Course introduction. What is “qualitative research”

Davide Nicolini

Today

- Analyse the unstable nature of the category “qualitative research”
- Examine some of the paradigmatic differences between types of “qualitative research”
- Examine some thorny issues in conducting “qualitative research”
- Review the rationale content and conventions of the rest of the course

The qualitative/quantitative divide

- Three versions of the same story
  - Theoretical
  - Methodological/Pragmatic
  - Historical/political
A theoretical divide?

- Using the basic criterion of validity the immediate and local meaning of actions as defined by the actors’ point of view (Ericsson, 1986, p.119)
- Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, memos and recordings to the self” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p.3)

A methodological/pragmatic distinction?

- Qualitative research is an umbrella term for an array of attitudes toward and strategies for conducting inquiry that are aimed at discerning how human beings understand, experience, interpret, and produce the social world (Mason, 1996).
- Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. (Bryman 2008a: 366)

Historical & political reasons?

- The historical and political name for the approaches used by social scientists who in the 1960 did not use surveys or experiments
- If you wrote a QUAL article until the early 1970 you had to spend half of space justifying why what you were doing was acceptable social science and then summarise the rest in half the space... no wonder so may articles never made it...
Creating and defending a space

- Lovell (2004) compared the research methods used in higher education journals, reporting that 74% of the studies were QUANT in nature, whereas 20% were QUAL, and [...] 6% were Mix Methods...

...a sample of 30 articles was taken from each journal (five per discipline) to yield a total of 150 articles for each discipline and an acceptable overall sample size of 600 articles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline and Group</th>
<th>Quantitative</th>
<th>Mixed Methods</th>
<th>Qualitative</th>
<th>Total Articles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>140 (93%)</td>
<td>10 (7%)</td>
<td>6 (4%)</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sociology</td>
<td>116 (77%)</td>
<td>7 (5%)</td>
<td>17 (12%)</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Resources</td>
<td>36 (65%)</td>
<td>3 (6%)</td>
<td>13 (22%)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>80 (45%)</td>
<td>36 (20%)</td>
<td>24 (13%)</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>63 (42%)</td>
<td>36 (24%)</td>
<td>15 (10%)</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>417 (69%)</td>
<td>64 (11%)</td>
<td>94 (15%)</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quals studies from the perspective of QUANT scholar (winners)

- Minor methods due to poor reliability, validity and lack of generalization
- A way to familiarize with a context in order to develop a set of hypotheses
QUANTS studies seen from QUALS

Losing the phenomenon

Input → [the phenomenon] → output

The phenomenon reappears

What?

The phenomenon reappears

How?

Two different and often partially overlapping approaches

There are many stereotypes about qualitative and quantitative approaches.

Qualitative and quantitative approaches are not as distinctive as the idea of a 'divide' suggests.

These stereotypes lead to comparisons that are political in import

Some common characteristics

1. A preference for qualitative data – understood simply as the analysis of words and images rather than numbers
2. A preference for naturally occurring data – observation rather than experiment, unstructured versus structured interviews
3. A preference for meanings rather than behaviour – attempting 'to document the world from the point of view of the people studied'
4. A rejection of natural science as a model
5. A preference for flexible, 'inductive', 'abductive', or data-driven orientation and inductive, hypothesis-generating research rather than hypothesis-testing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OBJECTIVISM</th>
<th>INTERPRETIVIST / PHENOMENOLOGY</th>
<th>ETHNOMETHODOLOGY</th>
<th>CRITICAL STUDIES (including participatory research)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data are derived from accounts elicited from participants through introspection. <strong>PROBLEM:</strong> Minimise the interference of the researcher; ensure that data are independent and intersubjectivity valid (triangulation, interrater reliability).</td>
<td>Data are derived from meaningful interaction and access to the inner subjectivity. <strong>PROBLEM:</strong> Accessibility. Interpretation Relativity of accounts Penetrating the culture.</td>
<td>Data obtained by being there, spend enough time in the field, documenting. <strong>PROBLEM:</strong> Ensure that all the features of the interaction are captured (audio/video recording).</td>
<td>Data as to link current accounts/observation to socio-historical conditions. <strong>PROBLEM:</strong> Penetrate façade and uncover effect of ideology on dominant discourse.</td>
</tr>
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**Different strategies in “qualitative research” (Wolcott, 1992)**

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Search for mental events, or states or attitudes that leads to a certain behaviour.</td>
<td>Search for rules that constitutes experienced action as such.</td>
<td>Documents practices that constitute scene of action and interaction / linguistic accounts do not simply represent the objects to which they refer but rather constitute those objects.</td>
<td>Aims at penetrating political fronts and the ideological cover up of phenomena. Uncover structural condition that keep unprivileged in their place.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Exercise 4: all data are constructed. What can we do about it?

In a moment, when I ask, please turn to the person on your right and ask them ‘three things they did last weekend’?

Please record, as faithfully as you can, what they say.

What did you do? Turning numbers into Quantities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>N=</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'Going out in the evening' – pub, club, cinema, food, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Staying in for the evening' – watching TV, reading</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>PhD work</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Visiting friends</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Traveling somewhere</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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</table>
Focus on the accounts: qualities

- Were they produced for a researcher?
- Were they like 'normal ones'?
- How would you respond in a different situation (e.g., if asked by a friend on Monday morning who told you s/he had a very boring and lonely Sunday)

Focus on the accounts: qualities

- For example, how many people mentioned they (1) washed their face, (2) used the letter 'k', (3) walked up some stairs, (4) breathed in, (5) looked at the sky, (6) saw a car driving past, (7) turned over in bed, (8) chewed food, (9) used the word 'because' seventeen times, (10) heard the sound of a door shut, (11) consumed milk...

- The report-ability of phenomena – what we say and how – is socially regulated and thus (itself) amenable to systematic analysis. So, data collection/analysis is something we have to do knowledgeably and reflexively.

Making Qual research robust

- If data area always constructed how can we make qualitative research credible and robust?
- Validity / Reliability
- Generalizability
- Reflexivity
Validity/reliability from the dominant paradigm (gate keepers)

- **Validity from a quant perspective**
  - The precision in which the findings accurately reflect the data

- **Reliability from a quant perspective**
  - The consistency of the analytical procedures, including accounting for personal and research method biases that may have influenced the findings

- Both incompatible with most qualitative approaches
- Risk of Qualitative research (sloppy, bad, anything goes)

Soundness and truth-value of Qual research: Remember Kuhn?

*Soundness and truth are criteria internal to a paradigm. Disputes on these issues are paradigmatic wars*

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</table>
| Observation that corresponds to the mental state, feeling, attitude that triggered a conduct | If "I were there test...pass as a native" (rely on social competence) | Instructability test | Capacity of results to provide handles for change.
| Transduction, interpretability | Risk of going native | Conversational machine | Why it is like it is and what aspects need to be modified to make it different |

Reliability

- Importance of making explicit aspects as:
  - Role of researcher
  - Informant selection
  - Description of Social Context
  - Data collection strategies
  - Data analysis strategies
  - Analytical premises

- Importance of documenting and transparency
Reliability vs. Dependability

- The traditional quantitative view of reliability is based on the assumption of replicability or repeatability. Remedy include triangulation and interrater reliability.
- The idea of dependability, on the other hand, emphasizes the need for the researcher to account for the ever-changing context within which research occurs.

Strategies to ensure the credibility of the study findings

- Meticulous record keeping, demonstrating a clear decision trail and ensuring interpretations of data are consistent and transparent.
- Establishing a comparison case/seeking out similarities and differences across accounts to ensure different perspectives are represented.
- Including rich and thick verbatim descriptions of participants’ accounts to support findings.

Strategies to ensure the credibility of the study findings (contd.)

- Demonstrating clarity in terms of thought processes during data analysis and subsequent interpretations.
- Engaging with other researchers to reduce research bias.
- Use different methods and perspectives to help produce a more comprehensive set of findings.
How to make findings useful for others (generalizability)

- **Representative generalization**
  - Can the findings be applied to populations outside the population of the study?

- **Analytical generalization**
  - Can new concepts used to open up new fields and develop further theory

- **Case to case transfer/inferential generalization**
  - Can the findings in one setting be used to increase understanding/make inferences in other to other settings?

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**Reflexivity**

- Attention to the complex relationship between processes of knowledge production and the various contexts of such processes as well as the involvement of the knowledge producer.

- A sceptical approach to what appear at a superficial glance as unproblematic replicas of the way reality functions

-Alvesson and Skoldberg (2000)

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**Reflexivity about**

- Methods & Discourses
- Reflexivity about own position and interests:
  - How has my personal history led to my interest in this topic? How does my gender/social class/ethnicity/culture influence my positioning in relation to this topic and my informants?
- Reflexivity about own understanding and values: What are my personal value systems and what areas do I know I am subjective about?
The rest of the course

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13 January</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>Davide Nicolini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 January</td>
<td>Case study design</td>
<td>Ola Henfridsson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 January</td>
<td>Doing Research Interviews</td>
<td>Chris Warhurst</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 February</td>
<td>Analysing interview data</td>
<td>Gaby Atfield &amp; Sally-Anne Barnes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 February</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 February</td>
<td>Participant observation and Ethnography</td>
<td>Davide Nicolini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 February</td>
<td>Principles and practicalities of doing thematic analysis and Grounded Theory</td>
<td>Natalia Levina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 March</td>
<td>Video based methods in social research</td>
<td>Johanne Mengis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 March</td>
<td>Discourse analysis</td>
<td>Johannes Angermuller</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 March</td>
<td>Documentary analysis</td>
<td>David Arnott</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Essay

Select one qualitative method considered during the module. Then, select at least four (classic and/or contemporary) studies that use this method in an exemplary fashion to study the same topic. Referring to these studies, critically evaluate the method in question.

Submission Friday 15th April 2016.

Summary

Across the module there will be common themes, and common differences.

We hope you’ll approach the materials with an open mind. If you are a ‘numbers person’, and find it frustrating, tell us why.

Keep checking the website for materials and readings.