

A Conceptual Overview of Five Inquiry Approaches

In: Handbook of Research Design & Social Measurement

By: Delbert C. Miller & Neil J. Salkind

Pub. Date: 2011

Access Date: August 29, 2018

Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc.

City: Thousand Oaks

Print ISBN: 9780761920465

Online ISBN: 9781412984386

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412984386>

Print page: 147

©2002 SAGE Publications, Inc.. All Rights Reserved.

This PDF has been generated from SAGE Research Methods. Please note that the pagination of the online version will vary from the pagination of the print book.

A Conceptual Overview of Five Inquiry Approaches

From these sketches of each tradition, we can identify fundamental differences among these types of qualitative research. Table 4.1 presents several dimensions. At a most fundamental level, the five differ in what they are trying to accomplish: their focus, or the primary objective of the study. Exploring stories of a life is different from generating a theory or describing the behavior of a cultural group. Moreover, although overlaps exist in discipline origin, some traditions have fewer interdisciplinary traditions (e.g., grounded theory from sociology; ethnography from anthropology and sociology), while others have a broad base of disciplinary evolution (e.g., narrative and case study). Data collection processes vary from an emphasis on specific forms (e.g., more observations in ethnography; more interviews in grounded theory) to a wide range of forms (e.g., multiple types of data collected in case study research to provide the in-depth case picture). The differences are most marked at the data analysis stage. Not only is the distinction one of specificity of the analysis phase (e.g., grounded theory most specific; narrative less well defined) but the number of steps to be undertaken also varies (e.g., see the extensive steps in phenomenology and the few steps in ethnography).

Table 4.1 FIVE INQUIRY APPROACHES IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Narrative Research</i>	<i>Phenomenology</i>	<i>Grounded Theory</i>	<i>Ethnography</i>	<i>Case Study</i>
Focus	Collecting the stories of lived experiences	Understanding the essence of experiences surrounding a phenomenon	Developing a theory grounded in data from the field	Describing and interpreting a cultural and social group	Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases
Discipline origin	Literature History Psychology Sociology Anthropology	Philosophy Sociology Psychology	Sociology	Cultural anthropology Sociology	Political science Sociology Evaluation Urban studies Other social sciences
Data collection	Primarily interviews and documents	Long interviews with up to 10 people	Interviews with 20-30 individuals to "saturate" categories and detail a theory	Primarily observations and interviews, with additional artifacts, during extended time in the field (e.g., 6 months to 1 year)	Multiple sources: documents, archival records, interviews, observations, physical artifacts, quantitative data
Data analysis	Stories Restories Themes Description of context	Statements Meanings Meaning themes General descriptions of the experience	Open coding Axial coding Selective coding	Description Thematic analysis Interpretation	Description Themes Assertions
Narrative form	Chronological story of an individual life	A description of the "essence" of the experience	A theory or theoretical model	A description of the cultural behavior of a group or individual	In-depth study of a "case" or multiple "cases"

The result of each tradition, its narrative form, takes shape from all the processes before it. A detailed picture of an individual's stories forms the basis of narrative, and a description of the "essence" of the experience of the phenomenon becomes a phenomenology. A theory, often portrayed in a visual model, emerges in grounded theory; a holistic view of a social-cultural group or system results in an ethnography; and an in-depth study of a bounded system or a "case" (or several "cases") becomes a case study. From this overview, we now turn to narrative

research as a systematic approach to qualitative inquiry.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781412984386.n32>