Thick, rich and powerful:
A “how to” guide for rigorous and relevant qualitative data analysis

Maree V. Boyle
Seminar held on
19 October, 2011
Workshop overview

1. What this workshop does and doesn’t cover
2. Key issues in Qualitative research: quick overview
3. 4Rs of Qual research
4. Wrestling with the Postivist-Interpretivist conundrum
5. Data analysis stages
6. Advice from A and A* journal editors
What this workshop does and doesn’t cover

- The analysis of NON-NUMERICAL data, usually collected via interviews, focus groups or secondary data sources.

- Focus on MANUAL rather than COMPUTER-ASSISTED analysis of non-numerical data that stays as text.

- Focus on sole qualitative studies not mixed methods.
Qualitative research: key issues

- High quality Qual research incorporates both the discipline and rigour of science and the creativity and interpretation of art.
- Mosaic metaphor.
- The importance of *verstehen*.
- Understanding emic and ethic categories are key to data analysis.
The 4 Rs

- See Kreiner, Hollensbe & Sheep (2009)
  - Richness
    - data that allows for detailed accounts of processes and nuances under investigation
  - Relevance
    - Establishing research questions based on extensive extant and theoretical literature work
    - Creating a direct link between research question and findings
  - Rigour
    - Clearly justified and defined collection and analysis processes
  - Reflexivity
    - Demonstration of where you as researcher “fit” within the data
    - Incorporation of autobiographical and retrospective stages during the data collection and analysis phases
Wrestling with the Positivist-Interpretivist Conundrum (See Tsoukas 2009)

- Qualitative data analysis does not involve measurement!!!
- Be careful not to use statistical terms to justify quality and rigour of qualitative data
- READ a lot of published qualitative research in your discipline to find out what is acceptable
- Tsoukas (2009) the challenge of generality and Small-N studies
Multi-stage data analysis

1. Question/focus formation
2. Data collection preparation
3. Data collection- phase 1 Data analysis
4. Data preparation
5. 3 –stage Coding
6. Theoretical saturation and fidelity testing
7. Conceptual ordering and organisation – data matrices
8. Creation of first draft narrative
9. Review and reflexive analysis
10. Writing final draft
Question focus/formation

- Identify the purpose of analysis – why are you doing this research and why is it important?
- Intensive literature and theoretical work is a crucial part of the formation phase – talk, read, talk more and take lots of notes
- Summaries of key concepts and theories
- Do your questions “fit” with your methodological choice?
- This all must be done before you set foot in the field
Data collection preparation

- Development of aide memoires and interview protocols
- Theoretical sampling
  - Who and where will you collect data from and why?
- Hardware and infrastructure
  - Recording equipment, transcription process and software, storage
  - Piloting the data collection and analysis process phase
Data analysis – 3 phases

- [Link to simple "how to" guide to coding]

- Phase 1
  - Prepare your data for analysis – upload NUDIST, N-VIVO or line number your data in a word document
  - Back up your original transcripts and documents
  - Use the rule of 3 for estimating data analysis timetable
  - Establish an index and retrieval system (if not using a software package)
Phase 2

- Exhaustive/Open coding
  - Okay to have multiple codes for a one piece or unit of data
  - Search for summary or evaluative statements
  - Code ALL of the data – don’t dismiss what might seem trivial
Phase 3 – Pattern matching and concept formation

- What are the core and re-occurring codes?
- Start to “pattern match” these codes into core categories
- Outliers - What is unusual or does not “fit”?
- Types of core categories
  - Imposed categories – confirming the existing literature
  - Personal narrative categories – the world as you like it to be
  - Emergent categories – “grounded” from the data
  - Using a “dump” file system
Theoretical saturation and fidelity assurance

- Subsequent data incidents that are examined provide no new information (Locke 2001)
- E.g.; Kreiner et al (2009) reached this point after coding 52 out of 60 interviews.
- Fidelity testing (Butterfield et al 1960) – a form of inter-coder reliability conducted after phase 3 where an independent researcher matches categories with a representative sample of text passages. Overall agreement between coders then calculated, with .70 being the minimum threshold
- Lincoln and Guba's checklist
Conceptual ordering and organisation – data matrices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Interview 1</th>
<th>Interview 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Military experience</td>
<td>Military 1,2 10-20, 21 - 27</td>
<td>Military 1 86-111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calm and reassure</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td>Trauma 1 54-85</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orgsupport</td>
<td>Orgsupport 1 88-117’258-265,460-494</td>
<td>Orgsupport 2, 3 and 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Writing Phases

- **Creation of first draft narrative**
  - Go back to the questions and the literature
  - Identify imposed categories and discuss these
  - Identify emergent categories and begin to explain possible reasons for emergence
  - Develop a “storyline” for each category and write up
  - Interweave literature work throughout.

- **Review and reflexive analysis**
  - Go back and review diary/reflexive journal in light of the personal narrative categories that have emerged
  - Write a biographical account of the research

- **Writing final draft**
Advice from A & A* ranked Journal Editors

- Professor Mike Pratt, Boston College -
  Associate Editor, Academy of Management Journal
- Dan Gallagher, Deputy Editor, Human Relations

How do I get my qualitative work published in good journals?

- When choosing a topic, decide what YOU are interested in. What problem do you want to solve? Use personal impetus to help you get engaged with the topic and the process.
- Read as deeply and as widely as possible. The idea of approaching a qualitative research project as a tabula rasa is wrong. You need to read to know what has not been said.
- When collecting data, be prepared to look stupid. Ask questions that are basic i.e.; “I don’t know what you do. Can you tell me?”
- Don’t start a project until you have sorted out access to the site or context, whether the context will sustain your interest, and whether you have the time, resources and skills to complete the project.
Advice from A & A* ranked Journal Editors cont...

- Key readings include: “The Ethnographic Interview” (Spradley); Strauss and Corbin (grounded theory); Miles and Huberman (Pragmatic approach); and Cresswell (mixed methods)

- Read lots of qualitative research from the best sources and find a “voice” that works for you. Practice writing this voice and get others to read and evaluate it.

- Eisenhardt’s tips for writing up qualitative data for publication include:
  - Who is the protagonist in the story?
  - What are goals of the story?
  - What is the story line?
  - Use visual cues, illustrations eg; tables to demonstrate emergence of concepts from data (see Kriener et al 2009).
Advice from A & A* ranked Journal Editors cont…

- Make sure that there is the “voice” of the informant in your writing
- Write to demonstrate/explain as well as to tell, especially in case studies.
- Identify and use power quotes in writing
Conclusion

Doing qualitative data analysis is:

- Not an excuse to ignore the literature
- Not just presentation of raw data
- Not theory testing, or just counting words
- Not simply routine application of “grounded theory” techniques to data
- Not just about sorting and indexing your data using a software package
- Not perfect
- Not easy
- Very satisfying when done well.
THANK YOU!!!!

QUESTIONS???