Yeah I think there's obviously really important context, so I don't really have the field of research. So I'm, I work for a research agency, a large research agency and I work as part of a dedicated qualitative methods team, and what that means in practice is that our day-to-day work is supporting teams across the research agency. Um, and also, like, working on and directing studies that are for government departments, or a range of our clients, basically. And our clients, and are pretty much all the government departments, but also regulators charities, large and small, the whole, the whole kind of landscape of people interested in socialism, which also actually sometimes universities as well. We also deliver fieldwork, often survey fieldwork, but sometimes qualitative fieldwork, where university groups, so, yeah, you know, I suppose I don't come from a particular sort of social science background in that way, you know, it would say, “Oh no, I'm a sociologist”, we're essentially psychologists. I'm a social researcher so, you know, sort of sitting right across all those things, but not having come from like, you know, like I said, a PhD or postdoc background - as from a particular sort of social science discipline, and so I think it's quite interesting, like I was just looking at questions like, I think our way of working might be quite different to what I suspect is quite different to what is undertaken in academic research. I sort of know it is a little bit from working with academics, but I'm really glad that you're talking to people who work in agencies, because of course we do work that, in our research feeds into eventually - one hopes - into how government departments think about policy or into like, major charity campaigns or into how regulators, you know, think about what's important to protect the public. So, actually, we are doing, you know, sort of social research in practice, that is being used by policymakers right now, and you know, obviously academics are doing that too. Many, many academics are working in, like, you know, absolutely kind of frontline social policy fields, and what's different in an agency is we’re often, we're often the people that are doing the quick turnaround work. Like we need to know about this within the next three months, within the next six months, or we have a lot of call-off contracts with them - with government departments. So a government department might need someone to do, they need a contractor who can do qualitative research for them on a project that they need answers on in a couple of months. So they will, they will, we will win a call-off with them and that means that they will come to us and only us for say, 18 months or two years. So that, you know, you, the dynamic is different.

Yeah. Yeah, it's really interesting because I think that the UK is probably the most mature market for qualitative social research. Also we, um, if I think about my global colleagues who do a lot of qualitative social Research. You see that in Canada, in America a little bit, yeah. Canada, Australia. You see it less in India actually, as well. It is growing, but I mean, you know, this is not something I [am] massively knowledgeable about, and it's, there's a huge huge market for qualitative research in social research in the UK, and we do in-depth interviews obviously. We do focus groups? More recently and we are doing a lot of deliberative participants, which we work, deliberative engagement work, so working, bringing, you know, convening [with] the public to discuss complex issues and getting them to reflect on it, and trying to understand where they come, where they get to, so things like citizens’ assemblies on climate change for local government departments. We did use digital quality methods as well, so we use, we sort of call it digital ethnography. Oh yeah, it's debatable whether it is strictly that, but we ask participants to download an app and ask [them to] participate through the app, perhaps sharing videos with us or experiences, taking photographs over. We often do that over short, quite short periods of time. Maybe, sort of, two to four weeks to get. And we will typically, though, we will use a mixture of focus groups, of course, and we use a mixture of these methods. Try and address the research, a research question. So there's sometimes you get projects that are solely depth interviews, or solely groups, but quite often the research problems that we're asked to address mean that we bring together a lot of these different kinds of methods.

Yes. Now this is a vexed question. So, yeah, I mean, I could probably do a whole hour talking about this, and we, we do use Nvivo, but not consistently across the business on all of our projects. And you know, when you're talking about using software, it's not just how, you know, are you using software? What are you doing within the software as well?

So, we're a large organization, we have 300 staff, probably of those, I don't know, at least about a hundred of them regularly do qualitative research. And so we don't have, not everyone is trained in using the software. Some people join us having used software in their previous organizations, that they're really confident with using Nvivo, but they'll be confident using it in a particular way. So they're confident in using it, perhaps in terms of using it for coding, and you’re probably aware of that. One of our big competitors, [Business name redacted] has a really specific approach to using Nvivo, to using CAQDAS software, which they call the Framework approach. So, when stuff join us from [that company] they are sort of drilled and trained really thoroughly in doing using Framework. Framework is basically generates, well, you, you have to manually generate summaries within a Framework in Nvivo. And those link through to the transcripts, which you can also code as well. So there's lots of different things going on in the business, in terms of the ways that people use software commonly, though we use Excel is the most, that's essentially it's the most accessible way for people to to organize qualitative data, and I lead on training for quality research in the business, and I really try to hammer home some kind of key messages about qual analysis, the importance of using summaries, and Excel is often used to generate summaries, and how important that is in qualitative data management. But I think that it's quite challenging in a large agency, because so many we have, in the way that we're working, we have so many people that are doing qual. Only some of the time, they're not dedicated, positive searches, they're mixed methods researchers. And so yeah, I think there are skills and confidence levels in organizing quality, you know, in quality to management and then quality they really vary and it people's experiences levels as well. So yeah, Nvivo, Excel, and Transcripts as well. Yeah, obviously we have all the different audio transcripts.

We also have video data as well, when we're using apps. Photographic data, so yeah, it can be quite a challenge for people.

Oh yeah, I'm glad you asked me that question in advance, because, thinking about frameworks isn't something that happens very much in research agencies like ours. Oh no, I haven't thought about that since I did my postgraduate, um 50 years ago. I mean at the fundamentally, we do thematic analysis. Fundamentally. But it's quite an interesting thing, that Probably over the last seven, eight years, because the kind of, what risk, what government departments were commissioning really changed, and you know, sort of post-austerity, the interest in [indecipherable] in commissioning like open research projects kind of became, but you know, but there was less money around Post-2010 and it's 2013-2014, we saw that. People were, government departments or commissioning evaluations.Now we deliver a lot of valuations for government, which incorporate qualitative data collection into them. And obviously part of the methods that are used and evaluation research, Obviously you start with a, you need to develop a theory of change and logic model process maps. So you are…

…that's your analytical framework, and you'll gathering your data kind of to you know, and you know, you're testing against that theory, and and then when we do things for, when we do pieces of work that might come in through a call-off contract or maybe a more Very occasionally, we get more expiratory pieces of work that come in. I think very occasionally, I guess there's probably, there's a mix of stuff that goes on, but we need to get more exploratory pieces, that not always, generally commissions outside of government, and you know, we'll ultimately be using thematic analysis. So I, does that help answer your question?

Yeah, I'm, well I was fascinated, if I, what you're doing really? Because I don't have any experience of it at all, like in them, in the kind of work we do. We are, we work under the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, so you know what you're saying that MRS in Market Research is really relevant. Like what? You know, we're a social research division of a big market research company. Typically, we don't pass on our data set to clients, we try to convince them that it's not really worthwhile them having the whole qualitative set, because unless if they really want it, they can, you know, we don't object - but we we have to - we just sort of have to say to them, it's very onerous to anonymize a qualitative data set associated to pay for that. We will do it. And, you know, we try to say to them, err what are you going to do with that data set? Because that's another question. Like sometimes it's [they] might say, “Well, we want all the transcripts”. Okay. We'll find, but what you did actually do with them, because undertaking analysis of - I don't know 70 transcripts or whatever - is, I don't know. Is it something they're really gonna do? So, this means that we're very rarely in the situation where we do that, and we've had occasional situations where we're asked to do it or we're to pass on our Nvivo project. And yeah, it, then we have to cost in a couple of glorious business of anonymizing, which takes us to, I guess you, you've got questions here about ethics and anonymization. And, you know, it's very, it's very different because I think, you know, so often with political research, we are, we sample people who have very specific characteristics. And so, we might be specific. You know, something, people who are really vulnerable. Okay, in my organization, we do really fieldwork with people who are victims of domestic abuse and you know, all kinds of, you know, In very, you know, very difficult, no personal, you know, refugees, all kinds of, you know, precarious situations at one end of the scale, and [at] the other end of the scale, we also speak to really see the stakeholders who is, you know, I don't know how you can really effectively anonymize certain kinds of stakeholder interviews because it's It really could be only one of three people. He said that, and so I think that's it. That's a challenge of positive research, more broadly. So you know, we face these kind of practical challenges that open qualitative data, and so you know, it practising, it's not something I've done and in theory, do I think it's a good thing? I think that qualitative research, you know, it does exist in a kind of political economy, of what, [a] hierarchy of what research methods are more important, and etc. And one of the things that I think weakens qualitative data, qualitative data collection in that hierarchy is it's transparency, right? Like we can't. It's harder for us because of the nature of the data. We've collected to be open about, open in sharing that data. But then I think that also leads us not to be open about how we're doing our analysis as well, which I think is really problematic, because I think then it, you know, leads to all of these things. You know, all of the questions that you get about, you know, did just one person say that, or you know - all of the things that you know potentially we can then, you know, the idea of using qualitative data in a, in a research programme, and it also means that we maybe don't do enough about validation about data as well. I don't think, I don't think we do enough about validation of our data, and that is a type of perhaps a time thing. And maybe more specific to social research is working in an agency setting than an academic setting - where you might-be have more of an emphasis on it, because you're funding is closely tied to it or something. I don't know.

Yeah, the very occasional cuts, but what I think is quite interesting is, I'm currently working on a public inquiry. For this public inquiry, there is an impetus to make the data set open, ultimately that it sits in a national data archive. So, I think this is very positive. It's a public inquiry. But how are we going to do it? I'm actually just coming back to work after maternity leave. So I've been back at work about a month and I've joined this project, which as I say, is a, it's a major public inquiry, and I can see that my colleagues [Named redacted], you know, we're happy to do that. And I thought, Well how, and that's fine, because the nature of research agency workers, we’re quite often, you know, the cliff. If our client says we absolutely need to do this, sometimes we will solve the ‘how’ problem a little bit later down the line. And I feel like this, this is a solvable problem - and a very interesting problem, but I know that my one of my tasks in the next couple of months is going to be to start digging around and going right, are there the pups this will be what you generate ultimately, but are there two kids to support? Is there a code of good practice in generating open access data? And, you know, I want to talk to the National Data Archives, and just find out what is, you know, how, what is their, what are their requirements? And then we need to sort of triangulate this. We've got, we've got an external panel for this study as well. I need to work with our ethics panel to sort of understand the, what, you know, whether we can get to an agreement on what we think the limits of and optimization confidentiality ought to be, you know, do we have you know, we have agreed we have, we have participant consent for it. But you know, this is a sort of longer question, that, the more deeper question here, what [are] participants consenting to? Because, they can sort of say, “Well yeah, I'm happy to have it in the National Data Archive”. But we are not sending them their transcripts and saying can you go through this, redact any bits that you're not happy with and then give it back to us, and then we'll put it in the National Data Archive, because that would be unbelievably onerous. It's a very large scale project act, or should we be doing that? I don't, you know. And so you want participants to say, “Yeah, I'm happy to go for it to go to the national data for our camp, which might happen in two years time. Five years times”. Like that today, really know what they've said yes to you. I don't know.

Yeah. And also are they going to be comfortable with how anonymized it is? I think I guess that's that. I mean this is an inquiry that's big and taken on a you know, on a politically sensitive subject and that would cover very personal experiences of the individuals and we are interviewing You know, I can imagine scenarios where people might not feel comfortable. I mean again, we're doing just as children, you've done in your consent. We've said, you can withdraw your consent etc. You know, so I think, you know, we've probably gone as far as we can, but It just feel like here, it just feels like you ground, and you know, you ground that, you know, onto next with ethical problems.

So yeah, it would be good to have. It would be good to have guidance on how to get this, right?

You know, you almost wonder if it would be helpful to have, like, you know, like a public voice on it, like, do we get, you know, members of the public have taken part in research, to sort of tell us what they think is an acceptable level? Or is it some kind of, you know, do we have some kind of debate on it, and you know, discussion with the public, because I wonder if that might sit with what you're trying to do. What do the public think is acceptable? Or what do your professional or senior stakeholders think is acceptable in terms of anonymization, confidentiality, transparency, when their data is put in a national archive, because it's totally different from survey things.

…our spaces. There is just quite a lot to it, and I think that, you know, for me, what I want to do is when we deal with this data set, is, I just want to feel like I've done what I can to understand what good practice is. What's you know, what's what's acceptable, and you know, and sort of put that into practice on this data set

A question, enabling factors. I think, I think having a good practice guide, just some kind would be really helpful.

…and if that was somehow validated, by actually, the first to figure in that, like, you know, like the National Data Archives, so or…

Trying to think. I mean, you know, the obvious thing is like the ONS or government social research. If they were able, you know, if they endorsed its approach, it would be really interesting to get GSR government, social research to engage with this. And I don't know if you're interviewing anyone from GSR, but…

Yeah. yeah, I mean, I think if you can speak to somebody at GSR somehow, so GSR is the, it is the research profession within government, so it's huge. Like you know, like there are, I don't know what like 200 GSR researchers in the Department of Work and Pensions. So there's like, I don't know how many GSR staffing government, but, so maybe it's a case of, like, trying to speak soon, as the senior people there. But, yeah, I think if you sort of, you know, from my point of view, to what extent would my clients government, social research, departments. And to what extent would my clients want the qualitative data sets to be open? You know, those data sets, where we were talking to tax credit, that you would say, tax credit claimants, universal credit claimants, you know. People getting, you know, disability living allowance, you know, people in all these kinds of, you know, situations where they are interacting with public policy [and] government systems.

Do, do they just, just the government want those [people’s] data to be open access? I think that's fundamental for them, for the work I do, but also, you know, could having that data, you know that I don't know, there must be some really big, there would be some big questions there about what GSR would be trying to do if they were allowed allowing that? But I don't know if GSL makes survey data open access, you know, there are obviously the national statistics, right? So again look, it might be really useful to speak to someone that ONS - the Office for National Statistics, they will have qualitative researchers in there. But, like, obviously national data sets are open access for surveys like a lot of the longitudinal cohort studies. They're obviously open access, so you could speak to somebody at CLS, the center of longitude law studies. You know, those are open access. So, and they're considered in the public interest, right? Or in the case of longitudinal studies in the, like, interest of, like, knowledge generation. But the qualitative data sets, not so much. But yeah, like there's no question that government is generating enormously valuable qualitative data sets through commissioning people like me, you know. [They] like us to generate qualitative evidence, so I mean, it will be political, but it'd be really interesting. Also to understand if they're are practical barriers as well as political ones. Or if it's just something they've just never thought of doing.

Now the clients that often ask us to have all the transcripts and have the Nvivo project are often our charities. That might be doing something like commissioning off for like a real kind of a landmark study for them, that they really want to try and explore, get to the bottom of like a major issue. So for example, we had a big charity in the food security sector commissioning us to do, they did a survey and also a longitudinal qualitative study with us, about people's experiences of food banks. So, I think they have taken that data set. They may use it internally. Would they be interested in making [it] open access? Well, they might do, you know you, I don't know, actually, but you see from my point of view, it's really, what, just what's up? What do our clients want? And I suspect that our clients haven't really thought about open access. And how these data sets could be used for, you know, the wider, wider knowledge. But yeah, I mean what? Now, I stop and think about it, like in my career I've probably generated, like, that's an interviews, probably but hundreds of like, very interesting data sets that are about like live public policies or that, you know, could be really interesting to historians of those policies ten years down the line, it is down the line, don't know. but,

Yeah. So yeah, I did sort of laugh to myself again about the epistemic foundation, because I just have not really thought about that for a very long time, it's just not...

So we've never, our clients will never ask us “what's your epistemic foundation”. More, I just, I just don't know that. I just fundamentally. And what I do, that isn't relevant. I probably have an epistemic foundation, but I don't know what it is, because you know, the reality of my work is, I'm you know, we are kind of set, you know, set parameters by our clients, to some extent. We challenge those parameters, etc, etc. But we are, we deliver work for our clients. That is, like, if that is, that is the focus of what we do.

And I mean, is that, I don't know. We're trying to think if there's a better way, of some way that I can get what you're trying to get [at] here, but I'm not sure there is?

Okay, all right. I see, sorry I'm beginning to see [what] we're getting at here. Okay. And yeah, I guess, you know, I think he said I was trying to sort of think about. I think this comes down to the, you know, again, things like, when we're doing evaluation research, we, you know, we are, we do secondary analysis of, like, lots of data to try and generate a theory of change, generate, a logic model, generate a process map. So, you know, [at] some level, we're kind of, it's largely. It's largely deductive reasoning. And then sometimes, we can sort of bring in more inductive elements like bringing more kinds of open elements, exploratory elements.

Yeah, but we are, we are largely looking at People's accounts, you know, they're looking at pseudo. It's the same with depth interviews and focus groups, but we look at people's accounts of their experiences, or their own accounts of their beliefs, opinions, or perceptions. Pretty much thematically organized, that, you know, I don't think we then kind of add a layer of, you know, as a sort of philosopher, you know, we don't kind of then…

How do we translate? What our participants are telling us into something meaningful that our client can then do something about. And that's where we're trying to get to

Yeah, I always enjoy it when we use theoretical frameworks in our research, because I think it does support. I think it just supports from the, particularly transparency and analysis, right? You know, we can say, like, this is how we, because sometimes, when we develop a code frame, there's all that she's like, “Well, how did you get to that code frame?” Whereas when you use a theoretical framework, you're just like, well, we're using this code frame because it links to this thing, framework. So yeah, that could be a really positive thing to do. It's funny. There are, surprisingly, I don't think there are about many, that have a really broad application in social research, convey is quite unusual in that way. And So yeah, I find it really helpful, particularly relating to, you know, it's the transparency amount in analysis. That's the critical factor.

It's very hard as well. Like, particularly in agency research where people are not necessarily qualitative specialists for them to be articulate, have the language at hand. I think language is really problematic in qualitative research, because, you know, we don't even consistently talk about coding. There are so many different words for coding and categories and etc, etc. And so it's hard for people to have the language at hand, to explain what it is that they've done until they feel confident about the choices that they've made in navigating data management, and then navigate, you know, developing it. And I've been in analytical strategy, and why they've done that. It's fundamental.

Yeah, I mean, I think that could be really useful for us in terms of you know, if we're faced with like a particularly challenging research question from a client, to be able to say, “Well, we know that this is a held in the Data - National Data Archives, or wherever and we can look at it and, you know, our first step would be to review this and generate, you know, theory along the lines of X or Y”. I think the problem, I don't know, I think about it in practice, though. How up-to-date it is might be an issue. Because we're often, you know, we're dealing with public policy challenges that are happening now. As I know as our academic social research practitioners of course, but I don't know. It's quite interesting to think about how interested our clients might be in looking at, and things that happened in the past. Or, you know, it's just, how contemporary can it kind of, can be these days might be an issue. I don't know how substantially we would use it. I think it's unlikely that we would, you know, the main, the main kinds of kind of, part of a project that we would deliver. Yeah, our clients would be secondary data analysis of latest, and we're always, you know, our raison d'etre is primary data collection. That's what you, so…

…but, I'm, you know. I think it could potentially be useful.

Yeah, I don't know. It's something like homelessness, Okay, It's like with profoundly out of fashion, in terms of research commissioning by government, or maybe it was going on, but we didn't see briefs, oh for about a decade. And now we're seeing a lot of briefs on homelessness, but it would be quite interesting if there was a data set of studies that were done, you know, ten years when that work was done, to sort of, you know, ground the work that is now being commissioned because I mean…

…you know, obviously, certain kinds of homelessness were less of a problem, sort of 10, 20 years ago, 15, 20 years ago. And now, you know, we've got different kinds of issues that are coming up due to austerity etc.

….no, no. I'm just yeah. Just, a lot of [echo in] this room. I'm not sure whether it's you, can see me…

No, it's something that I want to look into, and it's very much something that I'm going to be doing in the next few weeks is finding out more about it. But yeah, to my knowledge. I don't, yeah. So that's kind of interesting because I'm also on the board of the Social Research Association. So I'm quite involved in my kind of professional community as a qualitative researcher, but I'm not aware of it. I would say that, I'm not perhaps, we're not perhaps as linked up with what's going on in academic research, but there are academic researchers who are on the Social Research Association Board and in that community. So, and I think there would be opportunities too, for you to amplify your work. Once it's done through the SRA, because that is, that is a community of practice that cuts across academia government, charity sector, local government, you know, all of those,…

…all of those different sectors regulators where you find social researchers generated qualitative data.

I mean, I think a government, you know, I think it would have to come from GSR. I'd have to research profession in government saying, okay, just that we make our national data sets in surveys open access, we're going to do that with our qualitative data sets too, that are all set, kinds of qualitative data sets that are national data, national data sets. So maybe it's not about deeming them open access qual projects, but deeming certain kinds of qualitative data collection [as] national data sets. And I don't know how the ONS categorize things, but, you know, something like the survey that the story, the census, the census is in a data store. Like, there are countless, like, surveys on, like, you know, health and education, and childcare, and things like that, that are national data sets, and are, you know, produced, and can be accessed and manipulated by researchers, but that doesn't occur with qualitative data sets, and is it something you know less could or should rethink because I don't think you'd see change in my end unless it came from government.

No, no, don't, yeah, don't know. I’ll have to look into that. It could be that my colleagues know, it could…

That one makes it, knows I'm, because they have agreed to this, I'm like, they will have discussed in depth with the client, so it could be that one of my colleagues actually has this information and…

…I'm just worrying about it and making it my problem, when actually they've thought about it already. I actually haven't had that conversation. So yeah.

But it's not really fun, and I think maybe that;s, in that, to some level, speaks for yourself because I don't to my knowledge. It's not something we've done, and I've worked where I worked there, you know, 15 years now, and you know, I've been involved with, I mean it's a big organization. It's quite possible that that could have happened without me knowing, and, but even that, I'm sort of the core methods lead. I'd be surprised, but it's possible. So Yeah.

It's got to come from the client, you see? So this is a public inquiry. It's outside government. So, you know, think of something like the Granville Inquiry or something like that, it's that kind of thing. Yeah, so it sits outside of government, and…

…also there's a sort of public engagement transparency. There's an impetus to that. That just saying, look, we are being really open the way that the, it's been set up, is they have to. They're, you know, part of their mission statement. Part of their values is about being open, so I guess it's part of demonstrating that, now and…

…I kind of go back to ONS like, you know, I don't know of the statistics authority. I don't know how what their kind of position on open access to survey data is, but they will have one and there will be certain views that they have on, you know, public, actually, you know, the making, making national statistics accessible, because that is in the public interest, and it's in the public interest in a democracy, isn’t it, yeah?

So could that, would that extend to qualitative data? Has that question ever been asked? I don't know. Yeah, I think.

Yeah. So I feel like they might be the people to speak to you about it, but it's really in their power, and on this study it's been very much part of what the, the, DNA really of this, of this undertaking, this inquiry is, that... …that it's open.

Probably the workflow.

I really don't. So we struggle sometimes with, like, what's the workflow on qualitative? Anyway, because It's not always obvious. What kind of policy questions? Government departments are going to, you know, going to want to invest today, and things come up, and expectedly sometimes. Whereas we know, for example, that certain national data sets need to be retended like surveys, like, so my colleagues in the survey methods team know that there are eight surveys that will be, you know, they are coming up for retender, and off we go. Whereas we don't know that with qualitative research, we don't necessarily always know what's in the pipeline. We do to some extent with some, some big kind of, there were, you know, there would be certain big undertakings that are going on. But yeah, we don't necessarily. I mean, again, we're a big organization, we work with every government department, I guess, my colleagues who work with certain clients will have a sense of what kind of questions, those clients have, but yeah, so it's really hard to say essentially.