Harness the power of qualitative methods to improve your assessment and research efforts

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“...learning how people make it through the day is different than dropping balls off the Leaning Tower of Pisa or getting hit on the head by falling apples....The fact that it is different doesn’t mean it isn’t a science. It does mean that it has to be done differently than an experiment in a chemistry lab.”

- Michael Agar, *Lively Science*
Broadly Qualitative Research...

- is immersive and uses natural settings
- focuses on understanding the experiences and perceptions of subjects
- captures holistic information about subjects and settings
- acknowledges the role and impact of the researcher
- seeks to build theory
Major Approaches

- Qualitative Descriptive
- Ethnography
- Autoethnography
- Grounded Theory
- Phenomenology
Common methods

- Fieldwork
  - Participant observation
  - Observation
- Case study
- Focus groups
- Interviews
- Content Analysis
Constructing your study

- Match question with method
- Identify sites, participants
  - Appropriateness - Will it answer your question?
  - Access - Can you gain access? Are there barriers?
  - Ethics - Is this site or group appropriate to study?
- Sampling:
  What data do you need to answer your question?
  - convenience/opportunistic
  - purposive
  - snowball
- When to stop? Information saturation!
Verification and Validation Strategies

● Triangulation of data
  ○ Visit multiple sites
  ○ Visit site at different times
  ○ Talk to a variety of people

● Reflexivity
  ○ How might you have impacted the setting/responses and the interpretation of them?

● Memoing/Journaling
  ○ record initial thoughts, reflections, ideas, theories
Research is Act of Persuasion

Lots of different advice/rules - ultimately, what do you need to do to convince the reader you got it right?
Interviews
Interview types

- Informal/Conversational
- In-depth/Intensive
- Unstructured (e.g. oral history)
- Semi-structured
- Structured Interviews (e.g. opinion polls)
- Focus Group
Best Practices

- Build rapport
- Be clear, open, and flexible
- Be critical; clarify and interpret
- Steer the conversation
- Remember what has been said
- Don’t ask yes/no questions
- Be balanced: don’t talk too much or too little
- Address ethical concerns
- Stop when you’ve reached saturation (i.e. no new info)
Before and After Interviews

● Before interviews:
  ○ Practice interviews (piloting)
    ■ Video tape yourself

● After interviews:
  ○ Practice memoing
    ■ Who was interviewed?
    ■ Who was present?
    ■ Document background and setting
  ○ Self-assess - how did it go?
  ○ Reflect on, and document, initial thoughts
A brief interview demonstration
Coding
Codes

Systematically applied words or phrases representing data, just as numbers do in quantitative; a symbol which gets at the essence of a piece of data.
1 There’s just no place in this country for 1 illegal immigrants. Round them up and send those criminals back to where they came from.

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Best practices

- Code broadly, then group thematically
- Revise codes, then revise them again
- Record additions and revisions to codes
- Inter-rater reliability
- Pick a clear unit of analysis (i.e. interviews, books, newspaper articles, press releases)
Keeping track of codes

- Analytic memo - reflect and write about code choices and definitions. Why you chose, and how you define it.
- Create a codebook - a comprehensive list of all codes, code families, themes, etc.
  - Working copy
  - Final copy
Activity: Coding Exercise

“What kinds of conditions are associated with the affective experiences in a front desk employee of a busy hotel?”

Image from Susan Sermoneta (Flickr)
Tips and data management

- Document your methods, decisions, and rationale as you go
- Make a plan for regularly backing up data
Technology

● **Software**
  ○ NVivo
  ○ Dedoose
  ○ Atlas.Ti
  ○ MaxQDA

● **Computer assisted coding**

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer-assisted_qualitative_data_analysis_software
Resources

This is a brief list of sources; it is not meant to be exhaustive, or highly evaluative. It is biased towards brief, practical resources.

Getting started

Qualitative Research Guidelines Project  http://www.qualres.org/index.html


How to do a research interview. http://youtu.be/ZYCHvXdG1bE

Qualitative analysis of interview data: A step-by-step guide  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRL4PF2u9XA
Resources

Doing the work

Kvale, Steinar and Brinkmann, Svend, (2008). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*.


Charmaz, Kathy, (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*.

Vagle, Mark D. (2014). *Crafting phenomenological research*.


Resources

Doing the work (cont.)

Sandelowski, Margarete 2000 "Whatever Happened to Qualitative Description?" Research in Nursing & Health 23:334-340


Short Courses

Qualitative Research Summer Institute (Research Talk / Odum Institute)

CARMA (Center for the Advancement of Research Methods and Analysis). Wayne State University & University of North Dakota.

International Institute for Qualitative Methodology.