

Research Methodology Workshop Part 2

Most of us are familiar with a positivist, quantitative approach to research, but today we will be discussing qualitative research methods. When I started out as a civil structural engineer, I was focused on laboratory testing and counting, but now I'm excited to talk to you about a different approach.

Italian numerical data didn't mesh well with MBA, and that was a bit of a challenge while working for Scottish Hydroelectric. The project was about their industrial use of electricity, and it involved some quantitative analysis. However, the main part of the research was qualitative interviewing of their customers. This was my first time taking a step into the dark side of qualitative research.

My PhD was entirely qualitative, and it was about children's experiences of outdoor adventure with civil engineering. The research involved being a participant observer during their activities, interviewing them afterwards, and also interviewing the staff that were providing the activities. Currently, I am supervising a PhD submission that is autoethnographic, and it is about the author himself as an international expert in mergers and acquisitions. The research spans from testing how strong soils are to being deeply reflective about his experience in life.

The whole thing is fascinating, and I think I've made the jump to the dark side. I am a qualitative researcher, which is why I'm doing this session now. I want to ensure that what I present is relevant and applicable to each of your studies. Later on, we will go through each of your ideas, and we can help each other refine them. We will determine if something is qualitative or not, but it doesn't matter either way.

My aim is to empower you to use qualitative research, as it can be intimidating if you've never done it before. It's a different way of thinking, and it's not about proving anything or being objective. If you prefer measuring things and using numerical data, that's fine too. We all have our innate preferences, and exposure to qualitative research can broaden your perspective.

After a break, I will show you how to use qualitative data, analyze it, and present it in written form. Please feel free to ask any questions, thoughts, observations, or contradictions that you may have.

Regarding the slides, they have been updated and are located in the January 2021 file. If you have any trouble finding them, let me know.

Before we begin, I want to know if either Mel or George have any experience with qualitative research. Mel has some experience, but it has been a long time. George, how about you?

I have some experience in quality research where I conducted interviews and reported my findings. Does anyone else have experience in this field? It's alright if you don't, as we're assuming no prior knowledge. I would like to talk about how research is conducted in the workplace, sometimes without even realizing it. Andy, you're studying and will soon be making calls, so it's important to understand. Shibu, you made a face but haven't said anything yet. Lucy, what about you? Richards, it's about using

research in general. And Sean, you produced some qualitative research seven months ago, right? It's okay if you don't have experience; it's good to have a mix.

At 15:41, we had a discussion about qualitative and quantitative research. Qualitative research involves studying a specific group of people in-depth, while quantitative research studies a wider population but not as deeply. The difference between the two can be visualized as an oblong rectangle, with qualitative research being the tall and narrow rectangle, and quantitative research being the wide and shallow one.

At 16:50, I apologize for not explaining it clearly earlier. The focus of qualitative research is on understanding the "why" and "what" in the house, so it requires a tighter focus. On the other hand, quantitative research aims to identify wider patterns but doesn't delve too deeply.

To do a quick recap, Jim mentioned the importance of understanding the difference between data and method when reading a dissertation. Even PhD students can get confused with this. Thinking about data, it is what you need to answer your research question or respond to your research aim. The method is the way you generate the data.

For quantitative data, as Jim said, it's about numbers, stats, and generalizing. You're trying to measure patterns across the population. For qualitative data, you've got mainly language, and if you're doing a master's dissertation, it's going to be language. You can use images or artifacts for your research. Nonetheless, you're dealing with language, not numbers.

One thing that is a bit unsure about is providing a narrative interpretation of some interview data. It's not so obvious. What I want to do is try and demystify that for you as we go through. The key thing I want to get across to you about qualitative data and research is that in qualitative research, you define a neat package which I'm calling a case unit. It's not a case study. A case study has wider implications. You can read that Yin right, Yin did all the work on case studies, but the case unit is where you define the group of people you're researching.

For instance, the case unit for my PhD study was children doing an outdoor adventure course at a particular outdoor adventure center. That was a very specific case unit, and you think, well hang on, how do you generalize from that? You can't. But what you can do in that case unit context is say this is what's going on here, and this is the value of qualitative research, that you get in-depth understanding of what's happening in a small group of people, and then you have a built-in recommendation. More research is needed into other similar contexts.

That's how theory and generalizable patterns are developed from small qualitative studies, which then agglomerate into much wider understanding. Another way of thinking about the difference is part of this. Mel George, if I was to use this whiteboard where I'm standing, can you see it please? I'm probably the bit to the left. My left. No, left as I look at it. So where you're stood, I can see where you're stood. But if there's any more whiteboard to the other side of you, then no. Is there anything on this side? Can't see past the screen, right? I'm going to do this with the medium of mine.

We can have a conversation and brainstorm ideas instead of just focusing on calls all the time. It is important to understand the research methods and what you want to achieve.

At 17:56, I mentioned that there were pens and whiteboards available. I asked everyone in the room to write down their current thinking about their research aim or question on the whiteboard. I then asked Mel and George to share their thoughts so that I could write them down as well. The goal was not to judge anyone's thoughts, but to refine them together. I also clarified the difference between research aim and research question and asked if anyone was confused about the terms.

"OK. Thomas, are you unsure?" "No, thank you." "Thank you. Some people may not be sure about the research aim and research question, as they mean the same thing but are phrased differently. For instance, a research aim could be to evaluate the experience of young people in water sports at outdoor adventure centres. The research question would be: What is the experience of young people at outdoor centres who engage in water sports? You can choose to write either a research aim or a research question. I prefer writing questions and then turning them into aims if necessary. Please write it down. While you do that, Mel and George will share their current thinking."

Mel is focusing on workforce dependency and aims to understand how to promote self-resilience and employee independence within a health and social care organizational culture. On the other hand, George is examining outsourcing and wants to answer the question of when outsourcing is beneficial for public sector defense and security organizations in the United Kingdom.

"Thank you, George. Clive, Andy, Shibu, Richard, Sean, and Lucy, please write down a few words that represent what you are trying to find out. This is not a test, and there is no judgment. Take your time. If you need to, you can write it on one of the others' boards. Mel and George are online, but they may not be able to see everyone else's. Thank you all for your input."

"OK. Thomas, are you unsure?" "No, thank you." "Thank you. Some people may not be sure about the research aim and research question, as they mean the same thing but are phrased differently. For instance, a research aim could be to evaluate the experience of young people in water sports at outdoor adventure centres. The research question would be: What is the experience of young people at outdoor centres who engage in water sports? You can choose to write either a research aim or a research question. I prefer writing questions and then turning them into aims if necessary. Please write it down. While you do that, Mel and George will share their current thinking. Mel, would you like to go first and share your research aim or question?"

"In terms of a name, I am looking at workforce dependency. My research aim is to understand how to promote self-resilience and employee independence within a health and social care organizational culture."

"Great. Thank you, Mel. George, what about you?"

"I am exploring outsourcing. My research question is: When is outsourcing beneficial for public sector defence and security organizations in the United Kingdom?"

Before we begin, let me remind you that I'm a helpful AI-powered assistant. Please feel free to ask me anything that might be unclear to you, and I'll do my best to assist you.

Now, let's talk about the conversation. During the discussion, participants were asked to write down a few words that represent what they are trying to find out. This is not a test, and there is no judgment. Mel and George were online, but they may not have been able to see everyone else's board.

The group discussed the difference between a research aim and a research question. For instance, a research aim could be to evaluate the experience of young people in water sports at outdoor adventure centers. The research question would be: What is the experience of young people at outdoor centers who engage in water sports? Participants were encouraged to write down either a research aim or question.

Mel and George shared their research topics. Mel's research aim was to understand how to promote self-resilience and employee independence within a health and social care organizational culture. George's research question was: When is outsourcing beneficial for public sector defense and security organizations in the United Kingdom?

Other participants, including Clive, Andy, Shibu, Richard, Sean, and Lucy, were also asked to write down their research ideas. Mel and George were online, but they may not have been able to see everyone else's board.

Participants were encouraged to take a look at each other's ideas. Some of the ideas included change management or leadership, exploring current shared self-perceived problems affecting rural dispensing doctors in England and Wales, the role of logistics skills in dispute-free supply chain management, measuring the Myers-Briggs scores of executive coaches compared to scores of the population, recruitment of women into the Fire and Rescue service to change organizational culture, and assessing the value added from transnational partnerships in higher education strategy focus in Gloucestershire Business School.

During this session, the aim is to get all your ideas out in the open without judgment, and then to help each other refine them to make them better. Think of it like a therapy session where I'll provide guidance on improving your ideas, and you can help each other too. We'll start by discussing some principles of qualitative research, and then we'll refine each other's ideas when the time is right. As we go through this, you may want to think about how you can change your ideas. It's a starting point, and if you have any questions, I'll be happy to answer them.

We'll cover some theoretical and philosophical concepts related to qualitative research. I'll give you a brief overview, but if you want to learn more, you can read about it. Some terms have conflicting views, so you'll need to navigate through them yourself. If you're struggling to understand, Mark Saunders' "Research Onion" is a good starting point. We'll also look at research paradigms, such as positivism and interpretivism. An interpretivist researcher interprets what exists in the world to give it meaning, while a constructivist researcher looks for new understanding in the world and constructs new meaning out of it. These are just labels with definitions, but they can help you understand how they relate to your ideas.

When you read about interpretivism, it provides guidance on how to design and undertake research. You should use the principles and assumptions of constructivism to guide your study. These research paradigms are not just a set of rules, but a set of assumptions that will guide you in your research design. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena and is one of the assumptions of interpretivism. Some researchers consider interpretivism to be a form of phenomenology. Don't get too confused when reading, as there is no right answer for any of it. Take the assumptions that will work best for your study.

When pursuing a Masters MBA programme, SLD, or any other programme, it is common to take a pragmatic approach. Although you may fall into the interpretivist or constructivist category, some assumptions must be short-circuited to maintain applied research standards. Therefore, you will most likely have a pragmatic approach, with positivism as your main philosophy for quantitative studies and constructivism for qualitative studies. Ultimately, if you are conducting a qualitative study, you will be in either the interpretivist or constructivist category. Critical realism lies between positivism and interpretivism, borrowing from both. Qualitative research involves inductive and exploratory research, where you explore the world to identify what is present.

When conducting qualitative research, you should specify the particular group of people you are researching. While your findings may apply to a similar context, you cannot assume they apply widely. Therefore, it is crucial to be precise about the group of people you are researching. For instance, you might investigate criminal women in the Fire and Rescue service. You can conclude that recruiting women to full-time firefighting in Gloucestershire is the case in Gloucestershire, but you cannot assume it applies to Worcestershire without further research.

Qualitative research is all about rich data, loaded with meaning - lots of language and trying to understand the meaning that people attach to their experiences or their perceptions about the world. You are looking for that meaning, and the richness is important. While not new, it dates back to the psychology literature of the 1920s and 30s and has been a body of knowledge since the late 70s and 80s. Therefore, it has a historical heritage, and it is essential to look for the latest versions if possible.

Your introduction and rationale for the study should explain why you have focused on full-time women coming into Fire and Rescue in Gloucestershire. It might be that one of your criteria is access, and you have got access to the fire service in Gloucestershire or specific parts of it. You will sort this out with your supervisor. What I am trying to do here is to give you some tips on how to focus down and make your study more particular. You can refine your context even more in tighter detail. For example, you could use Cheltenham as a specific case unit, given the size of the Masters dissertation and the work that you would have to do.

I believe we should solely focus on the firefighters who are currently working. However, we need to further refine our focus to study the recruitment of full-time women in the Fire and Rescue service at Cheltenham or any other chosen location. Generally, studies of this nature should have a maximum of 8 to 12 interviews that last between 45 minutes to an hour. We can expect to face difficulties in dealing with the data, so it's best to focus on a single fire station with 8 to 10 female firefighters to obtain their perceptions.

It's crucial to keep in mind that this is only a master's dissertation and not an attempt to solve organizational problems or save the world. Our objective is to demonstrate our ability to define a

problem, research it, generate data, analyze it with literature, and present our conclusions. Therefore, we must not be too ambitious and understand that this is just the starting point of a more extensive study.

We should remember that we are working for two audiences: the academic audience to complete our dissertation and our workplace to provide managerial utility. However, these two objectives are not always compatible, and scalability can be an issue. Thus, it's essential to focus on achievable goals.

In our discussion on research methodology, we emphasize the importance of understanding subjective experiences and perspectives in qualitative research. We also stress the need to be specific about the research aim and question. The conversation touches on the scientific human construct of social interaction and the question of whose reality is real. We end with casual remarks.

The key to qualitative research is understanding the meaning and motive behind people's experiences. Researchers in this field often use German words because they represent concepts more accurately, even though not everyone speaks German. To illustrate this, let's consider the example of improving recruitment practices for women in the Fire and Rescue service. To achieve this, we need to understand the subjective experiences of women in this field and their suggestions for improvement. While some may argue that a subjective experience is not as good as an objective one, it's important to recognize that we need to understand the experiences people have had to make meaningful progress.

As someone who transitioned from engineering to qualitative research, I understand the challenges of shifting from an objective to a subjective perspective. In qualitative research, the goal is not to take an objective view but rather to understand each person's unique viewpoint on a particular phenomenon. We celebrate qualitative research with a subjective point of view. Our own perspectives are important in research. They don't answer world questions, but once we start aggregating them up in blocks of research, that's when we start to get a big body of knowledge. Everything we learn about research from school and early days is that we do a piece of research and must do it the same all the way through. However, qualitative research requires flexibility. New things happen, and we must be able to adapt to that in line with the purpose of our research. We may not do everything exactly the same.

Let's say Clive does 10 into 8 interviews. Every interview will be different, and that's because people have different things to say. You'll wake up one morning and you'll think, "ohh Blimey, I'm really tired". You won't be particularly good as an interviewer that day. Other days you'll be absolutely buzzed and you'll be learning new things. You're thinking this is great. I'm really enjoying this.

You may start with some ideas or themes that you want to explore from your literature review, which tells you the kind of questions to be asking. By about the third interview, some new material may have come in from the first two interviews that you then include in your later interviews. You might get to the fifth or sixth interview and find that there's a lot of similar material coming through on a couple of themes, so you might drop those off and put some new stuff in. Qualitative interviewing grows, changes, and responds to what you find within the purpose of what you're trying to find out. You may even have a name or a research question at the beginning, but by the time you get to the end, it may not quite be the same thing that you've answered, but it's the thing that needed answering, because at this first stage you didn't really know what needed answering.

Do you think that is the answer that will lead on to other things? Absolutely. And that's the flexibility and adaptability. None of you have read very much around the subject of what you want to research, and that's how it is at the beginning of a research project. You're starting to read. The more you read, the more you'll refine these aims, research questions, the more you'll understand what they should actually be. It may not be until you get to the end of the literature if you think actually I do need to tweak it because the real issues are coming out here. It won't be vastly different, but it will be slightly different.

It is important to ask the right questions when conducting research. In a qualitative study, you need to look for differences and seek new insights. While in a quantitative study, you are trying to find patterns of similarity. In interviews, if you do not get any insights from the first few, you should introduce new questions and follow through with others. However, you cannot claim that 100% of people answered a certain way, as you are trying to give a qualitative sense of the majority or the general feeling.

If you change your research question along the way, it is not necessary to acknowledge the change. Still, it is essential to produce a coherent piece of work that is consistent from beginning to end. You may change the wording of your research question as you find new information from literature, interviews, and discussions.

When presenting your dissertation, you must set it up for someone to read, and it must have a golden thread that runs through it. You need to justify your study and explain its managerial value. In the literature review, you should focus on the themes that have emerged and summarize them. Finally, you must find out more about the themes that are not clear from the literature.

Things that may not have been covered well enough in the literature, things that might not have been covered recently, or things that are contradictory. Or things that everyone agrees and you just want to reaffirm them. These are the themes that you use to design your interview questions or even the interview itself. After completing your literature review, you can use these themes to conduct interviews. You will get the interview data and the themes from the literature review that you can put together. Then, you can reach your conclusions on resilience in a particular context. This process concludes with you making recommendations. This is how you can write your master's dissertation.

The PhD interview questions are different from what you might have thought. Your subjective experience is important. An example of a PhD interview question is: "What are your views on why customers take part in courses at Rd in water sports?" This is a good question to ask, but it can be rephrased to make it more conversational. It is important to become familiar with your literature review and know what you want to find out. You can ask questions about service design and service delivery, as well as tangible things such as equipment and reliability. You can also ask questions around expectations and experiences. These are the five themes that you can explore with the interviewees, along with a few banker questions that you absolutely want to ask.

During the interview process, it is important to have themes in mind that summarize the relevant literature. You should also provide an example of a transcript from an interview to showcase the process and the types of questions asked. As you become more familiar with the topic, try asking more open-ended questions rather than specific ones. The interviewing method used in qualitative studies is called semi-structured, where there is some structure but also room for a free-flowing conversation.

It's important to remember that qualitative research is unpredictable and you can't second guess it. You must let the data emerge naturally from the interviewees, focus groups, and observations. Planning is still important, but you must be open to new and interesting findings.

Inductive research is used in qualitative studies where the data leads to new theories and understanding. Deductive research aims to prove something and requires numerical data and evidence.

Overall, the interview process in qualitative research can be complex and unpredictable, but it can also lead to new and exciting discoveries.

Let me take a look at some of the others. Clive, this definitely relates to you, and Laura relates to you. It's obviously a problem. Richard, are you involved? The current shared self-perceived problems affecting rural dispensing doctors in England and Wales. Are you retired? You're a retired GP, but are you still involved in that network of dispensing doctors association? You will have to be sensitive to your position in that association if you're going to be interviewing doctors in a different world. You have a particular position in their minds as a professional, and you're coming to this as an academic study with a different identity, but it cannot be entirely removed from the identity you've got with them. There is a separate purpose to this association as well. So from that point of view, it was confidentiality enabled.

What Rich has done there is he's mitigated against that and said he's got this positionality, which is how he's perceived by people in that network, professionally, personally, however, and yes, what you end up doing is how you reduce the negative impact of your position or positionality. Gerald, the HR Director in Germany, is an example of this. His study is of the career loyalty and motivations of Generation Y employees in his organization. He's the head of HR; talk about positionality.

He identified all of the Generation Y employees to be involved in the study and spent nearly six months gaining their trust, going around meeting with all of them, and explaining what his study was about and how this was separate from his role as HR director. It was anonymous and confidential, and if he learned anything about them that was separate, nothing would be done. This was purely about his PhD, and he convinced all of them that they would be happy to do the study with him.

The whole point here is trust. If you have this issue of positionality or a potential issue that might happen in university, health and social care, or the fire service, you have to work out the best way of reassuring everyone that you're not trying to do something other than a piece of academic research and that you value their input. You just do it differently. My own study was ethnographic, and I was based at an outdoor adventure center for two summers. My positionality was a bit sensitive because, prior to that, I was an inspector of outdoor adventure centers in a different sector. I used to be an international canoe slalom racer, and I had to try and play these down a little bit because what I didn't want to do was to come in as an inspector expert or a competition expert. I was going in there as a researcher to learn what they were doing.

I just about managed it, and it wasn't about lying. It was saying this is what I'm here for. The manager agreed, and that was all fine. My cover was nearly blown because when I turned up on the first day,

three of the canoeing instructors I had taught how to canoe at Hartpury College asked me what I was doing there. I told them I needed their help. With those three guys, I could use them to reassure everyone else that it was okay. So every now and again, they would tell me, "Oh, sometimes you can't use names. So and so is saying what's he up to now. Don't worry, he's cool, he's okay, he's fine." That was quite useful. But actually, trying to set up this and mitigate against it, you just do things. You never comment. So protocols, I would never make a disparaging comment about anybody or anything at the center.

They were all criticizing each other, but I refused to join in. It's just not something you do. And every Friday, we rotated bringing in chocolate fudge cake. I always made sure to bring it on my turn. It's the little things like that which create a sense of reassurance.

Talking about buoyancy, the outdoor instructors had a particular uniform. Because I was from the same industry, I was accepted despite wearing slightly older and more ragged gear than theirs. They'd look at me and say, "Yeah, your gear's a bit old, but you've got some kid, that's alright then you're fine." There's a lot of identity development that goes on. I'm giving extreme examples here, but it's an important aspect.

In a qualitative study, you may end up writing in the first person singular if it's more effective. I ended up writing my methodology for my PhD in that way because it was an ethnographic study and it came across as more rich. You need to interact and explain your research design, potential limitations, and positionality. In your literature review, you should address the positionality issue and explain how it was done.

Remember that you are actively generating your data all the way through and it can be tough, but also great fun. When you sit down with an expert to gain a unique perspective, it's rare for them to offer you that time. It's a good thing.

Surveys can be repetitive and create survey fatigue for people. It's important to keep in mind that research is multifaceted and iterative.

"What is the minute silence? I'm sorry for 11:11 on Sunday. Got it. Yeah, we can do. Thank you. OK, got it. Sorry, I have really been off the pace. Let's finish this bit here and do the timeout. We'll put it into a break as well and come back into it. It's not as scheduled, but we have to be flexible and adaptive as qualitative researchers. We have to be flexible to the study purpose or today's purpose. I think the same horses and races and you have to like people. If it's not your passion, I would recommend that. Okay, that's nice. You have to want to know about people. And you might not like it. What I'm trying to say is that you have to have the ability to engage people in interviews, focus groups, or observations and not be shy or uncomfortable talking. The last thing I will say is that I was away for the weekend with my two oldest friends and one of them, his son is a computer game designer. He told Andy a joke about computer game designers. How do you know when a computer game designer has developed social skills and is interested in people? They look at your shoes as well as their own. Okay, now that's his joke. It's about being comfortable with people, and in an interview, you might get into some difficult situations where they say things. You need to be able to adapt to that. The example I've got for you that we're going to show on YouTube, there's a little point in there where the interviewer has to deal with a comment. It's interesting, right? Thanks for that Clive. Let's take a timeout and come back to it at quarter past. Is that okay? Yeah, cool. Actually, Andy, could you

do that thing? Yeah, please. I'm going to do teams still recording on teams and all that. I'll stick to the party stream one. Yeah, please. Yeah, thanks.