Day 6: Methods and Results of Qualitative Research Reports

|  |
| --- |
| Day 6 Specific Learning Outcomes |
| 1. **Appraise the uses of qualitative methods for leadership studies.** |
| 1. **Examine various qualitative research methods.** |
| 1. **Distinguish the processes of various qualitative methods including narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, case study, and ethnographic research designs.** |
| 1. **Compare data collection and analysis methods for qualitative studies.** |
| 1. **Contrast the quantitative term “generalizability” with the qualitative term “applicability.”** |
| 1. **Critique the methods and results sections of a qualitative research report.** |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Book/Article | Author | Pages |
| *Understanding Research* | Plano-Clark & Creswell (2015) | 283-352 |
| Servant leadership: A phenomenological study of practices, experiences, organizational effectiveness and barriers. | Savage-Austin & Honeycutt | https://ezproxy.student.twu.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=57760063&site=ehost-live |

|  |
| --- |
| Class Announcement: Transition & New Focus |
| **Today we continue our overview of the most common research methods used in Leadership Research. Remember that the purpose of these overviews is that you will be a more informed consumer of research and a practitioner of evidence-based leadership practices.**  **Earlier when we explored the introductions to research reports we saw that the research problem establishes why a particular research study is worth doing, the review of precedent literature establishes what is already known about the problem, and the research purpose establishes what the research specifically intends to do. Today we want to continue to extend this to the next major section of a research report: The methods and results. Because of the great differences in quantitative and qualitative methods, we have broken this discussion into two days. Yesterday focused on the methods and results of quantitative research reports, while today we will focus on those of qualitative research reports.** |

Notes: Methods and Results of Qualitative Research Reports

These notes are designed to complement your engagement with Plano-Clark and Creswell’s Part Four, Chapters 9, 10 and 11.

|  |
| --- |
| Theme, Theorists & Concepts |
| * Purposes of Qualitative Research Methods |
| * Survey of Qualitative Research Designs |
| * Triangulation |
| * Saturation |
| * Data Analysis |
| * Data Interpretation |
| * Applicability of Findings |

Before[[1]](#footnote-1) we take a closer look at the methods and results sections of qualitative research reports, it would be helpful to revisit the points of comparison and contrast between quantitative and qualitative approaches that we made in Day 4. At this point, remember that the purposes of quantitative and qualitative research differ. Previously we have seen that quantitative research has three purposes: to explain and predict, to confirm and validate, and to test theory. In contrast, qualitative research has three distinct purposes: to describe and explain, to explore and interpret, and to build theory. Arising from these differences in purpose, the natures of quantitative and qualitative research designs differ. Quantitative designs tend to be more closely focused on a problem that has known variables that can be controlled or at least accounted for. The investigation is conducted following established guidelines utilizing largely predetermined methods while the researcher seeks to maintain a detached view. In contrast, qualitative designs tend to be more holistic, investigating unknown variables following flexible guidelines utilizing emergent methods in a highly context-bound, personal approach (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 96). Qualitative designs may be characterized as evolving and flexible, sometimes guided by a general hunch as to how to proceed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 45).

We saw that these differing designs lead to marked differences in what data are collected, how data are collected, and how data are analyzed. Quantitative research seeks to collect numeric data from as large a sample as possible so to enhance claims to being representative, using standardized data collection instruments. Qualitative research gathers textual or image-based data from typically small, informative samples using loosely structured or nonstandardized interviews or observations (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 96).

The differing designs of quantitative and qualitative research also lead marked differences in how data collected is analyzed. Quantitative data is approached primarily through deductive reasoning, employing statistical analyses applied to numerical data, with stress on objectivity. Qualitative data is approached primarily through inductive reasoning with the goal uncovering themes and categories, with acknowledgement of potential researcher bias and subjectivity. Typically, quantitative research findings are reported in a formal, scientific style with full display of numbers and statistics, while qualitative research findings are typically reported in a narrative form (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010, p. 96).

These differences have contributed to varying opinion as to the relative value of quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Sometimes people associated with one approach can be seen discrediting the other approach. Recognizing the various positions on the question, Bogdan and Biklin assert that the most widely held opinion is that there is no best method. “It all depends on what you are studying and what you want to find out” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 43).

Qualitative research has been “mainstreamed” in recent years, although in certain disciplines its use is not as widespread. In order to understand the complexity and “messiness” of real-life organizations, leadership investigation is turning increasingly to qualitative research.

**Qualitative Research Design**

We have seen thus far that the research problem establishes why a particular research study is worth doing, the review of precedent literature establishes what is already known about the problem, and the research purpose establishes what the research specifically intends to do. To that, we add the next step: The research design provides the overall plan for the research study. Qualitative research designs typically are less structured than in quantitative designs, and are far more flexible.

In contrast to quantitative research design’s resting solidly on theoretical frameworks, in qualitative research design the use of theoretical frameworks is not nearly so clear. While some qualitative researchers do employ theoretical frameworks, at least to some degree, others, such as Corbin and Strauss “prefer not to begin our research with a predefined theoretical framework or set of concepts” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 39). Consequently, qualitative research design has been characterized as an “evolving, flexible, general hunch as to how you might proceed” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 45). Theoretical frameworks are employed in qualitative research design to suggest alternate explanations, to help the researcher determine appropriate methodology, and to provide the basis for building and extending theory. The primary consideration for the qualitative researcher is that they remain “open” to new ideas and concepts that might not fit the concepts of the adopted theoretical framework (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 40).

Part Four of your reading of the course text (Plano-Clark and Creswell, 2015) focuses on four qualitative methods: narrative, grounded theory, case study, and ethnographic research designs. Be aware that there are variants and other generic qualitative methods that share similar methods of data collection (e.g., in-depth interviews) and analysis (i.e., thematic analysis) but vary somewhat in their philosophical foundations (e.g., in their epistemological claims). To give you a sense of this array of variants, Gall, Gall and Borg speak of these in terms of qualitative research traditions based on the types of phenomena investigated—investigation of lived experience, of society and culture and of language and communication (2007, p. 491).

Under *investigation of lived experience* the authors recognize the following:

* Cognitive psychology (investigating the mental structures and processes employed by individuals),
* Phenomenology (investigating reality as it appears to individuals),
* Phenomenographic research (investigating how individuals conceptualize reality) and
* Life history research (investigating how individuals perceive their life’s experiences).

Under *investigation of society and culture* they recognize the following:

* Symbolic inteactionism (investigating the influence of social interactions on the development of social structures and individual self-identity),
* Action research (in which researchers reflect on their own efforts to improve the rationality and justice of their personal work),
* Ethnography (the investigation of the characteristic features and patterns of a culture), cultural studies and critical-theory research (aimed at contesting oppressive power relationships within a culture), and
* Ethnomethodology (investigating the rules that underlie everyday social interactions).

Under *investigation of language and communication* the authors recognize the following:

* Narrative analysis (investigating the organized representations and explanations of human experience),
* Ethnographic content analysis (the investigation of the content of document in cultural perspective),
* Ethnography of communication (investigating speech patterns in the social life of a cultural group),
* Hermeneutics (investigating the process by which individuals arrive at the meaning of a text),
* Semiotics (investigating the meanings signs and symbols covey within a culture), and
* Structuralism and poststructuralism (focused on the investigation of the systematic properties of language and text) (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 491).

As a consumer of qualitative research, you will encounter many of these terms, and more. Hopefully, this will be helpful in situating them.

**Method Section: Qualitative Data Collection**

The research problem establishes why a particular research study is worth doing, the review of precedent literature establishes what is already known about the problem, the research purpose establishes what the research specifically intends to do, and the research design provides the overall plan for the research study. We now turn our attention to qualitative research data collection.

Qualitative research data collection is typically based on one or more of the following methods: observation (including participant observation), open-ended interviewing, first person accounts, and the review of various documents. Data collected is descriptive, and may consist of personal documents, fieldnotes, various records of people’s own words (including video and voice recordings and written transcripts), photographs, official document and other artifacts. Data is collected from small, nonrepresentative samples selected through various sampling strategies including theoretical, purposeful, and snow ball sampling (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 45).

A dominant word encountered in qualitative research is **triangulation**. Triangulation is a term borrowed from navigation and surveying, and conveys the notion that multiple sources of information will help establish a fact (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 115). Multiple sources of data are seen to lead to a fuller, more complete, and more defensible understanding of the phenomena observed. Consequently, multiple methods of data collection are frequently employed within the same qualitative research study. These commonly consist of the researcher’s fieldnotes, interviews, researcher observations, and analysis of various documents.

Fieldnotes are the written summary of personal observations made by the researcher regarding what they see, hear, experience and think deemed to be relevant to the research study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 119). In addition to recording observations of behavior, contexts, conversations and the like, field notes usually record the researcher’s thoughts and reflections including initial identification of emerging themes as they engage in the data-gathering process. Written fieldnotes usually accompany other forms of data gathering to provide details that might otherwise be missed. For example, a video of a particular event will not provide information as to what the researcher felt in that moment, or what the researcher observed happening off-camera—and that information may well be relevant.

Interviews are the primary way the qualitative researcher can investigate the experience of others (Seidman, 2006, p. 10). Interviews tend to be time consuming and often expensive, as the researcher must be physically present with the research participant being interviewed. Interview questions are usually open-ended, and tend to build on and further explore the participant’s responses in an evolving manner, with the goal of having the participant reconstruct personal experiences relevant to the research topic (Seidman, 2006, p. 15). Interviews are commonly voice or video recorded, and in most cases, these are later transferred to printed transcript form through the time-intensive process of transcribing. Various hardware and software solutions (such as HyperTRANSCRIBE©) assist in this process.

While interviews and document analysis is focused on words which reflect the participant’s perspective, observation allows the researcher to formulate their own version of the phenomena. This is strengthened when the researcher takes their observations back to the participants for checking. Qualitative researcher observer roles can vary on a continuum from complete observer to observer-participant to participant-observer to complete participant (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 276). As a complete observer, the researcher maintains independence from the setting studied, while as a complete observer, the researcher is a full and active participating member in the setting studied. The two middle positions tend toward one of these two poles.

Personal documents (including diaries, personal letters, and autobiographies) and official documents (including both internal and external communication, records, and personnel files) can be useful in juxtaposition with interviews to triangulate (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 138). Sometimes popular culture documents (including films, ads, magazines, etc.), photographs, and even official statistics and other quantitative data provide data for analysis. When handling quantitative data, qualitative researchers “are adamant about not taking quantitative data at face value,” and “see the social processes involved in numerical data collection and he effects of quantification on how people think and as important subjects for study” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 154).

In qualitative research, data is usually collected until *saturation* is achieved. Saturation is a term employed that simply means that no new information relevant to the development of categories, properties, dimensions and variances is forthcoming from continued data gathering (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 143). In effect, findings begin to replicate, and not add anything substantially new (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 278). Qualitative researchers often make statements about collecting data until saturation is reached in an effort to demonstrate that sufficient data was collected to support the conclusions that will be reported.

**Results Section: Qualitative Data Analysis and Results**

Qualitative research *data analysis* typically employs analytic induction, is ongoing throughout the research, and seeks to identify themes and concepts emergent in the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 46). This is a dynamic process in which the researcher breaks data apart into its various components in order to identify their properties and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 46). Because data might suggest more than one story, analysis is an interpretive act that often begins, as in Glaser and Strauss’ constant comparison, from the very onset of data collection (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007, p. 469).

Data analysis involves “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 159). Analysis involves *data interpretation*where ideas about the findings are related to broader concerns and concepts. Levels of analysis can range from the superficial description to theoretical interpretation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 80). The task is monumental. Software such as HyperRESEARCH© is of great assistance in helping the researcher assign codes to text data, which assists in the identification of concepts and themes. Qualitative research findings or results are usually presented in a narrative form. This can take many forms, and be organized in a variety of ways including the use of tables and figures when appropriate. Chapter 11 of the course text provides a concise discussion of this topic.

Because qualitative research can involve the investigation of as few as one research participant (as in a case study), great caution is exercised in making sweeping generalizations. In fact, because the term *generalizability* itself is strongly associated with quantitative research with much larger samples, Gall, Gall and Borg suggest the term *applicability* is more appropriate to the different processes and types of evidence associated with qualitative research (2008, p. 477).

**References:**

Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and method* (5th ed.)*.* Boston: Pearson.

Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research* (3rd ed). Los Angles, CA: Sage.

Gall, M., Gall, J. & Borg, W. (2007). *Educational research.* Boston, MA: Pearson.

Leedy, P., & Ormrod, J. (2010). *Practical research: Planning and design* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Plano-Clark, V., Creswell, J. (2015). *Understanding research: A consumer’s guide* (2nd ed.)*.* Boston, MA: Pearson

Seidman, I. (2006). *Interviewing as qualitative research: A guide for researchers in education and the social sciences* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Teacher’s College Press.

|  |
| --- |
| Assignment Instructions |
| **Immediately after class today, review the assigned readings, the instructor notes, and the PowerPoint(s) for today. Based on your reflections, prepare the following Reflection Brief.**  **Reflection Brief #3: Introductions to Research Reports (5% of course mark)**  (NB: This assignment is due tomorrow morning at the beginning of class.)  **Prepare a brief (250-300 word) response to the following:**  **The most important thing for me about the methods and results section of a high-quality qualitative research report is . . .**  **Please post this reflective brief in the drop box under Day 6.**  **N.B. Group #3 will lead us in a discussion of Reflection Brief #3 first thing tomorrow morning (part of 10% of Individual Daily Engagement course final mark). See MyCourses for grouping details.** |

|  |
| --- |
| Assignment Grading |
| **Assignments will be graded using the general rubric posted in the course outline for LDRS 591 in MyCourses and the specific reflection brief rubric provided on MyCourses.** |

1. © David Williaume 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)