A Survey of Qualitative Research Methods

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Question

- What research approach have you selected for your thesis/dissertation research?
My prediction

I bet most of you will mainly use a quantitative method of inquiry
## Epistemology

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<th>Positivism/Post-positivism</th>
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What is Qualitative Research?

• Refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things (Berg, 2009)

• An approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014)
Goal

• Provide a brief overview of qualitative research methods

• Motivate interest of workshop participants to expand their research toolkit
Qualitative Research: Myth vs Reality

Myth
• “Qualitative research is nonscientific and, thus, invalid”
• “Qualitative research is easy”
• “There is no such thing as qualitative data; everything is either 1 or 0”
• “Participant observation is the only way to conduct good qualitative research”

Reality
• What is science?
• More in-depth and requires clarity of goals during design stages → teaches you how to do research
• All research ultimately has a qualitative grounding
• Interviewing, FGDs, ethnography, sociometry, unobtrusive measures, historiography, case studies
“There are two things you are better off not watching in the making; sausages and econometric estimates”
(Leamer, 1983)
Qualitative Research in Economics

Typical
• Relatively unimportant compared to quantitative work
• Doctoral programs give greater emphasis to econometrics and statistics
  – 2 to 4 semesters
• Published only on occasions
• Considered not to be part of an economist’s toolkit

Last 2 decades
• Explosion in the last 10-15 years
• Research areas employing qualitative methods:
  – Gauging the effects of social programs
  – Exploring willingness to pay for environmental interventions
  – Effects of poverty
  – Technological diffusion
Methods
In-depth interviews

- Extended discussion with research subjects
- Adherence to structure depends on the number of interviews
- Information capture:
  - Taped and later transcribed
  - Notes
Ten commandments of interviewing

• Never begin an interview cold
• Remember your purpose
• Present a natural front
• Demonstrate aware hearing
• Think about appearance

• Interview in a comfortable place
• Don’t be satisfied with monosyllabic answers
• Be respectful
• Practice, practice, and practice some more
• Be cordial and appreciative
Focus Group Discussions

• Group discussion sessions
• FGDs are more for triangulation
• Things to consider:
  – Run multiple groups to average out group-specific idiosyncrasies
  – Run homogenous groups to elicit more productive discussions
Basic ingredients in FGDs

• A clearly defined objective and/or research problem
• The nature of the group
• Atmosphere/environment and rapport
• An aware listening facilitator

• A well-organized and prepared facilitator
• Structure and direction but restrained contribution to the discussion
• Research assistance
• Systematic analysis
Case studies and site visits

• Involves using a relatively small number of cases to conduct an in-depth analysis of a given question of interest.

• Commonalities and differences in experiences across cases are used to:
  – Establish key empirical patterns
  – Develop new explanations for observed phenomena
  – Gauge the extent theoretical understandings of the phenomena of interest are consistent with evidence provided by the cases

• Examples of economics fields:
  – Industrial organization
  – Development economics
Ethnography

• Extended observation of a given community, aiming to characterize the norms, habits and beliefs that govern patterns of behavior and interaction of its members.

• Full-fledged fieldwork requires 1–3 years of commitment to:
  – Develop broad networks of relationships in the community
  – Acquire access to opportunities to participate

• Common in anthropology and sociology but a few examples of economic interest exist:
  – Culture of Wall Street investment banks (Ho, 2009)
  – Ethnographies of working- and middle-class life (Roberson, 1998)
  – Understandings of consumption in low-income communities (Chin, 2001)
Historiography

• Information collected directly from subjects about important events and periods over their lives

• Valuable for capturing people’s perceptions of periods of important social and economic change and how their lives were affected by them

• Not used much by economists although there are some interesting exceptions
  — > 50 years of Zambian agriculture
Mixed methods

• Combines qualitative and quantitative methods → exploiting the strengths of both types of research and offsetting each others’ weaknesses

• Three main ways of conducting mixed methods research:
  – Exploratory sequential mixed methods
  – Explanatory sequential mixed methods
  – Convergent parallel mixed methods

• Examples of mixed-methods research include:
  – Evaluation of social programs and health-services research
  – Research on poverty in developing countries
Sample sizes

- Sample sizes are much smaller
- Constructed ‘purposively’
  - 25-30 people
- Scholars who believe ‘more n is better’ find this problematic
  - Why??
- Qualitative research gives a researcher the opportunity for in-depth investigation
- Important to be clear about the basis for selecting who to interview or what cases to study
Analysis

• Content analysis based on pre-coded themes
• Availability of software packages for analyzing narrative information (e.g. NVivo, MAXQDA and Atlas) now enables researchers to rely more on transcribed records that can be compiled and analyzed electronically
Further Reading

• Bazeley, Pat, and Kristi Jackson. 2013. Qualitative Data Analysis with NVIVO. SAGE Publications
Thank you!!