

The Basics of Qualitative Research

Basic Definition and History

- Research that investigates aspects of social life which are not amenable to quantitative measurement
- qualitative research uses a range of methods to focus on the meanings and interpretation of social phenomena and social processes in the particular contexts in which they occur
- Qualitative research is not a single set of theoretical principles, a single research strategy or a single method
- It developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, across a range of disciplines
- Disciplines include:
 - cultural anthropology,
 - interpretive sociologies (such as symbolic interactionism),
 - phenomenology and, more recently,
 - hermeneutics,
 - critical theory,
 - feminism,
 - post-colonial theory,
 - cultural studies,
 - post-structuralism and
 - postmodernism
- However, qualitative research is often based upon interpretivism, constructivism and inductivism
- It is concerned to explore the subjective meanings through which people interpret the world, the different ways in which reality is constructed (through language, images and cultural artifacts) in particular contexts
- The methods used in qualitative research, often in combination, are those which are open-ended (to explore participants' interpretations) and which allow the collection of detailed information in a relatively close setting

- These methods include:
 - depth interviewing,
 - ethnography and participant observation,
 - case studies,
 - life histories,
 - discourse analysis
 - conversational analysis

Designing Qualitative Research

- In the natural sciences there are certain patterns of relationships between things that occur: occurrences of universal certainty
- There are no such laws found in the social sciences
- It does not mean that social life operates in a total chaotic or completely irrational manner
- Social life operates within fairly regular patterns when carefully examined
- One primary purpose for social science research is to make sense from the various patterns
- This is accomplished by creating, examining and testing , and refining theory
- To build a theory one wants the building blocks of theory, namely concepts

The Nature of Qualitative Research

- The stance of an insider
- Gives strong sense of context
- Emphasis on process – the unfolding of events on time
- Little prior theoretical orientation – unstructured and no hypothesis
- Qualitative researchers frequently reject the formulation of theories and concepts in advance of beginning their field work
- Use of multiple methods of data collection
- Focusing on socially constructed reality

- Researcher's close proximity to the phenomena to be researched

Techniques of data collection in Qualitative Research

- Participant observation
- Unstructured interview
- Documents
- etc

The Intellectual Underpinnings of Qualitative Research

- The main intellectual under currents which tend to be viewed as providing qualitative research with its distinct epistemology are
 - 1 Phenomenology: views human behavior as a product of how people interpret their world. The role of the researcher is to capture the process of interpretation
 - 2 Symbolic interactionism: view social life as an unfolding process in which the individual interprets his or her environment and acts on the basis of that interpretation
 - 3 Verstehen : The term means “to understand” in German. Weber recognized two forms of understanding
 - Direct observational understanding of the subjective meaning of a given act
 - Explanatory or motivational understandable sequences of action which can be treated as explanation of the actual course of behavior
 - 4 Naturalism: The researcher should treat the phenomena being studied as naturally as possible that is he or she should seek to minimize the adulteration of the setting under investigation as far as possible
 - 5 Ethogenics: A central feature of the ethogenic approach is the understanding of episodes in social life. These are sequences of interlocking acts by individuals

Some Problems in Qualitative Study

- The access problem
- The problem of interpretation

- The problem of data analysis
 - Overwhelming data
 - Problem of theme development

Qualitative Research Tools in Detail

Ethnographic Research

- Ethnography begins at ground level with a lived experience of those in a particular social setting
- Ethnographic research, field work and participant observation can be used interchangeably
- The ethnographer is both an observer and a participant
- Ethnographic inquiry is not usually reduced to either observation or participation alone
- The balance between participation and observation is at the heart of all good ethnographic research

Access

- All field work begins with the negotiation of access
- Physical access as an immediate and obvious hurdle/obstacle specially in a closed setting like hospitals or hostels

The Qualitative interview

1 Collecting data by asking question

- The qualitative interview can be defined as that has the flowing characteristics
 - elicited by the interviewer
 - Interviewees are selected based on data-gathering selection plan
 - A considerable number of subjects are interviewed
 - It has a cognitive objective
 - It is guided by the interviewer
 - It is based on a flexible, non-standardized pattern of questioning

2 Quantitative and qualitative interviewing

- Information can be gathered through questioning by means of two instruments: the standardized questionnaire and the free interview

Characteristics of qualitative research

- Absence of standardization
- Comprehension versus documentation (context of discovery versus context of justification)
 - Questioning can be regarded both as a means of collecting information and as a means of understanding social reality
- Absence of a representative sample in qualitative research
- Case centered approach versus variable centered approach
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Types of Interviews

- Interviews differ in terms of their standardization

1 structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews

- Structured: All respondents asked the same question, with the same wording and in the same sequence
- Semi-structured interviews: The interviewer makes references to an outlines of the topics to be covered during the course of the conversation
- Unstructured interviews: Neither the content nor the form of the questions is pre-determined and may vary from one respondent to another

2 Special cases

a. non-directive and clinical interviews

Non-directive: No the topic of conversation is even pre-determined

Clinical interview: closely guided by the interviewer

- The objective is therapeutic
- For the above reason non-directive and clinical interviews are of no great concern to the sociologist

Conducting Interviews

- Conductive a good qualitative interview is a difficult art
 - The most difficult part is getting the interviewee to talk
 - Qualitative research does not only involve recording information it is a process of social interaction between two individuals
 - It is difficult to lay down general rules on how it should be conducted
 - Here are, however, few suggestions
- 1 Preliminary explanations
 - 2 Posing primary and secondary questions
 - 3 Probing: Probing may take several forms
 - Repeating the question
 - Repeating or summarizing the answer
 - Encouraging and expressing interest
 - Pausing
 - Asking for elucidation
- Language

Focus Group Interviewing

- A focus group interview may be defined as an interview style designed for small groups
- Through this method researchers can learn about:
 - Conscious
 - Semi-conscious
 - Unconscious, psychological and sociological characteristics and processes among various groups
- Focus groups is a series of audio-recorded group discussions held with differently composed groups of individuals and facilitated by a researcher, where the aim is to

provide data on group beliefs and group norms in respect of a particular topic or set of issues.

- It follows that groups should be so composed that, while different groups may contrast with each other, each individual group should be relatively homogeneous:
- While the uses of focus groups as a stand-alone research method are rather restricted (limited to the exploration of group meanings or beliefs and of group norms), their value as an ancillary method is considerable
- The size of the group should be small
- The facilitator is named as moderator

Advantages and disadvantages

- Allow the researcher to observe the processes
- Allow the researcher to access the substantive content of verbally expressed views, opinions, experiences, and attitudes
- Access a fragments of person's biography and life structure
- In focus group the moderator must be willing to give up some degree of data precision
- Remain tainted by the long standing relationship with marketing research

Case Studies

- A strategy of research that aims to understand social phenomena within a single or small number of naturally occurring settings.
- The purpose may be to provide description through a detailed example or to generate or test particular theories
- The object of the case could be many things
- The Case could be
 - a community,
 - an institution,
 - an individual,
 - an activity or an event

- Case studies are considered particularly valuable where the research context is too complex for experimental or survey research.
- The size of each case can vary from single individuals, to groups of people, organizations and whole cultures
- Case studies often use **multiple methods of data collection. These are**
 - **interviews,**
 - **observations,**
 - **documentary methods** and
 - **audio or video recording**

Ethnographic Tools in Detail: Key informant interview, Biographic Analysis, Participant observation

Key Informant Interview

What is it?

- Key informants are those research subjects in ethnographic studies who have a disproportionate weight and role in the conduct and outcome of the research
- They act as gatekeepers, particularly in the early stages of the research
- They may be ‘key’ in that they may provide particularly important understandings to the researcher on aspects of their collectivity, perhaps because they have a particularly rich knowledge of the collectivity through their seniority or through their specialist roles in the setting

Biographic analysis

What is it?

- The biographic method involves the detailed reconstruction of individual life stories
- The method overlaps with other qualitative research methods such as **life history, narratives and oral history**
- But biographical research may be used as a generic term to denote work which uses the stories of individuals.
- Biographies enable the understanding of individual lives set within their social contexts by tracing the circumstances, choices, constraints and decisions that affect people’s lives

- The purpose of a biographical study is to gain insights into the everyday experiences of individual lives thereby enabling the researcher to reflect on the wider cultural meanings of society.
- Biographical methods may include the supplementation of the life story, as told by the respondent, with other personal and social artifacts such as **diaries, photographs and letters**
- The biographical approach to the study of lives has been inspired by interpretive approaches such as the **phenomenological perspective** and the **symbolic interactionism**
- biographical method emphasizes a commitment to remaining close to the experiences and views of those being researched
- The method also stresses a commitment to viewing social life as developmental rather than static by studying how experiences of daily life may change over time.
- Typically biographical research focuses on a few (or even one) individuals or cases
- Data collection is characterized by depth **interviews, with individual** respondents being encouraged to reflect upon their lives and develop their own accounts of them
- The interviewer's role is to facilitate the respondent's story being told, but the result is a joint action, a collaboration between researched and researcher

Participant Observation

What is it?

- By 'observation' we mean the principal technique for gathering data on non-verbal behavior
- By 'participant observation' we mean, rather than simple observation, the researcher's direct involvement with the object studied.
- *Observation implies watching* and listening
- The researcher not only *observes the life of the subjects being studied*, but also *participates in it*
- In structured interviews, in statistical data analysis, in experiments, in the analysis of documents, even in in-depth interviews, the researcher does *not become part of the social phenomenon* studied
- In participant observation the researcher:

- Steps into the field' and immerses herself in the social context that she wants to study,
 - Lives *like and with the people* who are the object of the study,
 - Shares in their daily lives,
 - Asks them questions,
 - Discovers their hopes and pains, their worldviews and motivations, in order to develop that 'vision from within' that is the prerequisite of *comprehension*
- This approach has two underlying principles
 - (a) Full social awareness can be achieved only through understanding the subjects' point of view, through a process of identification with their lives
 - (b) This identification is attainable only through complete participation in their daily lives, by interacting continuously and directly with the subjects being studied.
 - Participant observation can be, therefore, defined in which the researcher enters:
 - Directly,
 - For a relatively long period of time into a given social group,
 - In its natural setting,
 - Establishing a relationship of personal interaction with its members
 - In order to describe their actions and understand their motivations, through a process of identification.
 - The solution to the *involvement/separation* dilemma probably lies in striking a balance between the two perspectives: if an excessive distance hinders understanding, complete identification can also be an obstacle

What to Observe?

- Participant observation has to be selective
- In the first instance, it is theory which establishes what is to be observed
- Participant observation is not conducted in a vacuum, nor does it start out from a kind of *tabula rasa*; rather, it is guided, especially at the beginning, by a particular 'sensitivity' towards certain concepts rather than others.

- Theory provides some indication of what to observe. Let us now look at the possible
- subjects of observation

Settings of Observation

- Physical setting;
- (b) social setting;
- (c) formal interactions;
- (d) informal interactions; and
- (e) Interpretations of the social actors

Qualitative Data Analysis

Non-conventional Qualitative Research, PRA, RRA, Writing a Research Proposal/Paper

Participatory Rural Appraisal

- Participatory Rural Appraisal/Assessment owes its existence to the convergence of a number of research programs, including participatory action research, agroecosystem analysis, applied anthropology and field research on farming system
- PRA may look misleading at first because it includes “Rural” although it can be applied to urban neighborhoods as well as rural villages
- There is a general impression that getting data is a complicated process such as a formal survey, questionnaire, analysis, etc
- Data can be collected through simple methods such as talking to the people, walking through the community, observation, etc
- Informal methods are as good as and sometimes better than formal methods

The Evolution of PRA

- Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a short cut method of data collection
- It is a methodology for action research and utilizes a range of techniques
- PRA provides the middle path of greater cost-effectiveness between rural development tourism research (quick and dirty) and the tradition of academic research (lengthy and boring)

Principles of PRA

- 1 Using optimal ignorance
 - Knowing what is not worth knowing
 - Avoids unnecessary details and irrelevant data
 - It does not measure more precisely than needed
- 2 Offsetting biases
 - Being relaxed not rushing
 - Listening not lecturing
 - Probing in stead of passing the next topic
 - Seeking out the poorer people and their concerns
- 3 Triangulation
 - Using more than one sources of information
- 4 Learning from and with rural people
 - Directly on the cite and face to face
 - Gaining from indigenous physical,technical and social knowledge
- 5 Learning rapidly and progressively
 - With conscious exploration
 - Flexible use of methods
 - Opportunism
 - Improvisation, iteration, and cross-checking, not following a blue-print program but adapting through a learning process

Good Features of PRA

- Iteration
- Innovative
- Interactive
- Informal

- In the community

The Menu of PRA Methods

- Mapping
- Secondary data review
- Observation
- Semi-structured interviews
- Analytical game: quick game to get community priorities, performances, ranking, scoring etc
- Stories and portraits
- Diagrams
- workshops

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA)

- RRA is a systematic and semi-structured activity to collect information on rural livelihoods
- If it is not systematic it would become a rural-tourism
- A process of RRA consists of a range of tools including:
 - Key informant interviews
 - Group interviews
 - Direct observations, etc
- The information gathered through RRA is usually analyzed and used by researchers
- In PRA it should be analyzed by the rural people themselves

Basic Characteristics of RRA

- The problem is observed from different angles
- Exploratory and iterative
- Allows rapid learning by researchers
- Uses an interdisciplinary team approach

- Interviews are conducted by researchers not by enumerators
- Respondents are selected purposely not at random
- Centered on problems/opportunities
- The context in which data is collected is as important as the data per se

Differences between RRA and PRA

RRA	PRA
Information is elicited and extracted by outsiders	Information is owned and shared by the local people
Outsiders go to rural areas, obtain information, and then bring it away to process and analyze	Professional go to rural areas but they facilitate rural people in collection, presentation and analysis of information by themselves
The information is owned by outsiders, not shared with rural people	The information is owned by rural people, but usually shared by outsiders

Non-Conventional Qualitative Research: Action Research

Research Ethics

Action Research (AR)

- Action research is known by many other names including participatory research, collaborative inquiry, emancipator research, action learning
- AR sometimes participatory AR is a research framework that evolved from a number of intellectual traditions
- Four stages of action research
- Research ethics
- AR is a process designed to empower all participants in the research process
- Action research has been described as an informal, qualitative, formative, subjective, interpretative, reflective and experiential model of inquiry in which all individuals involved in the study are knowing and contributing participants
- Widely accepted definitions of action research include the following
 - AR aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people and to the goals of social science
 - AR is a form of self reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of:

a. Their own social practices

3 AR is the systematic study of attempts to improve practices by groups of participants by means of their own practical actions and by means of their own reflection upon the effects of those action

Action Research Design

- Initially an exploratory stance is adopted where an understanding of the problem is developed and plans are made for some forms of interventionary strategy
- The intervention is carried out: the action in action research
- During and around the time of the intervention, pertinent observations are collected in various forms
- The new interventional strategies are carried out, and the cycle process repeats

The Role of Communication

- A distinguishing characteristics of action research is the degree of empowerment given to all participants
- All participant negotiate meaning from the data and contribute to the selection of interventionary strategies

The Role of Reflection

- Since action research involves unconstrained dialogue between researchers and the participants, there must be free information flow between them
- b. Their understandings of these practices
- c. The situations in which the practices are carried out

Assumptions in conducting AR

- The democratization of knowledge production and use
- Ethical fairness in the benefit of the knowledge generation process
- An ecological stance toward society and nature
- Appreciation of the capacity of humans to reflect learn, and change
- A commitment to nonviolent social change

Four stages of Action Research

- 1 identifying the research question
- 2 Gathering the information to answer the question
- 3 Analyzing and interpreting the information

4 Sharing the results with participants

Research Ethics

- Social scientists have an ethical obligation to their colleagues, their study population and the larger society
- Concerns about research ethics revolve around various issues of harm, consent, privacy and the confidentiality of data
- Unfortunately in social sciences ethical considerations are subjective
- Current concern about research ethics grew out of the biomedical research
- Nazi physicians exposed subjects to freezing temperatures, live viruses, poisons, malaria, etc
- The USA Tuskegee public health syphilis study is another bad example

Six Ethical Issues

- Informed consent
- Deception
- Privacy (confidentiality and anonymity)
- Physical or mental distress
- Problem in sponsored research
- Scientific misconduct or fraud
- Scientific advocacy

Informed consent

- Informed consent means the knowing consent of individuals to participate as an exercise of their choice, free from any element of fraud, etc
- In an institutional sponsored research, consent should be ensured in writing

Confidentiality and anonymity

- Confidentiality is an active attempt to remove from research records any element that might indicate the subject's identities
- Anonymity means that the subjects remain nameless

Writing a Research proposal

- A research proposal is a document that presents a plan for a project to reviewers for evaluation
- It can be a supervised project submitted to instructors as part of an educational degree (e.g. master's thesis or a Ph. D dissertation)
- Its purpose is to convince reviews, that the researchers are capable of successfully conducting the proposed research project
- The proposal is similar to a research project but it is written before the research begins
- A research proposal for a quantitative research has most of the parts of a research report

Contents of a research proposal include the following:

- A title
- An abstract
- A problem statement
- A literature review
- A method or design section
- References
- Annexes (time frame, resources, tools, etc)

The proposal lacks

- Results/findings
- Discussion
- conclusion
- A proposal has a plan for:
 - Data collection
 - Analysis
- Proposal for qualitative research is more difficult to write because the research process itself is less structured and preplanned
- The researcher prepares:
 - Problem statement
 - Literature review
 - Bibliography/references

Research proposal steps

Step 1: The title

- Naming the research
- 25 words or less
- Relevant to the research question

Step 2: The abstract

- Give the summary of the entire document
- Demonstrate to the reader the most important parts of each of the sections
- Not more than 200 words
- Write the abstract last

Step 3: aims and objectives

- Articulate in full detail the aims and objectives of your research
- Provide a detail description of the research question/s, the purpose of the research and descriptions of your approach methodology and method

- Discuss the research problem you intended to answer or investigate, your hypothesis, parameters of the research-what you intended to include in the research and what you intended to leave out

Step 4: Background:

- Detail background about the research question
- Demonstrate an understanding of the existing literature and research studies
- This help to understand the significance of te research you planned to conduct
- This helps to understand where it fits to the existing body of knowledge
- The background should comprise an extensive review of the literature related to your study
- Discuss what the existing literature is about and highlight any gaps, issues or contentions that arise
- Discuss the issues that relate to your research question

Step 5: Methodology and Method

- The methodology generally refers to the theory to be used to justify the use of a particular research methods that you are choosing to use : more than one methodology can be used
- The method describes the way you intended to investigate the question, e.g
- Discuss the different methods you intended to use in full detail, provide justification
- Discuss how many participants you intended to involve
- How you intended to find or approach participants
- How participants will be used in your study

Step 6: Schedule and timeline

- Demonstrate that the research is possible within a given timeframe

Step 7: Ethical approval

- Ay research involving human participants should get approval from ethical advisory committee or boards
- Understanding research ethics will impact on all asepects of your research

Step 8: Resources

- Discuss what resources you have at your disposal
- Highlight what resources you still require

Step 9: Budget

- Not all proposal require a budget, e.g. academic research
- If you apply for funding show how much money you require and justify the amount asked

Components of Research Report

1: Introduction

- Description of problem
- Statement of research questions or hypothesis
- Significance of problem and rationale for studying it

2: literature review

- Theoretical and historical perspectives
- Identified gaps in literature
- Reiteration of purpose of study

3: Methodology

- Research design and data collection procedures
- Characteristics of subjects
- Sampling design
- Descriptions of instrumentation
- Data analysis procedures

4: Findings (Results)

- Factual information presented

- Tables, charts
- Statistical and practical significances discussed

5: Discussion

- Brief summary of findings
- Explanations of unexpected findings
- Application to practice
- Weaknesses and limitations of research
- Suggestions for future research

6: References

7: Appendices