

## **An Explanation of Qualitative Research**

*By Cynthia Joffrion*

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### Qualitative research

The primary purpose of the qualitative research method is to provide an understanding of social phenomenon or behavior and the reasons that influence the behavior. This method concentrates on the interpretative nature of social reality by understanding how individuals construct meaning and act within their meaning systems. The key to understanding qualitative research lies with the individuals and the meaning they construct in interactions with their world (Merriam, 1998). Thus, the qualitative researcher views experience as it is lived and how this is influenced by a group's or person's view of the world. The researcher focuses on the influence of actions and measurements of these constructs in as natural a setting as possible.

Qualitative research is designed to be conducted in a natural setting. This allows researchers to analyze social phenomena with as little disruption as possible. In support, Patton (2003) states that the purpose of qualitative research is to understand interaction in the context of a particular situation. Often, the researcher physically must go to the people, setting, site, or institution in order to observe behavior in its natural setting. As a result, the geography of observation setting is considered in planning research designs.

In studying social phenomenon, the role of the researcher focuses on studying a phenomenon in a specified setting at a certain point in time. This is done to better understand the meanings and categories constructed by individuals or in groups related to experiences. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explain that it is advantageous for researchers to collect data and identify the characteristics that make humans the "instrument of choice" for naturalistic inquiry. This is primarily because humans are responsive to environmental cues and can quickly place the cues into categories. They are able to interact within situations and can process data immediately.

In addition, the researcher can interrupt data immediately and can adapt and accommodate. For example, a researcher can observe non-verbal cues or untypical responses and can immediately adapt the techniques and the circumstances of the study. This aids the researcher in collecting data that will be categorized during the analysis phase.

Qualitative research data analysis is influenced by the inductive research strategies in which the researcher builds on abstract concepts, theories, and hypotheses. Categories emerge from the collected information and lead to patterns or theories that help to explain a phenomenon. This can provide a challenge for the researcher in analyzing raw data because it must be placed in a logical format in order for the analysis to be completed. Basically, data analysis is the process of working with data by organizing it into manageable units, synthesizing, searching for patterns, discovering what is learned, and then deciding what to report (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Therefore, in analyzing qualitative data, the information must first be organized and paired with a method that allows for adequate commutation of the data and analytical results.

Qualitative research reports typically are rich with detail and insights into participant's experiences of the world, "may be epistemologically in harmony with the reader's experience" (Stake, 1978, p.5).

The results of qualitative data analysis are communicated in a very descriptive format and will target the analysis of the process, meaning, and understanding of the data. Qualitative research results are likely to include research descriptions of the context, the players involved, and the activities of interest. In addition, Merriam (1998) adds that data in the form of the participants' own words, direct citations from documents, and excerpts of videotapes are most likely to be included in support of research findings. This is conducive to the goal of qualitative research in that the information provided in the analysis can be extended to the generalization of a theory or to a social group. The characteristic of qualitative data to more fully describe

a phenomenon is an important consideration not only from the researcher's perspective, but from the reader's perspective as well. "If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them information in the form in which they usually experience it" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 120).

The primary focuses of the qualitative research is in quality and the nature or essence of a social phenomenon. The research inquiry is in a natural setting, which helps the researcher understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena. Researchers utilizing the qualitative approach have the responsibility to interpret what is observed. Next, they must link data analysis to reports, which provides evidence of a particular conclusion. Qualitative researchers are challenged to continually use appropriate research techniques that address the salient questions in a particular field.

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