Steps/Considerations for Qualitative Research*

Note: These steps are not meant to be sequential. They are often completed in a different order or simultaneously.

The page #s below refer to the accompanying .pdf file "Qualitative Research Appendix." The page #s are hand written in on the bottom of each page.

Framing the Issue

1. Try to develop conceptual framework (see p. 6)
   - It explains the key factors, constructs or variables, and the presumed relationships among them.
   - Draw a tentative picture, identifying important variables, themes
   - Avoid making it too global, with arrows pointing everywhere.
   - Purpose of this exercise is to identify the *specific* variables and relationships you are interested in--you can't look at them all.
   - It is not a final product--you will probably revise it as you undertake your data collection.

2. Frame questions based on the framework; e.g., "How do policymakers affect linker behavior, and linker network embeddedness?"
   - In the example, we are assuming policymakers directly affect linker behavior, but only indirectly affect linker perspective through their influence on linker network embeddedness.
   - Again, questions should tell you what you want to know most or first
   - Again, they are the *provisional* boundaries of your study--not set in stone.
   - If you are hazy about your research question, start with a hazy one and try to clarify it.
   - Continue to review your questions as you collect your data; it helps you to remain focused on what you really want to know.

Data Collection

3. Define the boundaries of your study
   - For example, if you are doing a case study, decide where the case begins and ends.
   - Think about the size of your study, its physical location, its timeframe
   - Think about the extent to which you will consider sub-issues within your topic.

4. Determine sampling frame (see p. 7)
   - Samples can include settings (e.g., shelters, field offices); actors (e.g., day care providers, service users); events (legislative hearings, arrests); processes (provision of service, making policy decision).

* Adapted from Miles and Huberman 1994

- Decide whom/what you will include (further definition of boundaries)
- Decide whom/what you will *not* include
- Revise your sampling frame as required (e.g., one key informant may suggest another you had not thought about).
- But keep in mind that an study can be endless. Start with an initial list of whom you need to talk with (or what you need to look at) to answer your research questions.
- Define aspects of case that you can study within your time and means, that connect directly to your research questions and will include the examples you want to study.
- Generating a table like the one on p.8 can be a useful way of identifying the dimensions to your study.

5. Design instruments (see, for example, p. 9)
    - How much depends on study (see p.10).
        - If it is exploratory and you don't know much about parameters or dynamics, it will be difficult to develop appropriate instruments
        - If you have well-focused questions, and a well bounded sample of people, events or processes, then use a well-structured instrument.
    - If you are comparing among cases, need to make sure you have a standard instrument that allows side-by-side comparisons
    - You will most likely not be relying on solely your instruments, but will supplement them with documents/products that you pick up while conducting the research.
    - Instruments may be revised during the course of the study.

<u>Data Management:</u>

6. Think about the following issues in advance
    - Is there quantitative data that can supplement my qualitative findings?
    - What will my data files look like? How will I find what I need?
    - What uses, if any, can I make of a computer?
        - This could range from typing notes, to tagging code words for later retrieval, to linking relevant data segments, to displaying data in a matrix or chart.
        - Factor in time for learning if you plan to use an unfamiliar software package.
    - Make back-ups of all your notes!

<u>Data Analysis/Reduction</u>

7. Coding Data (see p. 11)
    - Codes are data-labeling and retrieval devices
    - Make a copy of your notes/transcripts before starting to code them!
    - Codes can be developed in advance or after reading the material (or both)

- To develop them after reading the material:
  - Identify key themes, patterns, and concepts
  - May begin with just marking interesting/important passages or use index cards.
- Codes should be
  - Semantically meaningful; not numbers.
  - Clearly operationally defined
  - Structured, related to each other in a meaningful way. This will make it easier to remember the codes, and to revise them.
- Codes can be
  - Descriptive (e.g., "recommendation") or inferential (e.g., "coping strategy")
  - Very broad (e.g., perspectives, activities) or narrow (perspective on domestic violence legislation, activities with kids under 6 yrs.)
  - Begin with a master code, and then subcodes; e.g., EC signifies "External Context". Then within that there are EC: Demographics, EC: Endorsement: EC: Climate.
- Codes often require revision after you begin coding the document
- They require finding a balance between enough differentiation and too much specificity
- Consider checking the codes for reliability

8. Putting the data back together again
   - Don't think of coding as just simplification--it also involves "complication"; i.e., once you take the pieces apart, they must be reassembled or recontextualized.
   - Look for patterns, themes, contrasts, irregularities, paradoxes. They can suggest linkages or (to the extent they don't go together) dimensions
   - May involve counting (see p. 12)
   - Don't ignore bits that don't seem to fit in coding scheme. They have just as much importance.

<u>Drawing Conclusions and Displaying Data</u>

9. Drawing conclusions.
   - May involve
     - Noting patterns, themes
     - Building a logical chain of evidence
     - Making metaphors (data reducing, creating images, stepping back to see on more analytical level) (e.g., the playroom became an oasis for the children)
     - Contrasts/comparison
     - Partitioning
     - Subsuming parts into the general
     - Factoring

    - Noting relationships between variables (A and B are both high at the same time; as A increases, B decreases)
    - Noting intervening variables (e.g., effectiveness of toxic waste clean-up is mediated by community activism).
  - Should making conceptual/theoretical coherence

10. Displaying Data: Visual and presentation of information in systematic form that user can use.
    - Could be
      - Matrices (see p. 13)
      - Networks (nodes with links between them) (see p.14)
      - Other figures, charts, or typologies (see p. 15-16)
    - Data entries can be short blocks of text, quotes, phrases, abbreviations, dotted lines, arrows, etc.
    - Could be ordered by time period, by level, by role
    - Use visual aids *selectively* to highlight important points or relationships.
    - Visual displays should also be explained in the text--they are not a replacement for narrative explanations.

<u>Tips for Interviewing:</u>

- Listen more, talk less
- Follow up on what participant says
- Ask questions when you don't understand
- Ask real questions--not ones where you already know the answer
- When you are unsatisfied with what you heard--ask to hear more
- Explore, don't probe
- Avoid leading questions
- Ask open-ended questions; e.g., "Take me through your typical work day" or "What was that like for you?"
- Follow up, don't interrupt
- Keep participants focused and ask for concrete details
- Ask participants to reconstruct, not remember
- Avoid reinforcing your participants' responses
- Follow your hunches (e.g., "I'm confused, you are talking as though you enjoy your job but something about the way you are talking makes me think you're not. Is that fair?")
- Use an interview guide cautiously
- Tolerate silence

Some Additional Sources:

Joseph Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design*, 2nd edition. Sage 2005

John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Approaches 2nd edition*, Sage 2003

Adrian Holliday, *Doing and Writing Qualitative Research*, Sage 2002

David Silverman, Doing Qualitative Research, 2nd edition. Sage 2004.
C. Marshall and G.B. Rossman, *Designing Qualitative Research*, Sage 1989

Herbert Ruben, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 2nd edition, Sage 2004.

Janet Heaton, *Reworking Qualitative* Data, Sage 2004.

Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson, *Making Sense of Qualitative Data*, Sage 1996.

M.B. Miles and A.M. Huberman, *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd edition), Sage, 1994

Focus Groups, 3rd edition, Richard A. Krueger, Sage 2000