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Qualitative Essentials

Workshop Overview

- Introductions
- What is Qualitative Research?
- Why/When choose Qualitative Research?
- 7 steps to conducting a Qualitative Research Study
- Where to from here

Why Qualitative Research? My Insights and Experiences

- Research Rigor
  - The Howard Becker Story
- Feasibility/Access
  - The Turkey Story
- Communication, Discipline and Politics
  - The British Medical Journal Story
- My qualitative story – research focus, publications, editorial work, work in progress etc.

What is Qualitative Research?

- Qualitative research is about extracting meaning and understanding from non-numerical data.
  - interview transcripts, documents and archival material, visual data such as photos and videos, artifacts and more recently on-line and digital material.
- An inductive, interpretive approach to research.
- Findings are communicated via narrative, diagrams, visual methods or interactive forms.
- **Rigor/validity in qualitative research occurs through thorough and transparent data collection, analysis and dissemination of findings.**
- Your understanding of what qualitative research is will be strongly dependent upon your discipline, your supervisor/research team and the communication outlets available to you.

Methodological Orientation

- Characteristics of qualitative research include the following:
  - Conducted in a natural setting as opposed to an experimental/contrived setting.
  - The researcher becomes a instrument or tool in the research process.
  - Bias/vested interests are acknowledged, explained and even embraced in some circumstances.
  - Multiple sources of and different kinds of data are often used – (interviews with documents etc.)
  - Data analysis is inductive.
  - Research participants' voices are critical to demonstrating rigor.
  - Theoretical lens and interpretive inquiry are central to communicating qualitative research.

What is an Inductive Approach?

- *to condense extensive and varied raw text data into a brief, summary format*
- *to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary findings derived from the raw data*

Inductive

Inductive Research cont….

- *to develop of model or theory about the underlying structure of experiences or processes which are evident in the raw data.*
- The inductive approach reflects frequently reported patterns used in qualitative data analysis.
- Most inductive studies report a "model" that has between three and eight main categories in the findings.

About you…

- Why are you interested in using qualitative methods?
- What is your knowledge base? How much do you know?
- What is your research topic and what is your research design?

Why am I (and thinking about being)a Qualitative Researcher?

- Are you curious about people and the stories they tell?
- Do you enjoy creative writing?
- Are you an avid people watcher and collector of observations?
- Can you be invisible and blend into the crowd?
- Do you have the "blink" factor and strong pattern matching skills?
- What is your previous professional/work experience?

Trick Question???

- When you are conducting/communicating qualitative research, what is the ONE key thing you need to get 100% right?
- The answer will be revealed later!
- HINT: It is not what you think!

The Qualitative "Big 7"

1. Imagining – curiosity, passion, trigger event or information - **Methodological Orientation** - Do I understand why I have to articulate this?
2. Focusing – generic academic processes including literature searches and **problematizing** topic, with a focus on the why and how questions. At this stage propositions and research questions are developed.
3. Creating – collecting and "making" your data - What approach and how to access – **Is your approach ethical? Will you give dignity and voice to your informants?**

The "Big 7" cont….

4. Sense-making –See points 2 and 3 – **you need to make decisions about data analysis BEFORE you start data collection**.

5. **Validation** - What kind of validation strategies will you use?

6. Communicating your research – **publishing, presenting and visualising the end result.**

7. Reflexivity - **how will I use feedback about my work?** How will I respond to this?

Step 1: Imagining

COMPARING QUALITATIVE & QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative Research	RESEARCH ASPECT	Quantitative Research
Discover Ideas, with General Research Objects	COMMON PURPOSE	Test Hypotheses or Specific Research Questions
Observe and Interpret	APPROACH	Measure and Test
Unstructured. Free Form	DATA COLLECTION APPROACH	Structured Response Categories Provided
Research is intimately involved. Results are subjective	RESEARCHER INDEPENDENCE	Researcher uninvolved Observer. Results are Objective
Small samples –Often in Natural setting	SAMPLES	Large samples to Produce Generalizable Results [Results that Apply to Other Situations]

SHAYA'A OTHMAN

Step 2: Focusing

Research Questions/Propositions for Qualitative Projects

- Qualitative projects are different to quantitative projects in the they are focused on answering different kinds of queries and questions.
- For example, a quantitative study is concerned with testing hypotheses through examining the strength of the relationship between 2 or more variables. So, the literature review does a particular job, in that it clearly leads to the operational definition of a construct.
- In qualitative research, question formulation is more suited to a "how" or "why" question.
- In several disciplines, "propositions" are developed in qualitative studies. These are general statements about the likelihood of several concepts informing one another

Example: Qualitative Question/Proposition

- An example of a question may be:

What is the decision-making process that junior doctors engage in to go rural?

How does this happen?

Why do professional women stop seeking leadership and promotion opportunities in their late 20s?

- Propositions may also be presented in qualitative studies. Like hypotheses, these are statements about the likelihood of two or more concepts working together.

Propositions – Examples

- A proposition is a loose statement and not meant to be as precise as a hypothesis.
- Junior doctors with rural backgrounds are more likely to consider a rural placement as a favourable career choice.
- Young professional women are less inclined to "drop out" of seeking promotion opportunities if they have access to strong male mentorship.

Qualitative Project Literature Reviews

- Also known as the conceptual framework
- Tells the story of the primary concepts and theories that frame the study and how these ideas have evolved over time.
- The literature review also reviews and discusses past research upon which the current study builds, problematises or extends.
- Best organised by topic – discuss key topics as if discussing the plot of a story
- The "missing" puzzle approach – finding and filling the gap

What belongs in the qualitative method section of a thesis chapter/Confirmation documents?

- **Researchers' brief description of gaining access**
- **Proposed participants and fieldwork sites** – what types of participants and contextual sites are under study? (Numbers, demographics etc.)
- **Sampling plan** or rationale – what is the rationale behind who your participants are and how you are going to choose them?
- **Detailed description of data collection and fieldwork** – make it detailed as people will be interested in what and how you went/or are going to go about your study.
- **Detailed description of data analysis procedures/processes** – what is your plan for answering your research questions?

How are you going with this?

Step 3: Creating

Common ways of collecting and sourcing data

- Observation – simple, unobtrusive or participant
- Interviewing – semi-structured, group/focus, in-depth
- Ethnography – classical and auto
- Visual methods – video, photos etc
- Discourse, content and policy analysis using documents
- Ethnomethodology – studying micro interactions

Organising Qualitative Fieldwork

- All qualitative projects involve fieldwork. This means that the researcher has to carefully and meticulously plan and organise where the data is sourced from (the site) and who is going to facilitate this for the researcher.
- Fieldwork Roles – Total immersion, uninvolved observer, partial observer
- Gatekeepers – People who have to power to give you permission to collect data/get access to data. A single study may involve many gatekeeper with whom the researcher needs to negotiate
- Informants/Participants – Any person who provides data or evidence, in either a formal or informal manner

Observation

- Observational Roles
  - Observer
  - Observer as Participant
  - Participant as Observer
  - Full Participant (Immersion)
- Fieldwork/Observational Notes
  - Detailed, methodological & immediate
  - Methodological, conceptual, theoretical and reflexive

Interviewing

- There are various kinds of interviews: open-ended survey questions, semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews, group interviews, focus groups.
- You need to choose the right interviewing approach to suit the context of your study. It is not possible to conduct interviews in all research contexts.
- Group interviews follow the same rules but are considered 'group" versions of individual depth interviews

The Challenge of Qualitative Interviewing

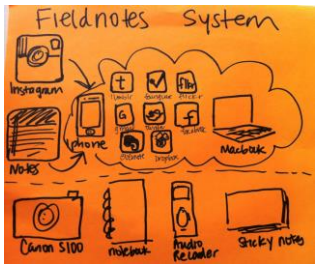
- Interviewing is an art form and needs practice. You can approach interviews in a number of ways, but the most common approaches are using semi-structured and open-ended questions.
- Make sure you "pilot" your questions with one or two interviews and then do a thorough critique of the interview which will lead to modifications.
- Be comfortable with silence and actively listen.
- Make sure your recording devices work – the use of smart phones can be risky so make sure you have a back
- All interviews will need to be transcribed. If you are thinking of doing a "shortcut" and only transcribing what you think is relevant, then you need to revisit your choice here. You will end up with "thin" or "washed out" data, and you cannot extract any rigorous meaning or understanding. It will catch up with you, or your supervisor and eventually your career.

Focus vs. Group Interviews

- Focus groups are tightly controlled, facilitated and best conducted in a purpose built facility that can audio and video record the interview. They also cost money so you need a budget.
- Best conducted by professionals who specialise in this technique.
- expensive but it will yield you rich and thick data and ultimately, rigorous answers to your research questions.

Ethnography/Fieldwork

- Ethnography include extensive fieldwork, on-line ethnography, auto ethnography etc.
- Etic vs. Emic data
- Fieldwork and time/space challenges.
- Considering the ethics of covert and/or politically charged research



Discourse/Content/Policy Analyses using Documents

- This approach deals with social, political/cultural challenges/questions through semiotics etc.
- Policy analyses of large volumes of documentation can use data mining/content analysis software such **Leximancer.**

Visual Methods

- A picture is worth 1000 words
- Extremely valuable for instantly conveying complex, textured, non-linear ideas
- Visual evidence can be the focus or supplementary to other data
- Requires a high level of creativity and is difficult to publish

Step 4: Sense-making

Data Collection Challenges: what is the one key challenge for your project?

Qualitative Data Analysis

- What it is…pattern matching, finding themes, exploring meaning and understanding through textual data
- Types of data analysis include:
  - Content /Thematic analysis
  - Grounded theory
  - The process of coding is a detailed, intensive and multi-staged process used to turn often messy and large amounts of data into a coherent set of themes, typologies or conceptual/theoretical models.
- **Data analysis software is used with to organise and index data. It does NOT analyse your data for you. That is what your brain is for.**
- Qualitative research rigour and validation strategies – This depends upon your discipline requirements…Creswell (2013) provides a good overview of 8 qualitative validation strategies

Case Study Method

- In-depth description/analysis of a case and/or multiple cases
- When an in-depth understanding of a case can provide a deeper understanding of a theory or concept
- Psychology, law, political science and medicine.
- Unit of analysis includes events, programs, activities, policies or more than one individual.
- Multiple sources of data
- Description, thematic analysis and cross-case analysis
- Reported as a detailed analysis of one or more cases

Ethnomethodology/Conversation Analysis

- Analysis very detailed social and verbal interaction using audio, photographic and video analyses
- Requires high-end digital equipment to document timing, conversational pauses, utterances etc.

Grounded Theory

- Developing a theory grounded from data developed/created/found in the field.
- Best suited when the "voice" of the participants is important
- Best if you need to document a process, action or interaction involving many individuals
- Sample of 20 – 60 individuals is best
- Data analysis through open, axial and selective coding
- Generation of a theory illustrated diagrammatically can be a final outcome of this kind of analysis

Qualitative Data Analysis

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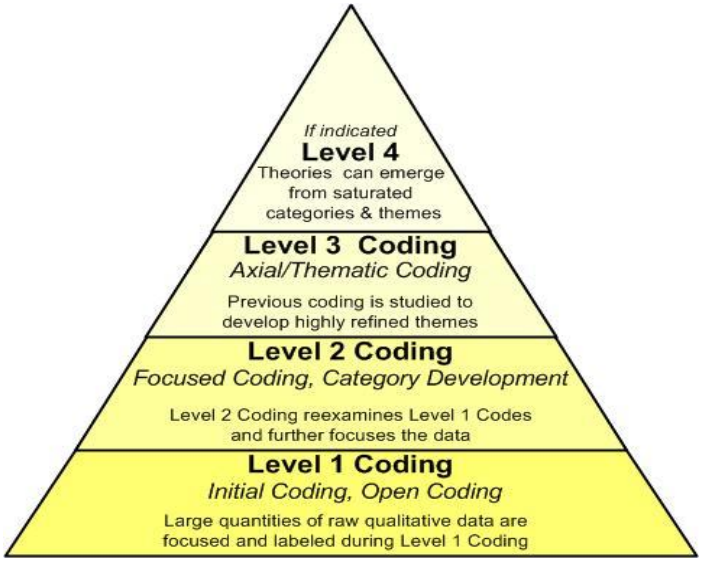
  - The process of coding is a detailed, intensive and multi-staged process used to turn often messy and large amounts of data into a coherent set of themes, typologies or conceptual/theoretical models.
- Data analysis software is increasingly used especially with large number of documents.
- Qualitative research rigour and validation strategies – Dependability, Confirmability, Transferability and Credibility

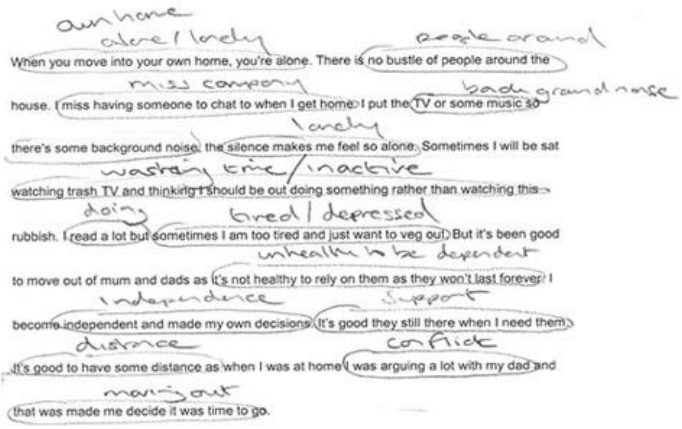
Qualitative Data Coding



Qualitative Data Coding: Process, technology and Challenges

- Coding – a process whereby "messy" and "unconnected" non-numerical data is analysed via a rigorous and methodical process. This is tedious and takes much more time than most first plan for.
- Manual Coding – This involves the process of learning how to code BEFORE you use any Technology such as NVIVO etc. BEFORE you embark on learning how to use a software package such as NVIVO, you really need to be very comfortable and familiar with your data.

What does manual data coding look like?



Group Coding Exercise

- **Join your discipline group and spend 4 minutes doing an individual "quick" coding analysis of the page in front of you.**
- **Write this up on the paper sheet and prepare to share with the whole group.**

Technology and Data Analysis

- Nvivo- QSR.com
- Leximancer etc
- These packages are good for indexing and retrieving but they will not "analyse" your data. Know how to analyse your data BEFORE you commence data collection.

Step 5: Validating

Qualitative Analysis: Validation Strategies

- Bias – Is it relevant in qualitative research?
- Reflexivity
  - Not just reflection on practice but also deep understanding of biases, assumptions and interpretation
- Your validation strategy will depend on your research approach (See Creswell (2013) Chapter 10 for the 8 different types of qualitative validation strategies
- Triangulation
- Inter-coder reliability

Step 6: Communicating

Communication/Dissemination

- Reporting and communicating the findings of a qualitative hard.
- Most journals tend to prefer quantitative research but there are an increasing number of new journals that publish qualitative research.
  - You really need to do your homework regarding what the norm is for your discipline, what journals are publishing qualitative research, and who the editors of your key disciplinary journals are.
- There are challenges with multidisciplinary team research especially a traditional medical/allied health mix.
  - Being the "token" qualitative researcher on a research team can be challenging and often not much fun. You often have to engage in quite a lot of "educating" re the process, scientific merit and value of Qualitative research.

Step 7: Reflexivity/Reflection

Being Reflexive

- Qualitative research is really dependent upon the researcher being reflexive.
- This means you really need to interrogate what you have done, how you did it, and what the outcomes were.
- Feedback from journals, conferences and trusted colleagues is 'gold". Use it to improve your work. Public media/social media.
  - There is an increased expectation that scholars will have a strong social media presences. This means your research will reach a wider audience, but it will also receive much more intense scrutiny.
- And the last "Important" thing?

And the answer is…Ethical Practice

- Qualitative research is (unfortunately) subject to more scrutiny ethics wise.
- Unless the information/data you are using is sourced from the public domain, you need to de-identify your informants, participants, organisations etc.
- If you have not sufficiently de-identified your data, and someone correctly identifies where your data is from, you run the risk of compromising your reputation and career prospects and also your research centre and University's reputation.
- You may also harm the organisation's reputation from which you collected the data.
- Your university will not be your friend if you get the ethics wrong throughout your research.
- So, MAKE SURE you get it right.

Where to from here?

- Set up a qualitative research reading/support group in your school/discipline area.
- Keep in contact with your qualitative researcher fellow students or early career colleagues. Please share advice and experience.
- My contact details are as follows:
- Qualskill/Work Ethics Partners Pty Ltd - mvb24660@gmail.com
- I can provide a private consultation…please email me for consultation scope and fees etc.

Questions???