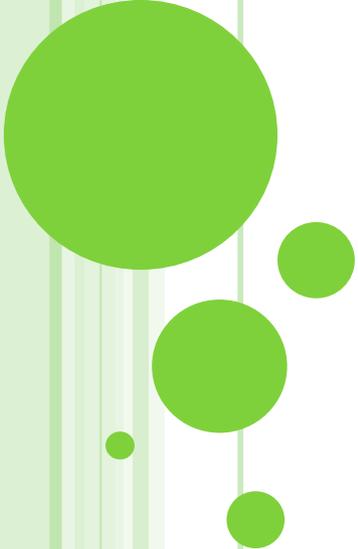


THE NATURE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH



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DECLARATION

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I. THE MAIN PREOCCUPATIONS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

a) Seeing through the eyes of the people being studied

- Subject matter of social sciences differs from the one in natural sciences
- The objects of social sciences – people – are capable of attributing meaning to their environment
- Need for a methodology that reflects the differences between people and objects
- Qualitative researches express commitment to viewing events and the social world through the eyes of the people that they study



- Seeking to probe beneath appearances (insiders may view things differently than outsiders)
- Practical problems:
 - Risks of ‘going native’ and losing sight of what are you studying
 - Where are the limits, e.g., participating in illegal or dangerous activities
 - Possibility that the researcher will be able to see only through the eyes of some of the participants



b) Description and the emphasis on the context

- Qualitative researchers provide a great deal of descriptive details when reporting the results of their research. This is to provide explanations
- Details are important for qualitative researchers because:
 - Their significance to their subjects
 - The details provide account of the context within which peoples' behavior takes place
- Contextual understanding of social behavior
 - We cannot understand the behavior of members of a social group other than in terms of the specific environment in which they operate



c. Emphasis on process

- Quantitative research tends to view social life in terms of processes
 - There is often a concern to show how events and patterns unfold over time
 - Qualitative evidence often conveys a strong sense of change and flux

Process is a “*sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context*”



d) Flexibility and limited structure

- Unstructured approach – keeping structure to the minimum is supposed to enhance the opportunity of genuinely revealing the perspectives of the people you are studying
 - Qualitative researchers adopt methods of research that do not require development of highly specific research questions in advance
- Flexibility – researcher can change direction in the course of his/her investigation much more easily than quantitative research



e) Concepts and theory grounded in the data

- Preference for treating theory as something that emerges out of the collection and analysis of data
- “Grounded theory” – stresses the importance of allowing theoretical ideas to emerge out of one’s data



II. STEPS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

1. General Research Questions



2. Selecting relevant site(s)/subjects



3. Collection of relevant data



4. Interpretation of data

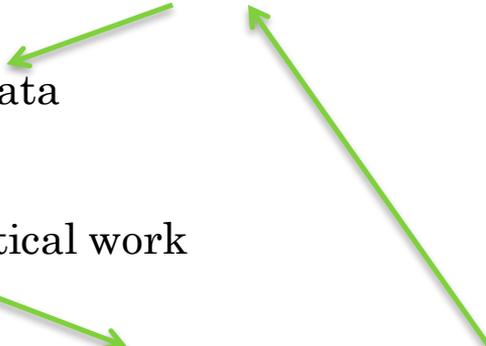


5. Conceptual/theoretical work



6. Write up findings/conclusions

Collection of further data



Tighter specification of research questions



III. WHERE TO USE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

- Acquiring more personal experience with phenomenon the researcher is interested in
- Exploratory research
- Complex and sensitive issues
- Evaluation research
- Action research
- In combination with quantitative research:
 - To explain correlations yielded by quantitative analysis, i.e., their causes and effects
 - When proven measures are unavailable for quantitative research. Use qualitative at the initial stage to develop indicators



IV. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS

Several diverse methods associated with qualitative research:

- Ethnography/participant observation
- Qualitative interviewing
- Focus groups
- Discourse and conversation analysis (language based approach)
- The collection and qualitative analysis of text and documents



V. THE CRITIQUE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

a) Qualitative research is too subjective

Qualitative finding rely too much on:

- The researcher's often unsystematic views about what is significant and important
- Upon close personal relationships which researcher frequently creates with the people studied



b) Difficult to replicate

- Unstructured nature and reliance on researcher's inventiveness makes it impossible to conduct true replication, since there are hardly any standard procedures to be followed
- Researcher is the main instrument of data collection, what is observed and heard; also, what the researcher decides to concentrate upon is very much product of his/her preferences
 - Differences between researchers in determining what is significant
 - Responses of participants is likely to be affected by the characteristics of the researcher (personality, age, gender etc)
 - Unstructured data leads to interpretation profoundly influenced by subjective leaning of a researcher



c) Problems of generalization

- The scope of findings of is restricted
- Findings are to be generalized to theory rather than to population
- *Moderatum* generalization – that is, one in which aspects of the focus of enquiry (e.g., a group of football hooligans) ‘can be seen to be instances of a broader set of recognizable features’



d) Lack of transparency

- It is sometimes difficult to establish what the researcher actually did and how s/he arrived at the study's conclusion



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