

Qualitative methods in evaluation research

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What is qualitative inquiry?

Innovators are told, "Think outside the box". Qualitative scholars tell their students, "Study the box. Observe it. Inside. Outside. From inside to outside, and from outside to inside. Where is it? How did it get there? What's around it? Who says it's a 'box'? What do they mean? Why does it matter? Or does it? What is *not* a 'box'? Ask the box questions. Question others about the box. What's the perspective from inside? From outside? Study diagrams of the box. Find documents related to the box. What does *thinking* have to do with the box anyway? Understand *this* box. Study another box. And another. Understand *box*. Understand. Then, you can think inside *and* outside the box. Perhaps. For awhile. Until it changes. Until you change. Until outside becomes inside – again. Then, start over. Study the box."



(Patton 2002)

Qualitative vs. quantitative research questions

- Examples of qualitative questions
 - What are the dimensions of the return-to-work program, what are the needs and behaviors of the actors in the process, and what are they actually *doing*? And *why*?
 - How does the physical, social, organizational and structural contexts influence the program?
 - Interactional and relational aspects, communication, organizational environment, financial aspects

EXHIBIT 5.3 A Typology of Research Purposes

Types of Research	Purpose	Focus of Research	Desired Results	Desired Level of Generalization	Key Assumptions	Publication Mode	Standard for Judging
Basic research	Knowledge as an end in itself; discover truth	Questions deemed important by one's discipline or personal intellectual interest	Contribution to theory	Across time and space (ideal)	The world is patterned; those patterns are knowable and explainable.	Major refereed scholarly journals in one's discipline, scholarly books	Rigor of research, universality and verifiability of theory
Applied research	Understand the nature and sources of human and societal problems	Questions deemed important by society	Contributions to theories that can be used to formulate problem-solving programs and interventions	Within as general a time and space as possible, but clearly limited application context	Human and societal problems can be understood and solved with knowledge.	Specialized academic journals, applied research journals within disciplines, interdisciplinary problem-focused journals	Rigor and theoretical insight into the problem
Summative evaluation	Determine effectiveness of human interventions and actions (programs, policies, personnel, products)	Goals of the intervention	Judgments and generalizations about effective types of interventions and the conditions under which those efforts are effective	All interventions with similar goals	What works one place under specified conditions should work elsewhere.	Evaluation reports for program funders and policymakers, specialized journals	Generalizability to future efforts and to other programs and policy issues
Formative evaluation	Improve an intervention: A program, policy, organization, or product	Strengths and weaknesses of the specific program, policy, product, or personnel being studied	Recommendations for improvements	Limited to specific setting studied	People can and will use information to improve what they're doing.	Oral briefings; conferences; internal report; limited circulation to similar programs, other evaluators	Usefulness to and actual use by intended users in the setting studied
Action research	Solve problems in a program, organization, or community	Organization and community problems	Immediate action; solving problems as quickly as possible	Here and now	People in a setting can solve problems by studying themselves.	Interpersonal interactions among research participants; informal unpublished	Feelings about the process among research participants; feasibility of the solution generated

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Study design examples: basic research

An unstructured, open and explorative approach

- Topic: The perspectives of employers and people on sick leave on workplace measures in return to work
 - Explorative design based on the research aim
 - Open-ended interviews with 18 people on sick leave and their managers (45-120 mins)
 - Allows the respondents to control the agenda for the conversation, but covers specific topics of interest
 - May lead to a large variation content between the interviews; limited comparability, but open for analyses of unexpected themes
- Suitable design for an explorative study with small or medium sized data materials

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Study design examples: applied research

A structured approach

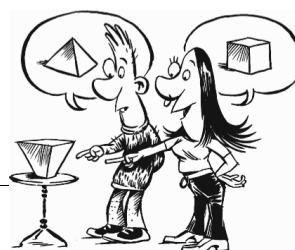
- Topic: Occupational health services' work with rehabilitation
 - 40 interviews with OHS staff and employers
 - Based on specific research questions
 - Structured interview guide
 - Focuses on answering predetermined questions, limited flexibility
 - Facilitates comparisons between respondents, limited possibilities for analysing unexpected aspects of the issue

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Evaluating complex interventions

- Interventions and projects in work disability prevention is often complex, involving several stakeholders
- Need for mixed methods, and different approaches for different aspects and phases of the intervention
- Focus on outcomes, processes and context

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Evaluating complex interventions

- Process evaluations may be both formative and summative
 - Formative evaluations are carried out both to document processes and to improve the quality of the intervention
 - Summative evaluations are used to give context to the outcome studies by summarizing what was actually done in the intervention

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Formative evaluation as continuous learning

You learn something new every day. Actually, you learn something old everyday. Just because you just learned it, doesn't mean it's new. Other people already knew it. Columbus is a good example.

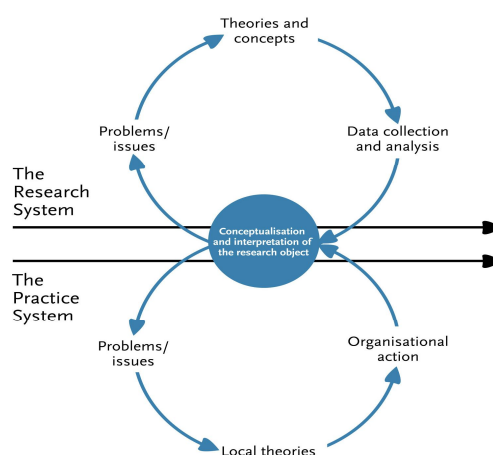
George Carlin

- What is new for the practitioner is not necessary new for the researcher
- What is new for the researcher is not necessary new for the practitioner

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Interactive research

- Has its origin in action research
- Focuses on close collaboration between research and practice, but lets the two develop in separate systems



(Svensson et al, 2015)

Qualitative analysis?

- Less structured study designs opens for analyses based on results (inductive) or theories (abductive, iterative)
 - The employer study has resulted in two papers with different analytic approaches:
 - Result-oriented analysis, based on the perspective of the people on sick leave
 - Theory-driven analysis, based on theory of employers social responsibilities

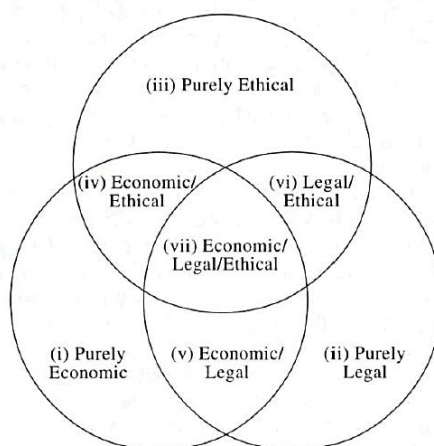
Meaning unit	Condensed meaning unit Description close to the text	Condensed meaning unit Interpretation of the underlying meaning	Sub-theme	Theme 12
She kicks about and hits the care provider when she is putting shampoo to her hair. // She tries to push the care providers away.	Using physical violence when being undressed and washed.	Fighting to defend her body zone against intrusion.	Fighting to protect her personal space	Interaction as a process of respecting and invading each other's privacy
When the care providers are in her room she closes the door from the outside so the care providers are locked up in her room and she stays outside in the corridor.	Closing the door between herself and the care providers.	Marking a boundary against others.		
She comes out to the corridor. She wears T-shirt, plastic pants and diapers and she has faeces all over her body. She walks into another resident's room and locks the door. // The care provider goes to see what she is doing and it appears that she has laid down in his bed. She goes into the ward office and starts to mess about among the staff's documents.	Appearing undressed and "dirty" in commonly used areas and in other residents' rooms and beds.	Crossing fellow residents' physical space.	Invading the physical space of others	
The care provider knocks on her door, waits for an answer.	Knocks on the door and waits for an answer.	Asking permission and waiting for an answer before entering her room.	Paying respect to her physical space	
The care providers permit her to rise and rummage about, she is allowed to move around while they are looking after her. // She is wandering around in the bathroom during the showering.	Permitting her to rise, rummage about, move around and wander during the morning toilet.	Allowing a certain amount of freedom of movement during the morning toilet.	Paying respect to her personal space	
She sits in a chair in her room restrained by a belt. // The care providers put her into a shower chair and restrain her with a belt, which is tied to the back of the chair.	Using physical restraints.		Invading her personal space	
The care provider sits on her bed and leans over her.	Sits on her bed and leans over her.	Coming too close.		
Care providers ask: "Shall we go to the toilet?" "Shall we take a shower?"	Addressing her as we instead of you.	Treating private matters as common matters.		
The care provider is talking with others about her rash and itch.	Discussing private matters over her head.			

Figure 3 Examples of meaning units, condensed meaning units, sub-themes and themes from content analysis of observations about interaction between a woman with dementia and her care providers.

Theory-driven analysis: example

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Figure 2:
The Three-Domain Model of Corporate Social Responsibility



Concepts for quality assessment

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- Validity, reliability and generalizability are quantitative concepts
- In qualitative research the concept of trustworthiness is used, which comprises:
 - Credibility – is the material managed and categorized in a reasonable way?
 - Transferability – are the results transferable to other contexts?
 - Dependability – the overall quality of the material and the research process
 - Confirmability – how well are the reporting of results and the conclusions supported by the data?
- These points are attained through the scrutiny of several researchers, feedback from respondents, and thorough and transparent descriptions of data collection and analysis

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