

The Language of Qualitative Research

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Slides available at

<http://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~marylynn/lectures/qual-res.pdf>

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Objectives

- Define qualitative research
- Use and explore the language of qualitative research
- Explore rationale for use of qualitative or naturalistic research methods in
 - information service settings
 - online or networked environments
 - social and behavioral settings



Define Quantitative Research



Quantoid: Key Assumptions

- Objectify reality
- Emphasize primacy of method
- Identify variables
- Measure variables
- Apply deductive reasoning
- Develop
 - generalizations
 - predictions
 - causal explanations

“Quantoid” Strategies

- Hypothesis
- Manipulation & control
- Experimentation
- Reducing data to numerical indices
- Deductive
- Component analysis
- Seeking norms and consensus
- Researcher: detached & impartial

What is Qualitative Research?



Qualtoid: Key Assumptions

- Find meaning through eyes of participants
- Must understand a social setting or individuals from their perspective
- Acknowledge levels of complexity and unpredictability in settings inappropriate for only “measuring”

Why?

- Jerome Bruner, in *Acts of Meaning* said
 - Aim to discover and to describe formally the meanings that human beings create out of their encounters with the world.
 - Focus upon the symbolic activities that human beings employ in constructing and making sense of their world and themselves (p. 2)

Characteristics of “Qualtoid” Strategies

- Naturalistic and emergent
- Inductive
- Pattern seeking
- Descriptive
- User-centered
- Multi-method

Purpose of Qualitative Research

- Contextualization
- Interpretation
- Identification of patterns and perspectives

Why?

- Again to quote Bruner:
 - Our culturally adapted way of life depends upon shared meanings and shared concepts and depends as well upon shared modes of discourse for negotiating differences in meaning and interpretation (p.13).

How?

- Variety of qualitative research methodologies for data collection, analysis, etc.
- Among them are variations of
 - Case studies
 - Ethnography
 - Phenomenology
 - Naturalistic Inquiry
 - Grounded theory

Ethnography

- Ethnography derived from the Greek “ethnos” (people or cultural group) and graphic
- Writing of the people
- Sub-discipline of descriptive anthropology, ethnography
- Social scientific description of a people and the cultural basis of their peoplehood.

Naturalistic Inquiry

- Little or no control of research setting
- Interviews emerge with little direction from the respondent
- What you find is what you find

Grounded Theory

- Researchers develop theories that emerge from observing a group.
- The theories are "grounded" in the group's observable experiences
- Researchers add their own insight into why those experiences exist
- Grounded theory attempts to reach a theory or conceptual understanding through inductive process

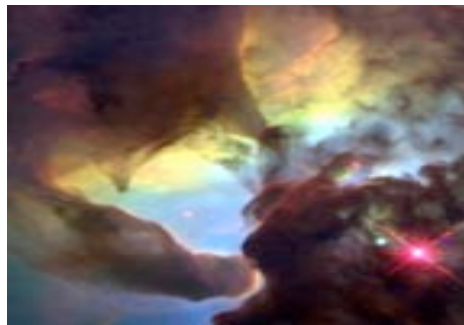
Roles

- Researcher as research instrument
- Researcher as learner
- Participant as expert
 - NOTE!!! Please never use the word SUBJECT for a human research participant/respondent 😊

Fieldwork

- Research in which the numbers are small, the relationships complex, and nothing occurs exactly the same way twice (Wolcott, p. 19).
- Researcher is “ready to look a fool for the sake of the sciences!” (Kirk & Miller, p. 49)

Why Qualitative Research in Information Work?



Methods of Investigation

- Observation
- Interviewing
- Group discussion/focus groups
- Historical study
- Use of “artifacts”
- Case studies

Examples from the field

- Ethnography of networked class
- Adoption and use of email among UT faculty
- Acceptance and use of Student Microcomputer Facility (SMF)
- User and usability studies

Data Collection Methods

- Observation
- Analysis of email
- Interviews
- Surveys
- Analysis of Artifacts
- Focus groups
- Field journal

Ethical Issues

- Inform study participants generally of your intentions
- Change the names of informants and study location
- Insure confidentiality of responses
- Member checking
- Trustworthiness of data

Quantoids = Reliability and Validity

- In social research there...
 - Is no such thing as objectivity
 - Is no such thing as the “correct answer”
- Study results may not be replicable
- No generalizations

Qualtoids: Trustworthiness

- Field journal
- Multiple data collection methods
- Member checking
- Peer debriefing
- Results may be transferable

Exercise

- Choose a topic of interest using qualitative methods
- How would you operationalize study?
- Ask questions
 - Is it practical?
 - Is there insured access to data?
 - Is topic intrinsically valuable?
 - What data collection methods would you use?

Conclusion

- Defined qualitative research
- Explored rationale for use of qualitative or naturalistic research methods in
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Questions? Concerns? Comments?

