Designing a Qualitative Research Project: Data Collection and Methods

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Interactive Model of Research Design

- Goals
- Conceptual Framework
- Research Questions
- Methods
- Validity
Moving from Questions to Methods

- What is the most appropriate method to use?
  - The answer is almost always: “it depends”

- Deciding on your method(s) depends on:
  - Research setting
  - Research questions
  - Research goals
  - Conceptual framework: what gaps are you filling?

- Common to employ multiple data collection methods within a single methodological framework.
Components of Qualitative Methods

- Sampling: what times, settings, or individuals you select to observe or interview?
- Data collection: How do you gather data?
- Data analysis: What do you do with this information to make sense of it?

- Are these distinct or concurrent?
Sampling

- Qualitative methods frequently use purposeful sampling strategies.
  - Why?
    1. Typicality or representativeness of settings, individuals, and activities
    2. Capture heterogeneity in population: Identify the range of variations
    3. Identify and examine cases that are critical: based on conceptual framework and subsequent research
    4. Establish comparisons between cases
Purposeful sampling strategies

- Maximum variation sampling: Purposively seeking out people, activities, or settings that add contrasting perspectives on a phenomena.
  - Used to describe and understand variations
  - When might this be useful in your research?
Purposeful sampling strategies

- Typical case sampling: Sampling people and settings that you think are typical and can provide an in-depth description of a particular case
  - Used to illustrate a particular phenomena
  - When in your research might you use this?
Purposeful sampling strategies

- Snowball sampling
  - Ask informants to identify additional people or settings
  - When might we use this strategy?
Data Collection

Some common data collection methods:

- Focus Group Discussions
- Key informant interviews (semi-structured, unstructured)
- Textual analysis (analysis of documents)
- Participant observation
- Action research (Events mapping, role playing etc..)
Data Collection

- Some common data collection methods:
  - Focus Group Discussions
  - Key informant interviews (semi-structured, unstructured)
  - Textual analysis (analysis of documents)
  - Participant observation
  - Action research (Events mapping, role playing etc..)
  - These data collection strategies often fit into broader methodological designs (ie case studies, grounded theory, etc…)
Focus groups: Moderated discussion

- When might a focus group discussion be useful?
  - Valuable tool for eliciting discussion and information on a topic;
  - Identifying shared and contrasting viewpoints within and between populations

- How do we structure a FG?
  - FG guidelines: List of general research concepts and questions to be explored by moderator
    - Guidelines are normally open-ended, they don’t try to ask directly about individual experiences.
    - Individual experiences often come up as people support their opinions.
    - Usually “funnel” form: from general to specific
Focus Groups: Cont.

- Sampling: “Break” versus “Control” characteristics
  - Break Characteristics: Define a subset of the population based on your research questions/conceptual framework
  - Control Characteristics: Shared characteristics
  - Should do FG with several groups of each combination of break characteristics
  - Example: How do gender roles shape horticultural market participation?
    - What are some break and control characteristics we can use to form our groups?
Focus Groups: Cont.

Points of caution/strategies:

- Domination of discussion by one or two individuals
  - What can we do?
  - Focus groups should avoid having community decision-makers. This should be a break characteristic

- Quiet/Unwilling participants:
  - How do we elicit their participation?

- Easy to overgeneralize with focus group data
Focus Groups Cont....

- How is data from Focus Groups Captured?
  - Record discussion
    - Transcribe for richer analysis: 2 hour FGD will often yield 40-50 pages
  - Field notes/memos
    - Write notes on your impressions, thoughts, and observations about the group immediately after.
    - This aids in interpretation
  - Notes on main guideline points
    - Identify major points of consensus and disagreement over key questions and concepts in FG guidelines.
    - Observe interaction within the group
Key Informant/In-depth Interviews

- When are key informant interviews useful?
  - Elicit personal experiences, thoughts, and beliefs from individuals with direct knowledge of your research topic

- Interviews: Guided conversation

- Qualitative methods favor open-ended interviewing. Rarely use structured questionnaire
  - Why?
Key Informant/In-depth Interviews

- What is the difference between semi-structured and unstructured interviews?
  - Semi: wording, order, and arrangement of questions suggested, but allowed to vary depending on responses
    - Used to enable specific comparison btw cases or respondents
  - Unstructured: normally guided by interview protocol or checklist of topics to be covered
    - Effective for exploring in-depth personal experiences and beliefs
Key Informant/In-depth Interviews

- Strategies and Points of Caution:
  - Differences between social, economic, educational status
    - Interviewing a farmer vs. CEO of a grain trading firm
      - What do you need to be cognizant of?
  - Context/setting of the interview matters
    - Create space to speak freely
  - Introducing the topic (similar with FGD)
    - Limit bias in responses
    - What are strategies to introduce the topic?
  - Probe, do not lead
Action Research

- Broad term that covers multiple approaches and entails multiple data collection strategies:
  - Participatory Action Research
  - Cooperative Inquiry
  - Developmental Action Inquiry
Action Research

- Commonalities
  1. Involves some collaboration between researchers and researched
  2. Reciprocal process in which both parties educate one another
  3. Focused on the production of local knowledge to improve specific interventions or professional practice
Action Research

- **Goal**
  - Empower research subjects to assume ownership of the research process and to use the results to improve their quality of life.

  - Data are generated in a participatory way with respondents, findings are interpreted with their help.
    - What are some potential ways of collecting this sort of data?
    - What sort of data might be generated?
Action Research

- **Major Advantages:**
  - Increased relevance of research questions and results for target community
  - Involving subjects in interpretation of results bring rich contextual information

- **Major Challenges**
  - What would be some major challenges associated with this approach?
Conclusion

- Qualitative research designs frequently utilize multiple data collection strategies, depending on the questions, the population, and the context.
- The data generated are frequently textual: field notes, memos, transcribed interviews, and discussion notes.
- Data collection should be an open ended process—try to limit pre-structuring of instruments.
Conclusion

- Remember that the methods you use are part of an integrated research project—allow new and unexpected findings to reshape your overall design.