Quick Study: Qualitative Research Methods

Qualitative Research

- Qualitative research data comes in the form of words, pictures, narratives, and descriptions rather than numbers.
- The researcher relies on the views of participants, asks broad and general questions, collects data, and analyzes it for themes.
- The data is collected from a small number of individuals or sites.
- Researchers tend to take a subjective and biased approach.
- Research reports tend to use flexible emerging structure and evaluative criteria.
- Offers access to subjective experience
- Utilizes a contextual approach, offering a deeper and richer understanding of people’s lives and behavior, including some knowledge of their subjective experiences
- **Grounded Theory Methodology**: develops theory by letting meaning, concepts, and theories emerge from the data or be “grounded” in data, rather than be imposed in the data.
- Provides **Idiographic Explanations**: Explanations focus on a single person, event, or situation and attempt to specify all the conditions that helped produce the person, event, or situation.
- Qualitative researchers typically rely on the following methods for gathering information: *Participant Observation*, *Non-participant Observation*, *Field Notes*, *Reflexive Journals*, *Structured Interview*, *Semi-structured Interview*, *Unstructured Interview*, and *Analysis of documents and materials*.

Field Research

- Field research is a type of qualitative research.
- Involves observations made of people in their natural settings as they go about their everyday life
- Enables researcher to approximate the meaning, feeling, and interpretation that people assign to experience
- Researcher must understand the full context in which people behave.
- Two kinds of observations:
  - **Participation**: Researcher personally experiences the world of the observed
  - **Observation**: Noting and recording the behavior of others in the social setting
In-Depth or Ethnographic Interviewing

- Informal, unstructured interviews
- Explores a wide range of subjects
- Lasts a long period of time
- Another source of data for participant observation
- More interactive and collaborative and less directive than survey interviewing
- The goal is to explore how the world appears to the respondent without imposing structure.

Case Studies, Life Histories, and Narratives

- Detailed descriptive study of all or part of a life or an organizational event

Focus Groups

- Focus group (group depth interview) is an interview with a whole group of people at the same time.
- It is led by one or more moderators who direct the discussion by following an outline of the main topics of inquiry.
- Participants are free to frame answers and to construct meaning.
- Advantages:
  - More flexible
  - Less expensive
  - Faster than individual interviews
- Disadvantages:
  - Less generalizable
  - Difficult to analyze
  - Qualitative rather than quantitative data

Assessment of Field Research and Qualitative Methods

- Deep and insightful data
- Includes actual behavior and statements
- Longitudinal
- Group behavior
- Researcher direct involvement
- Might include observer bias
- Lack of structure
- Difficult to quantify
- Restricted samples