

Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods in Management and the Organizational Sciences

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Overview of workshop

- Overview of the general purpose and goal of qualitative research
- Overview of the diversity of different qualitative methods
- Different epistemological and ontological foundations that shape application of qualitative approaches
- Three qualitative methods
 - Thematic analysis
 - Grounded theory
 - Content Analysis by Rhonda Reger
- Additional thoughts by Jane Lê
- Q&A

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Definition and purpose of qualitative research

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What can qualitative research do?

- Miles and Huberman (1994, p.10)
Qualitative methods put an “emphasis on people’s lived experience”.
- Van Maanen (1983, p.9)
Qualitative methods help to understand the “meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world.”
- Strauss and Corbin (1998, p.11)
“Qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods.”

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Beyond that...

- Qualitative research is “particularly difficult to pin down” (Van Maanen, 1998:xi)
- It’s flexible and emergent
- Designed while being done
- Requires “highly contextualized individual judgments” (Van Maanen, 1998:xi)

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Gephart (2004): Why is qualitative research important?

1. It “employs the meanings in use by societal members to explain how they directly experience everyday life realities.”
 - a) “Description and understanding of the actual human interactions meanings and processes that constitute real-life organizational settings.”
2. “Qualitative research involves both data collection and data analysis. Both steps in the research process can be qualitative or quantitative.”
3. “It provides insights that are difficult to produce with quantitative research. For example, qualitative research can provide thick, detailed descriptions of actual actions in real-life contexts that recover and preserve the actual meanings that actors ascribe to these actions and settings.
4. Qualitative research can thus provide bases for understanding social processes that underlie management.
5. Qualitative research can also provide memorable examples of import management issues and concepts that enrich the field.
6. Finally, qualitative research has the potential to re-humanize research and theory by highlighting the human interactions and meanings that underlie phenomena and relationships among variables are often addressed in the field.

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Different theoretical perspectives and traditions (examples)

- Positivism/post-positivism
 - There is an objective reality we are trying to uncover (e.g., case study)
 - Post-positivism: That reality can only be known probabilistically.
- Social constructivism
 - Meaning and reality are created in interaction (e.g., between participants, between the participant and the researcher) (e.g., discourse analysis)
- Phenomenological
 - Study of subjective experience, how individuals perceive events and their surroundings (e.g., ethnography)
- The boundaries between these approaches are not always clear.
- The same method can be part of different traditions, e.g., grounded theory is employed by positivist, social constructivist, phenomenological, and post-positivist researchers

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Qualitative research methods

- There is large diversity between methods
- Sometimes it helps to distinguish between data collection and data analysis methods
- But these things are interrelated

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Data Collection Techniques

From Madill & Gough, 2008

Methods of Collecting Qualitative Data

Procedural categorization	Qualitative method
Collaborative	Conceptual encounter Delphi groups Memory work Role play
Interview	Biographical Creative/dramatological Ethnographic Focus groups Free association narrative Group Interpersonal process recall Narrative Reflexive Semi-structured Structured Telephone Theme-centered Unstructured
Naturally-occurring	Archival documents Diaries Internet material Memory books Naturally-occurring conversations Visual material
Observational	Field notes Observation Participant observation
Structured	Open-ended questionnaires Protocols Q-methodology Repertory grids Vignettes

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Data Analysis Techniques

From Madill & Gough, 2008

Methods of Analyzing Qualitative Data

Procedural categorization	Qualitative method
Discursive	Conversation analysis Discourse analysis Metaphorical analysis Psychoanalytically informed analysis Semiotic analysis
Thematic	Analytic induction Framework analysis Grounded theory Interpretative phenomenological analysis Template analysis Thematic analysis Theory-led thematic analysis
Structured	Attributional analysis Comprehensive process analysis Consensual qualitative research Content analysis Logical analysis Protocol analysis Q-methodology Repertory grid analysis Task analysis
Instrumental	(Collaborative/participatory) Action research Co-operative inquiry Ethnography Ethnomethodology Feminist research Media framing analysis Narrative analysis Phenomenological methods Process evaluation Rapid assessment Visual methodologies

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Common qualitative methods in I/O (Wilhelmy & Köhler, 2022)

Qualitative data collection method(s) used, according to the authors	EJWOP	JAP	PPsych	IJSA	JOOP	JBP	
(a) Unclear/unspecified (i.e., no specific data collection method stated by the authors)		1					1 (1.5%)
(b) Semi-structured interviews	3	3	1	1	2	3	13 (19.4%)
(c) Interviews of unspecified type	6	2	1		1	1	11 (16.4%)
(d) Critical incidents	2	2				4	8 (11.9%)
(e) Open-ended questions on questionnaire		3			1	3	7 (10.4%)
(f) Organizational documents	4					2	6 (9%)
(g) Observations	2	1			1	1	5 (7.5%)
(h) Verbal protocols during a task or questions about task		1	1	2			4 (6%)
(i) Focus groups	2					1	3 (4.5%)
(j) Discussion posts		1					1 (1.5%)
(k) Diary events method	1						1 (1.5%)
(l) Newspaper or press articles	2						2 (3%)
(m) Quantitative data	2						2 (3%)
(n) Secondary data (collected for another study/purpose)		1	1				2 (3%)
(o) Cognitive mapping technique					1		1 (1.5%)

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Common qualitative methods in I/O (Wilhelmy & Köhler, 2022)

Qualitative data analysis method(s) used, according to coder assessment	EJWOP	JAP	PPsych	IJSA	JOOP	JBP	
(a) Unclear/unspecified (i.e., the coders were not able to identify a specific data analysis method based on the information provided by the authors)		1	2	1		3	7 (13.7%)
(b) Content or template analysis	6	7	1	1	4	3	22 (43.1%)
(c) Analysis of themes	2	4				2	8 (15.7%)
(d) Grounded theory	3	1				1	5 (9.8%)
(e) Sorting techniques						3	3 (5.9%)
(f) Narrative analysis	1						1 (2%)
(g) Discourse analysis					1		1 (2%)
(h) Process analysis	1						1 (2%)
(i) Concept mapping approach						1	1 (2%)
(j) Poetic structural analysis	1						1 (2%)
(k) Interpretative phenomenological analysis						1	1 (2%)

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Three qualitative approaches in more depth

Thematic analysis
Grounded theory
Content analysis (Rhonda)

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Thematic Analysis

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Thematic analysis

- Braun & Clark (2006, p. 78): “Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative analytic method within psychology.”
- Braun & Clark (2006, p. 79): “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in (rich) detail.”
- Boyatzis (1998): Tool to use across different methods.
- Benefits of thematic analysis
 - Epistemological flexibility
 - Braun & Clark (2006, p. 81): “thematic analysis is not wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and therefore it can be used within different theoretical frameworks (although not all), and can be used to do different things within them.

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Before you begin

- Important:
 - Researchers make their (epistemological and other) assumptions explicit
 - Theoretical position of a thematic analysis (and its underlying assumptions) is made clear
 - Qualitative psychologists need to be clear about what they are doing and why
 - Include the often-omitted ‘how’ they did their analysis in their reports

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Research Decisions

- Purpose: A rich description of the data set, or a detailed account of one particular aspect?
 - What claims do you want to make?
 - A rich thematic description of your entire data set requires an accurate reflection of the content of the entire data set. Some complexity will then be lost.
 - A detailed account of one aspect (or a group of aspects) requires a more focused analysis of a particular theme or part of the data.

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Grounded Theory

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Grounded Theory - Definition

- [G]rounded theorizing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) is the process of iteratively and inductively constructing theory from observations using a process of theoretical sampling in which emergent insights direct selection and inclusion of the “next” informant or slice of data. Grounded theory involves constant comparative analysis whereby groups are compared on the basis of theoretical similarities and differences (Gephart, 2004, p.459)

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Grounded Theory - Application

- Strauss & Corbin (1998, p.11)
 - Grounded theory “can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods.”
- Suddaby (2006, p. 634)
 - Grounded theory “is most suited to efforts to understand the process by which actors construct meaning out of intersubjective experience.”

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Best Reasons to use Grounded Theory

- Exploring inconsistencies, gaps, or contradictions in theory
- Developing or extending current theory
- Establishing conditions in which theory does (not) apply
- Exploring a relatively new setting or situation

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Characteristics

- Highly subjective
 - You really want to understand something from the participant's perspective
 - You need to explore at their level
- Contextual
 - Try to be as contextual as you can
 - The context is part of the story
- Mundane detail
 - You collect everyday talk, behavior and situation
 - Grounded theory doesn't happen in labs or surveys
- Interactive
 - Interaction with participants, live in their world
 - You are in part influencing the setting
- Textual
 - Your interpretation of things
 - You create text like memos, field notes, that capture your thoughts and experiences, which become part of your data
 - Only you, the observer, can analyze the data: nobody else can

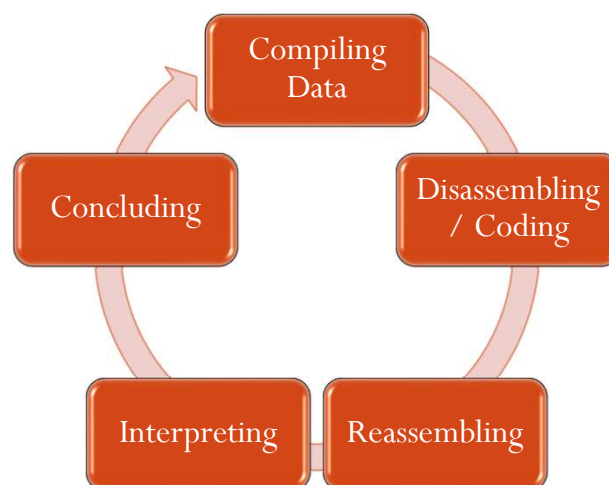
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Iterative, adaptive process during data collection

- Data analysis accompanies data collection
- Once you collect some data, you start analyzing it
- Your analysis will tell you what you don't understand yet
- You then collect more data
- You constantly refine your data analysis and data collection
- You collect data until you don't learn anything new anymore
 - Theoretical saturation

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Grounded theory analysis – Key processes



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What makes for a good qualitative research question?

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AVOID: Gap-spotting

The prevalent ways of constructing research questions

Basic gap-spotting modes	Specific versions of basic gap-spotting modes
Confusion spotting	Competing explanations
Neglect spotting	Overlooked area
	Under-researched
	Lack of empirical support
Application spotting	Extending and complementing existing literature
Combinations	Multiple justifications

Source: Sandberg, J. and Alvesson, M. (2011) "Ways of Constructing Research Questions: Gap-spotting or Problematisation", *Organization*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 23-44.

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The Research Question

- Does gap-spotting lead to interesting theories?
 - Short answer: NO
- So why do researchers use this approach?
 - Gap-spotting is easy
 - Gap-spotting is uncontroversial and safe
 - A powerful tradition indicates knowledge accumulation
 - Academia is a crediting economy
 - Research institutions encourage gap-spotting
 - Contemporary journal formats encourage gap-spotting
 - It often makes sense to adopt gap-spotting
 - The alternative to gap-spotting – problematization – is difficult

Source: Sandberg, J. and Alvesson, M. (2011) "Ways of Constructing Research Questions: Gap-spotting or Problematization", *Organization*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 23-44.

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The Research Question

Problematization...

- an 'endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of what is already known' (Foucault, 1985: 9)
- a central goal is to disrupt the reproduction and continuation of an institutionalized line of reasoning
- taking something that is commonly seen as good or natural, and turning it into something problematic
- is seen as an end in itself in some research orientations (e.g. postmodernism, feminism and critical theory)
- does not need to involve challenging the assumptions underlying an entire paradigm and, thus, produce a scientific revolution

Source: Sandberg, J. and Alvesson, M. (2011) "Ways of Constructing Research Questions: Gap-spotting or Problematization", *Organization*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 23-44.

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Alvesson & Sandberg (2011)

FIGURE 1
The Problematisation Methodology and Its Key Elements

Aim of the problematization methodology					
Generating novel research questions through a dialectical interrogation of one's own familiar position, other stances, and the literature domain targeted for assumption challenging					
A typology of assumptions open for problematization					
<i>In-house:</i> Assumptions that exist within a specific school of thought	<i>Root metaphor:</i> Broader images of a particular subject matter underlying existing literature	<i>Paradigm:</i> Ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions underlying existing literature	<i>Ideology:</i> Political-, moral-, and gender-related assumptions underlying existing literature	<i>Field:</i> Assumptions about a specific subject matter that are shared across different theoretical schools	
Principles for identifying and challenging assumptions					
1. <i>Identify a domain of literature:</i> What main bodies of literature and key texts make up the domain?	2. <i>Identify and articulate assumptions:</i> What major assumptions underlie the literature within the identified domain?	3. <i>Evaluate articulated assumptions:</i> Are the identified assumptions worthy to be challenged?	4. <i>Develop alternative assumptions:</i> What alternative assumptions can be developed?	5. <i>Relate assumptions to audience:</i> What major audiences hold the challenged assumptions?	6. <i>Evaluate alternative assumptions:</i> Are the alternative assumptions likely to generate a theory that will be regarded as interesting by the audiences targeted?

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Thank you!

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Questions



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