

Qualitative Research

Spring 2006

Naturalistic inquiry

- seek to describe, understand, or interpret daily life experiences and structures based on field observations
- attempt to develop new theory and/or verify existing theory by demonstrating plausible support through data

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Analytic induction

Procedure for verifying or modifying existing theories based on new data

- develop rough definition of phenomena
- formulate a proposition or hypothesis
- study one case to assess the “fit”

If no,

- reformulate the hypothesis or redefine the phenomenon

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Preparation...

- Identify the problem
- Generate research questions
- Review the literature
- Choose a research design

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Components of qualitative research

- **interview relevant people**
- **observe various outcomes & events**
- **examine written documents**
- **make decisions about information**
- **write a narrative**

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Theory

- **Is crucial to a definition of the problem and the decision of how to tackle it!**
- **The frame of reference regarding how the world (or this part of it) works**

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Guiding theories

- **Phenomenological Theory**
 - generally inductive; results are generated from the study data
 - few assumptions are made in advance
- **Cognitive Theory**
 - assumes that it is possible to describe what people think by listening to what they say
- **Cultural or Personality Theory**
 - psychoanalytic perspective (talking freely about oneself)
- **Materialist Theory**
 - views the world according to observable behavior patterns

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Qualitative designs

- **Ethnographic**
 - art & science of describing a group & its culture
- **Case Method**
 - studying a person, program, or institution
- **Historical**
 - studying a past event, person, or group in the past or the development of a phenomenon such as a profession
- **Unstructured interviewing**
 - open-ended questions gain in-depth individual perspective
- **Heuristic**
 - complete immersion into the phenomenon of interest
 - self-reflection on personal experiences
 - for the purpose of discovery & understanding of the meaning of human experience

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Data Collection

In the field...

- observation
- interviewing
- tape recording

The “instrument” is the observer.

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Data collection considerations

- **when to observe**
- **who to interview**
- **which documents to examine**
- **how many documents to examine**
- **what to photograph**

Note ethical considerations of each

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Data analysis

Various processes are used to
organize field notes systematically

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Concerns common to qualitative researchers

- **being unobtrusive in the setting**
- **gaining access to the setting**
- **degree of participation in the setting**
 - ranging from observer to active participant

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Validity

Validity – determining the extent that conclusions represent subjects' reality

- **Rival explanations** – can data be organized in ways that support other logical possibilities
- **Negative cases** – what can be learned by looking at those cases who don't "fit" the data
- **Triangulation** – using different data collection techniques to study the same program

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Validity

Validity – determining the extent that conclusions represent subjects' reality

- **Design checks** – assess if there are flaws in data collection
- **Researcher effects** – consider how researcher involvement may alter findings
- **Participant reaction to analysis** – their agreement with accuracy, fairness, & validity
- **Intellectual rigor**

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Reliability

Concerned with reproducibility

• **Methods to enhance external reliability**

- researcher status position
- informant choices
- social situations & conditions
- analytic constructs & premises
- techniques for data collection & analysis

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Reliability

Concerned with reproducibility

• **Methods to enhance internal reliability**

- low-inference descriptions
- multiple researchers involved
- participant researchers
- peer examination
- mechanically recorded data so others can check veracity

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