

# Qualitative Research

Chaper 6 of *Practical Research* by  
Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod

Kevin Baldor

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- ▶ What people believe about what happened

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- ▶ The researcher is the instrument
  - ▶ Objectivity is replaced with acknowledgment of biases and an attempt at evenhandedness

# When to Consider a Qualitative Approach

- ▶ To describe a situation, phenomenon, etc.
- ▶ To gain insight into a problem
  - ▶ perhaps developing problems to be studied quantitatively
- ▶ To verify the validity of assumptions or claims in the real world.
- ▶ To evaluate the effects of policies or practices in the real world.

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  - ▶ Taxonomy before Ontology
- ▶ It can act as a sort of "closed loop feedback" for existing theory.
  - ▶ Economics example

# Common Qualitative Research Patterns

- ▶ Case Study
- ▶ Ethnography
- ▶ Phenomenological Study
- ▶ Grounded Theory Study
- ▶ Content Analysis

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- ▶ Content Analysis
  - ▶ Finding patterns in human communications

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- ▶ Research Report:
  - ▶ a rationale for studying the case
  - ▶ a detailed description of facts related to the case
  - ▶ a description of data that was collected
  - ▶ a discussion of patterns found
  - ▶ **a connection to the larger scheme of things.**



# Ethnography

- ▶ Definition: In an ethnography, the researcher looks in depth at an entire group that shares a common culture; it is especially useful for understanding complexities of a particular, intact sociocultural group.
- ▶ Method: Site-based fieldwork is the essence of any ethnography. The researcher depends on a gatekeeper and key informants and is a careful observer.
- ▶ Data Analysis: Data collection and data analysis occur somewhat simultaneously. Steps in data collection include
  - ▶ description,
  - ▶ analysis, and
  - ▶ interpretation.

The research strives for rigorous subjectivity.

- ▶ Research Report: Often written in a personal, literary style and includes
  - ▶ an introduction providing a rationale for the study
  - ▶ a description of the setting and methods
  - ▶ an analysis of the group studies
  - ▶ a conclusion.

# Phenomenological Study

- ▶ Definition: A phenomenological study attempts to understand peoples perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation. The researcher tries to answer the question, “What is it like to experience such-and-such”
- ▶ Method: Phenomenological researchers depend almost exclusively on lengthy interviews with a carefully selected sample of participants. The phenomenological interview is often unstructured in which the researcher and participants to arrive at “the heart of the matter”
- ▶ Data Analysis: The central task in data analysis is to identify common themes in people’s descriptions of their experiences. Steps include
  - ▶ identifying relevant statements,
  - ▶ grouping statements into “meaning units”
  - ▶ seeking divergent perspectives
  - ▶ constructing a composite.
- ▶ Research Report: There is no specific structure but the report should produce understanding of the experience.

# Grounded Theory Study

- ▶ Definition: The major purpose of a grounded theory study is to begin with the data and use them to develop a theory. The study uses a prescribed set of procedures for analyzing data and constructing a theoretical model from them – the theory is “grounded” in the data.
- ▶ Method: Data collection is field-based, flexible, and likely to change over the course of the study. Interviews typically play a major role. A constant comparative method is used in that data analysis drives later data collection.

# Grounded Theory Study (continued)

- ▶ Data Analysis: Data analysis includes
  - ▶ open coding
  - ▶ axial coding
  - ▶ selective coding
  - ▶ development of a theory.

No matter what form the theory takes, it is based entirely on the data collected.

- ▶ The Research Report: Writing is objective and impersonal and includes
  - ▶ a description of the research question
  - ▶ a review of the related literature
  - ▶ a description of methodology and data analysis
  - ▶ a presentation of the theory
  - ▶ a discussion of implications.

# Content Analysis

- ▶ Definition: A content analysis is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of material for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes, or biases. A content analysis is typically performed on forms of human communication and involves the greatest amount of planning at the front end of the project.
- ▶ Method: A content analysis is systematic and includes
  - ▶ identification of the material to be studied
  - ▶ definition of the characteristics to be studied
  - ▶ a breakdown of complex items into smaller segments
  - ▶ scrutiny of material for identified characteristics under study.

## Content Analysis (continued)

- ▶ Data Analysis: Data analysis involves tabulation of the frequency of each characteristic found in the material studied. Tabulations and statistical analyses are used to interpret the data.
- ▶ The Research Report: The research report includes
  - ▶ a description of the material studied
  - ▶ precise definitions of material characteristics,
  - ▶ the coding or rating procedures
  - ▶ tabulations for each characteristic.

# Data Collection

- ▶ Sampling:
  - ▶ choice of sample depends on the research question
  - ▶ tends to be nonrandom in selection of data sources
  - ▶ is purposeful
- ▶ Observations:
  - ▶ researcher may be an outsider or a participant observer
  - ▶ intentionally unstructured and free-flowing
  - ▶ can be problematic and lack objectivity
- ▶ Interviews:
  - ▶ can yield a great deal of information
  - ▶ tend to be unstructured and open-ended
  - ▶ occasional use of focus groups