
The Practice of Qualitative Research

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The Practice of Qualitative Research will be a valuable aid to novice researchers from the undergraduate to doctoral level interested in practically conducting qualitative research. This 406-page student-focused book, by a widely published university professor whose experience with qualitative techniques resonates throughout, contains numerous pedagogical devices in each chapter including: a boxed introduction, glossaries, discussion questions, as well as additional resources of websites and journals. Students are provided a multi-faceted approach to learning through use of case studies, tables, pictures and “behind the scenes” sections with ethical strands interwoven throughout the text. Underlying theoretical philosophical frameworks are provided but the focus, as per the book’s title, is on practice.

In Part 1, the theoretical foundation for a qualitative approach to research is established and clarification is provided on differentiating qualitative vs quantitative research. The researcher’s perspective on social reality is noted, with explanations of ontology, epistemology and the subsequent impacts on research methodology in words, diagrams and tables. The extensive research toolset is discussed and the importance of the type of data and method selected to ensure alignment of research goals with methods is addressed. Quantitative research and positivism are contrasted against qualitative research with illustrative examples that explore, describe and explain the type of data required with the method to obtain the data.

The primary approaches to qualitative research, categorized under positivism, interpretative and critical, along with the underlying ideas are succinctly discussed within a contextual perspective explaining how the approach arose and the traditions with which the approach is associated. The focus progresses to creating a qualitative research design with an eight-step guided questioning approach on formulating a research question, drawing research samples, determining data collection methods, analyzing and writing while addressing limitation and validity issues.

The ethics of social research is superbly addressed starting with an historical perspective on the Tuskegee Syphilis Study and the atrocities disguised as research during the Second World War leading to the Nuremberg Code in 1949. Ethical guidelines of professional associations in various disciplines are discussed along with the approach to protecting research participants using informed consent letters that provide appropriate disclosure and ensure the respondent’s confidentiality. Deception in research is explored using the Milgram experiment as well as the controversies around Alice Goffman’s ethnographic dissertation fieldwork. New technologies, using the context of social media platforms, affecting ethics in research are addressed using the lenses of public and private information in the context of issues including confidentiality, consent and disruption to the community caused by a researcher’s presence.

In Part 2, in-depth (intensive) interviewing is deftly explored as a data collection method with numerous reflexivity and interviewing tips provided to ensure successful interviews. The appropriateness of interviewing for issue-oriented (focused) topics is discussed and an example transcript is analyzed. Designing and conducting an in-depth interview study is

explored with structured, semi-structured and low-structure interviews reviewed along with the creation of interview guides as an analytic process and a tool for novice interviewers. The value of active listening skills along with the use of pilot interviews, especially when researching sensitive topics, is discussed to ensure ethically responsible interviewing. Being an insider or outsider and the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing with this status is explored. Peer-to-peer type interviews and online interviews are also examined along with the analysis and interpretation of interviews.

The advantages and disadvantages of the use of focus groups across a breadth of academic disciplines, to explore mundane as well as sensitive matters, are effectively explored with useful example transcripts of a moderator and multiple interviewees highlighting interaction dynamics. The ability to gain exploratory data as well as the value of gaining data from populations, where typically it can be difficult to obtain data is demonstrated. The multiple voices present in focus group interviews are effectively contrasted against one-on-one interviews and an interesting feature is the discussion of online focus groups. The step-by-step process of designing a focus group, addressing challenges of group heterogeneity or homogeneity, along with tips on being an effective moderator will help ensure researcher success with this tool.

The ethnographic tradition takes into account the philosophical framework of the interpretative perspective and the positivist perspective along with the appropriate methods. Clarity is provided on starting with a research site, gaining entry through gatekeepers, developing relationships with informants, determining the appropriate participation levels as well as exiting field research. Tips for beginner researchers, weakness to avoiding in field research and the writing and analysis of field notes and interpretation issues are extremely well addressed.

The methods (interviews, document analysis, oral history) used in case studies as well as the types of case studies (exploratory, descriptive, explanatory) are described. The reasons for use of case studies, design of case studies and step-by-step approach for conducting case studies and generalizing findings are covered. Qualitative and quantitative content analysis with a variety of mass media products is reviewed and associated strengths and weaknesses explored. The analysis of online and mediated texts is discussed and an engaging and entertaining example is provided of textual analysis of the highly rated television show *The Big Bang Theory*. Mixed methods research is defined and the advantages and disadvantages, along with the reason for using such an approach are explored. A typology for mixing methods is presented and two case studies provide practical understanding of a qualitatively driven mixed methods research approach. Finally, a step-by-step approach is provided to guide researchers in successfully executing similar approaches.

In Part 3, the content neatly culminates with a step-by-step process to analyze and interpret qualitative data. Coding is explored and interpretation validity and reliability checks are discussed. Software for qualitative data analysis is addressed in terms of note taking, transcription, coding and storage. Thereafter, starting with the academic audience in mind, the layout of typical research presentations is provided. Like a do-it-yourself manual, after you read a chapter on use of a specific qualitative tool, you will feel confidence and comfort in the effective use of that tool to perform your research.

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