Qualitative Methods

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Design of the presentation

- The qualitative-quantitative debate
- Qualitative research
  - Its beauty & limitations
- Qualitative methods
  - Focus on interviewing
- Qualitative data and data analysis

Qualitative and quantitative research: 2 versions of the debate

- A: the epistemological version of the debate
  - Whether they are contrasting epistemological positions
- B: the technical version of the debate
  - Whether they simply refer to different clusters of techniques of data collection and analysis

- The debate is relevant in terms of the prospects for multi-strategy research
  - If A) → multi-strategy research is impossible
  - If B) → multi-strategy research is possible

Qualitative vs. quantitative research

- The epistemological version of the debate has 2 major forms:
  - The embedded methods argument
    - Any method is rooted in epistemological commitments and those cannot be mixed
  - The paradigm argument
    - The two types of research are viewed as paradigms and those are incapable of reconciliation
- The technical version of the debate:
  - The 2 types of research are connected to epistemological assumptions, but the connections are not inevitable
  - Research methods can serve different masters
- *The choice and adequacy of a method embodies assumptions regarding ontology, human nature, and epistemology*

Key features of qualitative research (1)

- Approach rather than techniques
- Produces richly and relevantly detailed descriptions and particularized interpretations and explanations of people and practices / events
- Emphasizes the understanding of particular phenomena and processes (vs. freezing the world)
- Takes seriously the actors' viewpoints (insiders' views)

Key features of qualitative research (2)

- Involves intense or prolonged contact with field / real life
- Produces ideographic knowledge (as opposed to nomothetic knowledge)
- Case oriented (as opposed to variable oriented)
- Primarily uses words or images
- Sensitivity to context
- Reflexivity (researcher is the main measurement device)

Wolcott (1990)

"One of the opportunities - and challenges- posed by qualitative approaches is to regard our fellow humans as people instead of subjects, and to regard ourselves as humans who conduct our research *among* rather than *on* them."

Limitations of qualitative research

- Deals with subjective opinions, attitudes and impressions about events and people
- Small / unrepresentative samples of studied phenomena
- Ethics problems are likely
- Intense involvement with the ”field” may lead to researcher’s overload
- Dangers:
  - deep insight and understanding vs surface description
  - telling good stories vs creating good constructs

Qualitative data and methods

- Qualitative data are: (Miles & Huberman 1994):
  - well-grounded, rich descriptions, explanations of processes, identifiable contexts
  - preserve chronological flow, see consequences of events, derive explanations
  - generate or revise conceptual frameworks
  - undeniable, concrete, vivid, meaningful.
- Qualitative methods
  - Participant-Observer methods, Case studies, Content analysis, Linguistic analysis, Biography, Interviewing, etc.
  - Comprehensive explanation of *how* and *why* *(*Eisenhardt 1989)

Interviewing: Issues and challenges

- The preparation
  - Selecting interviewees, deciding on the interview type, designing the interview guideline, communicating with potential interviewees, considering technology issues, etc.
- Conducting the interview
  - “Playing” and “underplaying” certain parts of your identity
  - Dealing with motivation and power issues
  - Planning vs. flexibility
- After the interview
- Successful and failed interviews: personal experiences

Analytic stances towards interview data

- Following positivism, (standardised) interview data:
  - give access to 'facts' of the social world
  - accounts whose sense derives from their correspondence to a factual reality
  - hold independently of the setting and the interviewer
- Following symbolic interactionism, (open-ended) interview data:
  - are valid when a deep mutual understanding between the parties is achieved
  - context is intrinsic
  - no clear cut between interview and other forms of social interaction

Qualitative research design

"the logic that links the data to be collected (and the conclusions to be drawn) to the initial questions of a study" (Yin, 1989: 29).

- Questions
- Propositions
- Units of analysis
- Data collection
- Interpretation

Qualitative data analysis: generating meaning

- Noting patterns, themes
- Clustering
- Making metaphors
- Counting / Comparing / Contrasting
- Noting relationships between variables
- Building logical chain of evidence

- *For some, coding, indexing, sorting, retrieving or otherwise manipulating data.*
- *For others, imaginative work of interpretation*

Handling the data

'We use the data to think with, in order to generate ideas that are thoroughly and precisely related to our data'

Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 27.

- Think about coding as way of relating data to ideas about those data.
- Computer programmes to help (e.g. Nud*ist / nVivo, etc.)

Validity (1)

- Check for representativeness
- Check for researcher effects
- “Triangulate”
- Check meaning of outliers, use extreme cases, follow up surprises
- Look for negative evidence

Validity (2)

- Make ‘if-then’ tests
- Rule out spurious relationships
- Replicate a finding
- Check out rival explanations
- Get feedback from informants.

Yin on case studies

- An empirical enquiry which:
  - investigates a **contemporary** phenomenon in real-life **context**; when
  - boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which
  - multiple sources of evidence are used.

Case studies

- Going after the ”talking pig”
  - A case study must derive its excitement and justification through more than a description of a particular phenomenon
- Not representative
  - House (TV series)
  - Not going after the random selection; going after special cases!
  - The goal of the study should not be representativeness
- The importance of connecting the power of description (coming from the case) with conceptual insights
- Cases can:
  - Motivate
  - Inspire
  - Illustarte

(Siggelkow, *AMJ* 2007)

Case Study Design

	Single-Case Designs	Multiple-Case Designs
Holistic (single unit of analysis)		
Embedded (multiple units of analysis)		

Source: Yin, 1989

Validity (Yin)

- Construct validity
  - multiple sources, chain of evidence, informants review
- Internal validity
  - pattern-matching, explanation-building, time-series
- External validity
  - replication in multiple cases
- Reliability
  - case study protocol, case study data base

Participant-Observer research

- Period of intimate study and residence
- In well-defined community
- Employing wide range of observational techniques
- Including prolonged face-to-face contact
- With members of local groups
- And direct participation in some of the groups' activities.

1st order and 2nd order concepts

- 1st order
  - the “facts” of the investigation
- 2nd order
  - the “theories” used to organise and explain the facts

‘Types’ of P-O data

Observational data:

observed activity and behaviour (interpreted)

Presentational data:

appearances put forth and maintained by informants about what they are doing (idealised and interpreted)

Need to evaluate believability of what is seen and heard to separate the two.