Qualitative Research

Session 1:
Taking stock of where we are

Prof Jan Nieuwenhuis
Different stories and different perspectives

Qualitative researchers are after meaning – social meaning people attribute to their experiences, circumstances, and situations, as well as the meanings people embed into texts and other objects.

Qualitative research has a unique grounding — fosters particular ways of asking questions and particular ways of thinking through problems (how, why, what).

Qualitative research is a separate science.
Four key terms

- **Ontology** – the nature of social reality – is the social world patterned and predictable, or is the social world continually being constructed through human interactions and rituals.

- **Epistemology** – basic assumptions about what we can know about reality, and about the relationship between knowledge and reality.

- **Methodology (theoretical perspective/paradigm)** is an account of social reality. Three major methodological approaches in qualitative research are often discussed:


(2) ...
Four key terms (continue)

**Methods** – the tools researchers use to collect data – technique for gathering evidence:
- listening to (or interrogating) participants,
- observing behaviour, or
- examining historical texts and records.
- ..
Methodology is the bridge that brings our philosophical standpoint (on ontology and epistemology) and method (perspective and tool) together.
Ontology

Epistemology

Methodology/
Theoretical perspective paradigm

Method
Data gathering techniques

*Positivist
*Post-positivist
*Structuralist
*Post-structuralist
*Interpretivist
*Constructivist
*Critical theory
*Feminist
*Participatory
*Pragmatism
*Etc! Etc!
Methodology: Three strands in qualitative research

Interpretivism/constructionism
- Focus on people’s subjective experience – understanding from within
- Social world distinctly human product
- Meaning originates in human mind
- Multiple realities
- Social world does not exist independently from human mind

Critical theory
- Reality historically constructed
- Relationships based on power
- Social reproduction
- Purpose is to critique social reality and power
- Legitimacy of research is based on critique of discourse of power – emancipation

Post modernism
- Social reality does not exist independently
- No objective truth
- Reality consist of facts and values
- Knowledge is special kind of story
- Knowledge not eternal
- Task is to describe an emerging reality
Historically, qualitative methodologists have described three major purposes for research: to explore, explain, or describe the phenomenon of interest. Synonyms for these terms could include to understand, to develop, or to discover. Many qualitative studies are descriptive and exploratory: They build rich descriptions of complex circumstances that are unexplored in the literature. Others are explicitly explanatory: These studies show relationships

The general view of descriptive research as a lower level form of inquiry has influenced some researchers conducting qualitative research to claim methods they are really not using …...they are using: qualitative description. Qualitative descriptive studies have as their goal a comprehensive summary of events in the everyday terms of those events (Sandelowski (2010)).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of the Study</th>
<th>General Research Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Exploratory:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To investigate little-understood phenomena</td>
<td>What is happening in this social program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To identify or discover important categories of meaning</td>
<td>What are the salient themes, patterns, or categories of meaning for participants?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To generate hypotheses for further research</td>
<td>How are these patterns linked with one another?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Explanatory:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To explain the patterns related to the phenomenon in question</td>
<td>What events, beliefs, attitudes, or policies shape this phenomenon?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To identify plausible relationships shaping the phenomenon</td>
<td>How do these forces interact to result in the phenomenon?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Descriptive:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To document and describe the phenomenon of interest</td>
<td>What are the salient actions, events, beliefs, attitudes, and social structures and processes occurring in this phenomenon?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emancipatory:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To create opportunities and the will to engage in social action</td>
<td>How do participants problematize their circumstances and take positive social action?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Types of qualitative studies

- Case studies (single, multiple, intrinsic, instrumental, collective)
  - Life history
- Historical research
- Ethnography (shared culture)
- Auto-ethnography (own)
- Ethnomethodology (conversations)
- Clinical study
- Feminist study (critical)

- Biographies (their words)
- Narrative design
- Developmental case study
- Phenomenological (lived experience)
- Document analysis
- Grounded theory
- Evaluation (proactive, clarification, interactive, monitoring, impact)
Defining qualitative research

Qualitative research is a methodology concerned with understanding the processes and the social and cultural contexts which shape various behavioural patterns. It strives to create a coherent story as it is seen through the eyes of those who are part of that story, to understand and represent their experiences and actions as they encounter, engage with, and live through situations. To do this, qualitative research employs a wide range of data gathering techniques (e.g. interviewing, focus groups, observation, etc.) and seeks insights through structured, in-depth data analysis that is mainly interpretative, subjective, impressionistic and diagnostic. (Nieuwenhuis/Smit, 2012)
5 axioms of qualitative research

1. Human life can be understood only from within.
2. Social life is a distinctively human product.
3. The human mind is the source or origin of meaning.
4. Human behaviour is affected by knowledge of the social world. (Interpretivism accepts that there are multiple realities).
5. The social world does not ‘exist’ independently of human knowledge.
Key aspects of qualitative research methodology

A situated activity – locates the observer in the world – researcher is research instrument

World is series of representations

Interpretive, naturalistic approach to world

* study things in their natural setting, attempt to make sense of/ interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them (meaning of meanings)
What is a thick description?

„Thick description“ often not used correctly
thick description is not about the size of data display or the amount of description provided from it
The task of thick description - „is to make meaning clear“ (Shank)
Thick description must be both depictive and analytical, both empirical and intellectual.
Thick description – use ideas and concepts that help with the sense-making process of inquiry.
• Participants’ perspective of events, beliefs, practices *from their point of view*
• "the professional stranger" vs professional scientist
• Deeper understanding: through first hand understanding
• Emphasises participants voices and settings:
• Meaning emerges and is constructed by participants
• Levels of meaning: levels of listening and looking
• Researcher is method/ instrument
Things jist ain’t been the same ‘round here since that re-search dude did those interviews.

I want to know the essence of horseness.

What does it mean to be a chicken?

I must find my inner porcinicity.

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Session 2:

Changing stories: The turf war
Why is the discourse on research paradigms like his and her arguments?
The separation between qualitative and qualitative research

Schwartz and Ogilvy (1979) Changing stories

1. Movement from simple to complex realities: It is no longer possible to view systems as merely the sum of their parts; as systems become more and more complex
2. Movement from hierarchic to heterarchic concepts of order
3. Movement from mechanical to holographic images
4. Movement from determinacy to indeterminacy.
5. From linear toward mutual causality
6. From assembly to morphogenesis: Morphogenetic change occurs suddenly and dramatically, operating in such a way that lower forms create higher order forms.
7. From objective to perspectival views: Objectivity is an illusion, but subjectivity in the usual sense is not the only alternative:
## Changing stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Scientific story</th>
<th>Emergent story</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>View of knowledge</strong></td>
<td>World is based on fixed laws</td>
<td>No absolute fixed laws – relative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knowledge is absolute</td>
<td>Knowledge tentative - approximation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can be known</td>
<td>Can be partially known</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Objectivity - rationally</td>
<td>Subjectivity - rational</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>View of phenomena</strong></td>
<td>Can be empirically studied</td>
<td>Relational</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Simplistic</td>
<td>Complex</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reductionistic</td>
<td>Holistic</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relationship between phenomena</strong></td>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>Fluid – systemic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hierarchical order</td>
<td>Integrative – heterarchical</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parts are discrete units</td>
<td>Whole more than sum of parts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Causation</strong></td>
<td>Linear (cause-effect)</td>
<td>Multi – interrelated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unidirectional – measurable</td>
<td>Not always measurable - understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deductive reasoning</td>
<td>Inductive/lateral/deductive reasoning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome of research</strong></td>
<td>Predictable future</td>
<td>Unpredictable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control of behaviour</td>
<td>Morphogenesis</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Simplistic: Reducing phenomena to simple, discrete elements
- Reductionistic: Focusing on individual elements
- Relational: Interconnected phenomena
- Complex: Multifaceted, intricate phenomena
- Holistic: Integrating all elements
- Fluid: Dynamic, interconnected
- Systemic: Interrelated elements
- Integrative: Interconnected phenomena
- Heterarchical: Interconnected, yet distinct
- Linear: Sequential, cause-effect
- Unidirectional: One-way
- Linear (cause-effect): Direct cause-and-effect
- Deductive reasoning: Following conclusions from premises
- Multi – interrelated: Interconnected, yet distinct
- Not always measurable: Understanding
- Inductive/lateral/deductive reasoning: Inference
- Predictable future: Predictable outcomes
- Control of behaviour: Controlling outcomes
Quantitative Research

- Structured data
- Statistical analysis
- Objective conclusions
- Surveys, Experiments

Qualitative Research

- Unstructured data
- Summary
- Subjective conclusions
- Interviews, focus groups, observations
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative Mode</th>
<th>Qualitative Mode</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assumptions</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Social facts have an objective reality</td>
<td>• Reality is socially constructed</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Primacy of method</td>
<td>• Primacy of subject matter</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Variables can be identified and relationships measured</td>
<td>• Variables are complex, interwoven, and difficult to measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Etic (outside's point of view)</td>
<td>• Emic (insider's point of view)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Generalizability</td>
<td>• Contextualization</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Prediction</td>
<td>• Interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Causal explanations</td>
<td>• Understanding actors' perspectives</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Approach</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Begins with hypotheses and theories</td>
<td>• Ends with hypotheses and grounded theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Manipulation and control</td>
<td>• Emergence and portrayal</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Uses formal instruments</td>
<td>• Researcher as instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Experimentation</td>
<td>• Naturalistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deductive</td>
<td>• Inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Component analysis</td>
<td>• Searches for patterns</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Seeks consensus, the norm</td>
<td>• Seeks pluralism, complexity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Reduces data to numerical indices</td>
<td>• Makes minor use of numerical indices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Abstract language in write-up</td>
<td>• Descriptive write-up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The turf war

There are bands who go around gathering their data in a qualitative way, and there are others who carry out large-scale hunting expeditions with their surveys. Each band is rather autonomous with very few links, apart from occasional periods of warfare and sporadic raids on one another’s cattle. (Scott cited in Thompson 2004: 23)
So the difference between the two is often claimed as:

Quantitative is like a trench –
Long and shallow

Qualitative is like a well-
Narrow but deep
At first glance, it appears that they are indeed different paradigms as most authors in this vein even provide tables, which classify the differences between qualitative and quantitative methods on epistemological, ontological, and axiological grounds (e.g., Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Silverman, 2000; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). On closer inspection, however, it is difficult to sustain these differences because qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques do not necessitate a particular view of the nature of reality, privilege a specific research theme and how to research it, or determine the truth value of data or the relationship between researchers and their research subject.
The fallacy of separation of qualitative and qualitative

False dualism (Pring, 2000) – one not a better science than the other – it is not a tug of war
False primacy (Brew, 2001) – no superior truth – approximation of truth
False certainty (Barnett, 2000) – super complexity
False expectations (Hammersley, 2002) – cannot produce final answers – openended
So what are we dealing with?

The crime scene analogy

Evidence = Scientific data + Narrative data
Pragmatism as alternative paradigm

Pragmatism is a philosophical tradition developed around the idea that the nature of knowledge, language, concepts, meaning, belief, and science—are all best viewed in terms of their practical uses. Pragmatism, is aimed at solving practical problems in the “real world” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, Rorty, 1999).

Pragmatism “anti-representational view of knowledge” - “aim at utility for us” (Rorty, 1999).

Pragmatism offers an alternative worldview to those of positivism/post-positivism and constructivism and focuses on the problem to be researched and the consequences of the research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Miller, 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).
Crafting a research design

**Pragmatist approach**
- Start with the research question
- Identify the most appropriate design
- Identify data collection methods
- Identify data analysis strategy

**Science methodological approach**
- Formulate your ontological position
- Formulate your epistemological point of departure
- Decide on appropriate design
- Select data gathering techniques
- Determine data analysis strategy
So what are the alternatives?

Mixed method research

Action research

Case study research
Pragmatist (functionalist) research approach

Formulate the research question

Do intensive literature review

Identify appropriate theories that offer provisional answer to question

Identify questions for data collection from literature

Select appropriate data gathering techniques

Purposive sampling

Collect data

Analyze data using a-priori coding

Triangulate to determine if findings corroborate theory
Qualitative Research

The end of session 1&2