Universitat Pompeu Fabra Barcelona

Qualitative Research Methods of the Social Sciences Applied to Communication

A Guide

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1
Latest trends in (online) journalism research

1. Informational Conception: Journalism as an Instrument
2. Mediatization
    a. Journalism as an Institution
    b. Society articulated with the Media
    c. Journalism as Discourse
        i. Rhetorics & Technology
        ii. Narrativity
3. The main problems:
    a. In which way news and information are gathered, produced and disseminated?
        Factors of Production
        Journalism as Social Construction
        Journalism as a Job
            Ideological Values
            Media Cultures
            Reality-Constructing Activity
    b. How is it changing?
        Cooperation – Groups – Communities
        Speed – Connectivity - Flexibility
        Innovation
        Adaptation
        Transformation
    c. Convergence – Globalization
        Decentralization
        Non linearity
        Property and Alliances
        Network Journalism
        Multinodal Structures
        Social Interaction
        Comparative Studies
        Media Policy
        News Flow

4. Some bibliographical recommendations:
    a. Wahl-Jorgensen, Karin & Thomas Hanitzsch. Handbook of Journalism Studies. New York: Routledge, 2009.
    b. Heinrich, Ansgard. Network Journalism. Journalistic Practice in Interactive Spheres. New York; London: Routledge, 2010
    c. Ornebring, Henrik. Comparative European Journalism: The State of Current Research. Oxford: Reuters Institute, 2009
    d. What's trending in Media, Cultural and Communication Studies <http://explore.tandfonline.com/page/ah/media-trending/media-studies-trending>

Further Reading
Hanitzsch, T.; Esser, F. Challenges and Perspectives of Comparative Communication Inquiry. *Handbook of Comparative Communication Research* [01_trends_comparative_communication_research.pdf]

2
Theoretical Interpretative Framework (an Quality Control)

Theoretical Background

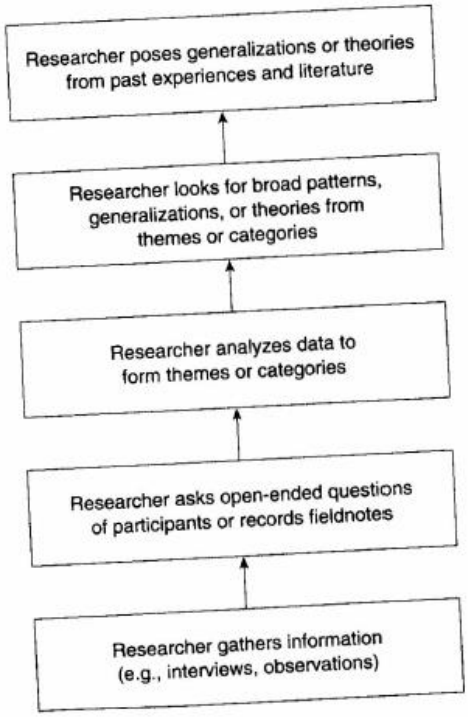
Two main questions:

1. Why do we use theories?

   "[Theory] is used as a broad explanation for behavior and attitudes, and it may be complete with variables, constructs, and hypotheses.

   Researchers increasingly use a theoretical lens or perspective in qualitative research, and advocacy pespective that shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed, and provides a call for action or change."

   It is an inductive logic:



Creswell, J. H.
Research design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches.
Los Angeles etc.: Sage, 2009

Theories, Methods or Approaches?

Three theoretical suggestions:

1. Grounded Theory

   "Grounded theory methods are suitable for studying individual processes, interpersonal relations and the reciprocal effects between individuals and larger social processes".

   Creswell, J. H.
   Research design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches.
   Los Angeles etc.: Sage, 2009

   Glasser and Strauss
   To generate (inductive) theories
   Related to social questions
   Based on a systematic analysis of data
   Simultaneous data collection and analysis
   Open at first, then Axial and Selective-Theoretical
   Iterative design and theoretical sampling
   Until theoretical saturation
   Comparative system
   Categories from Empirical Data
   Until finding the central category (or categories)

2. Action-Network Research

   "It leads to better research because the practical and theoretical outcomes of the research process are grounded in the perspective and interests of those immediately concerned, and not filtered through an outside researcher's preconceptions and interests".

   Reason, P.; Bradbury, H.
   Handbook of Action Research. Participative Inquiry and Practice.
   London etc.: Sage, 2001: 4

   Community-based , Collaborative
   Participants help to design research
   To produce practical knowledge
   Democratise the Research process
   Emphasis on Taking Action

3. Mixed Methods

   Quantitative and Qualitative Paradigms
   Complex Research Questions
   A Sequence of Methods

Data Collection, Analysis, Interpretation

Some help to decide:

Box 4 Key elements to look for in research papers

Grounded theory

- Does the research question indicate that a theory is needed?
- Is the study designed to support iterative data collection and analysis in a context of theoretical sampling?
- Does the discussion explain how the theory responds to the original research question?

Mixed methods

- Is the research question appropriate for mixed methods or would a single method suffice?
- Is the relation among the methods clear in terms of their sequence, priority, and integration?
- Does the discussion relate the findings to a complex understanding of a multifaceted phenomenon?

Action research

- Does the research question arise from a situated problem that is best understood through a collaborative research partnership?
- Are the research agenda and activities shared by researchers and partners?
- Do the results meet the partners' needs in a collaborative and equitable manner? Is the identified problem acted on in a substantive way?

Lingard, L.; Albert, M.; Levinson, W. Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory, Mixed Methods, and Action Research. *BMJ* 337: 459-461

Indicators of quality control

Accurate **description** of the problem.
Construction of the corpus (**relevance**).
Indication of the methods (**transparency**).

Quantitative Research	Qualitative Research
internal validity	credibility
external validity	transferability
reliability	dependability
objectivity	conformability

1. Credibility
   Through persistent observation, triangulation of methods and control of the operations, both gathering and observation.
2. Transferability
   Using an intentional sampling system, and proposing a deep description.
3. Dependability
   The research process will be examined.
4. Conformability
   Methods will be discussed and evaluated and results compared.

Further Readings
Main texts: Lingard, L.; Mathieu, A.; Levinson, W. Grounded theory, mixed methods, and action. BMJ 2008;337
Methodological articles: Strauss, A.; Corbin, J. Grounded Theory Methodology. An Overview Charmaz, K. The Grounded Theory Method: An Explanation and Interpretation
Examples: Domingo, D.; Masip, P.; Costera, I. Tracing Digital News Networks Jones, M.; Alony, I. Guiding the Use of Grounded Theory in Doctoral Studies – An Example from the Australian Film Industry

3
Qualitative Research Methods of the Social Sciences Applied to Communication

1. Why do we use qualitative methods (and Ethnography)?
   It serves a research goal
   It is systematic
   Related to more general theories
   Controlled with validity and fiability criteria
2. It is applied to social groups:
   Closed
   Living together during a long time
   Confronting situations
   Behaviors in public events
   All those that cannot be analyzed using surveys or interviews
3. Benefits and Weaknesses

Benefits	**Weaknesses**
Firsthand data	Time consuming
Direct witness	Difficulties
Confidence	Reserve
Conflict and evolution	Generalization
Comprehensive social description	Self prejudices

The main problema: Access

Further Readings
Main texts: Oller Alonso, M.; Barredo, D. International Comparative Studies: Towards the Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Methods Jackson II, R. L.; Drummond, D. K.; Camara, S. What is Qualitative Research?
Methodological articles: Paulussen, S.; Ugille, P. User Generated Content in the Newsroom: Professional and Organisational Constraints on Participatory Journalism

4
Main Techniques of the Qualitative Methods

1. Observation

Benefits	**Weaknesses**
Point of view of the observed	Time consuming
Witnessing the facts	Self prejudices
Comparative	It is not always easy to differentiate facts and interpretations
Explorative	Generalization

Types of observation
- Participant
  - *Known as researcher*
  - *Unknown as researcher*
- Non-participant

Observation Techniques
- Plan the observation
  - define the problema, scenario, periods
  - People – Identify informants
    - Activities
    - Time
    - Space
  - How to record
  - How to analyze

2. Netnography and Virtual Ethnography

"**Online ethnography** and **digital ethnography** are **generic terms** for doing any sort of ethnographic work using some sort of online or digital method. When you use those terms, it is unclear what you have done in terms of what procedures you used, what the methodology is, such as what ethical guidelines you used for example. The literature base you will cite is also a bit amorphous."

R. Kozinets, http://kozinets.net/archives/475

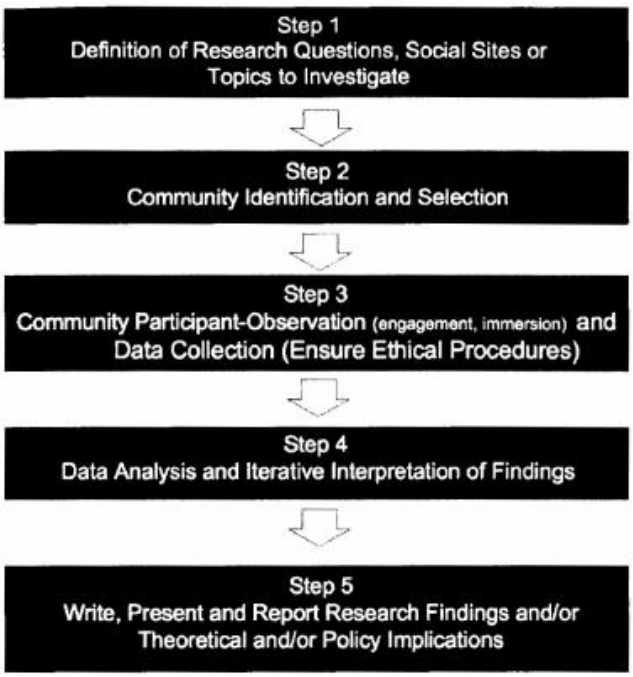
"**Virtual ethnography** is the term coined by Christine Hine, and it refers to a method that sees online work as only partial and incomplete. I would expect that if you called your online ethnography a virtual ethnography, then you would adhere fairly closely to the research attitudes and practices, in fact the methodology of combined research philosophy and actions, of Professor Hine as she demonstrated them in her book."

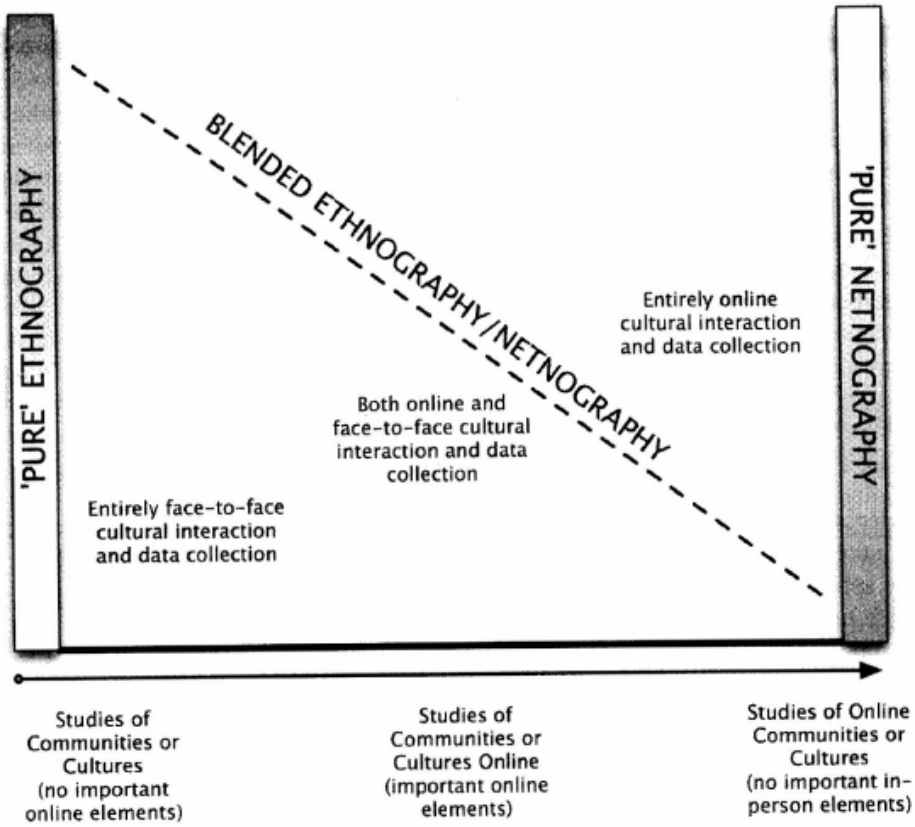
"**Netnography** refers to a specific set of online ethnographic procedures characterized by a particular methodology, including an epistemological background, analytic frameworks, and a consistent and evolving set of guidelines for entree, observation, data analysis, ethics, and so on."

R. Kozinets, http://kozinets.net/archives/475

Netnography: Methods

- Online survey methods (using the Web)
    - Good for online communities (patterns and attitudes)
    - Variable and factor correlations
- Interviews and Journals
    - Detailed experiences
    - Gain deepen knowledge
- Social network analysis
    - Structure and patterns of relationships
- Observation (participant/non-participant)





Virtual Ethnography: Methods

1. We can use ethnography to investigate the ways in which use of the Internet becomes socially meaningful.
2. Interactive media such as the Internet can be understood as both culture and cultural artefact.

3. The ethnography of mediated interaction often asks researchers to be mobile both virtually and physically.
4. Instead of going to particular field sites, virtual ethnography follows field connections.
5. Boundaries, especially between the "virtual" and the "real", are not to be taken-for-granted.
6. Virtual ethnography is a process of intermittent engagement, rather than long term immersion.
7. Virtual ethnography is necessarily partial. Our accounts can be based on strategic relevance to particular research questions rather than faithful representations of objective .
8. Intensive engagement with mediated interaction adds an important reflexive dimension to ethnography.
9. This is ethnography *of, in and through the virtual – we learn about the Internet by immersing ourselves in it and conducting our ethnography using it, as well as talking with people about it, watching them use it and seeing it manifest in other social settings.*
10. Virtual ethnography is, ultimately, an adaptive ethnography which sets out to suit itself to the conditions in which it finds itself.

Please consider in general:

- Alteration
- Anonimity
- Access
- Archiving

Please consider in practicing Virtual Ethnography:

The importance of developing appropriate researcher presence
The limitations of covert ethnography – negotiating consent is about more than just ethical duty
The importance of participating in and understanding a communication ecology
Members check
Limitations: honesty and trustworthiness of online communicators
Consider content analysis as well

Langer, R.; Beckman, S. Sensitive Research Topics: Netnography Revisited. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, 8(2): 189-203

3. Interviews and Life Histories

Benefits and Weaknesses

Benefits	**Weaknesses**
Holistic data	Time consuming
Direct interaction	Difficulty of controlling veracity – Need to contrast
Deep data	
Useful in several phases of the research	
Interpretative	

Types:

- Structured / Semistructed /Focalized / Open
- Individual / Group
- On a topic / On the people
- Exploratory /descriptive / Interpretative /Prospective / Contrast

Individual interviews

- Preparing the interview
  - Describe the goals
  - Sampling and selection of people
    - Best informed, friendly, accessible
    - Profiles
  - Organize the questions (according to categories)
  - Formulation of the questionnary
- Performing the interview
  - Presentation
  - Purpose
  - Selection of the interviewee
  - Anomymity and Confidentiality
  - Permission to record, time, etc.
  - Topics
  - Questions
- Structure of the interview

- Introduction
- Questions to discover questions (completing the questionnary)
- Focalization and deepening
- Central versus contextual questions
- Closure

Type of questions
- Comparative
- Questions on the past (memories)
- Affective reactions
- Cause-effect relations
- Complementary information
- Conditional
- Indagatory

Some strategies
- Silence
- Elaboration
- Assertion and repetition
- Recapitulation
- Further information
- Changing the topic
- Post-interview

Life histories (and oral history)
- Definitions
  - Narration of one person's life (or passages of life) in a serial conversation.
  - Longitudinal
  - Conventional: one life = social phenomenon
  - One or multiple stories
    - Cross stories
    - Parallel stories
- Benefits and Weaknesses

Benefits	**Weaknesses**
Quick method	Different levels of participation
Non-expected data	Group effect
Price	Different individual habilities

Rich answers	
Social discourse	

Preparing the life history interview
- Profile
- Motivation
- Time, place, number of interviews
- Guidelines

Structure
- Introduction
- Inviation to speak freely
- Use of pictures, documents, etc. to trigger the memories
- No need to rush
    - From general to specific
    - Avoid self-including answering questions
    - Avoid yes-no questions
- Closure (consensus)
- Gratification
- One-two hours long

Exemple of transcription record file:

- **Datos Personales**
- Nombre / Pseudónimo (opcional)
- Año de nacimiento (edad en el momento de la entrevista)
- Lugar de nacimiento / Lugar de residencia
- Familia de origen
- Formación (titulación máxima) / Actividad actual (profesión)
- Estado civil y numero de hijos
- Otras actividades relevantes (asociaciones...)
- **Datos Entrevista**
- Dirección y teléfono Informante
- Fecha Entrevista / Lugar entrevista
- Nombre entrevistador
- **Datos Transcripción**
- Páginas de transcripción
- Materiales complementarios
- Limitaciones para la consulta y la citación
- consentimiento

4. Focus groups

Definitions

Socialized (and focused) conversation

Freedom to express thoughts, feelings, mental structures...

Collective dialogue and interaction

Focalization and deepening

Seeking for homogeneity from heterogenity

Benefits and Weaknesses

Benefits	Weaknesses
Help for hypothesis	Good informant are scarce
Useful for social behaviors	Information control
Useful for change measurement	Impatience
Illustrative	

Preparing the focus group session:
- Describe the goals
- Sampling and selection of people
- Organize the questions (according to categories)
- Prepare the place and recording system
  - Neutrality,
  - special rooms (with one-side mirrors),
  - same status

Participants
- Sampling and selection of people
  - According to the goals and variables
  - Profiles (stratification)
  - Representative – Non statistical, but meaningful
- 6-8 people
- With no previous relationships
- More people in mind than the necessary

Structure of the focus group session
- Introduction
- Individual presentation
- Ice-breaking question
- Development, according to some guidelines
  - From general to specific
  - Avoid self-including answering questions
  - Avoid yes-no questions
- Closure (consensus)
- Gratification
- One-two hours long

Treating the information
- Segments
- Codification and categorization
- Analysis and description
  - Partial or total transcription
  - Report
  - Participants' codification

Further Readings (correspondence with the support stuff)
Main texts: Beneito-Montagut, R. Ethnography goes online: Towards a User-centred methodology [06_ethnography_online.pdf]

Fielding, N. G. Qualitative Research and Our Digital Future [07_qualitative_research_digital_futures.pdf]
Methodological articles: Callejo Gallego, J. Observación, entrevista y grupo de discusión [observacion_entrevista_grupo_discusion.pdf] Kitzinger, J. Introducing Focus Groups [focus_groups.pdf] Lunt, P. Rethinking the Focus Group in Media and Communications Research [foucs_group_02.pdf] Hine, C. Virtual Ethnography [virtual_ethnography.pdf] Langer, R.; Beckman, S. C. Sensitive Research Topics: Netnography Revisited [netnography.pdf]

Consensus methods

The panel specialists arrive at conclusions and recommendations through consensus. Specifically appointed for the evaluation.

1. Delphi
   - Prediction technique (origin Rand Corporation)
   - Goal: arriving to an agreement, decreasing dispertion and maintaining dissidence
   - Sequential anonymous query
     - Occurrence degree (probability)
     - Importance degree
     - Tendencies
     - Categorized answers, if possible
   - Phases
     - Problem
     - Experts recruitment
     - Launching the query
       - From 2 to 4 rounds
       - From 10 to 30 people
     - Results
   - Answers reconsidered

Redundant information is eliminated

Benefits and Weaknesses:

Benefits	Weaknesses
No physical presence required – participants worldwide	Time consuming
Predictive	Well-known participants
It avoids leadership effect	Professional interest
Flexible	Lack of answer and abandon
Low cost	

Expert Panel

"The main task of an expert panel is usually synthesising a variety of inputs – testimony, research reports, outputs of forecasting methods, etc. – and produce a report that provides a vision and/or recommendations for future possibilities and needs for the topics under analysis."

Slocum, N. *Participatory Methods Toolkit. A practitioner's manual. Method: Expert Panel.* Brussels, King Baudouin Foundation and the Flemish Institute for Science and Technology Assessment , 2005

When to use an expert panel?

- Studying very specific fields requiring a high level of competence.
- Studying subjects for which other tools are difficult to implement at a reasonable cost
- Carrying out limited-scope evaluations.
- Assisting the evaluators in their conclusions on a subject in complex evaluations
- Providing assistance in the drafting of final conclusions relating to the possible impacts of a programme

Recruiting experts:

Professional Experience

+

Independence

+

Ability to work in groups

Taking into account the number of required disciplines

... and a chairman.

Procedures

First panel sesión

- The panel's organisation and the role of each member.
- The type of investigation, the data collection methodology, and details of each panellist's task (such as field visits)
- The intervention work programme, the organisation of future sessions and their contents.

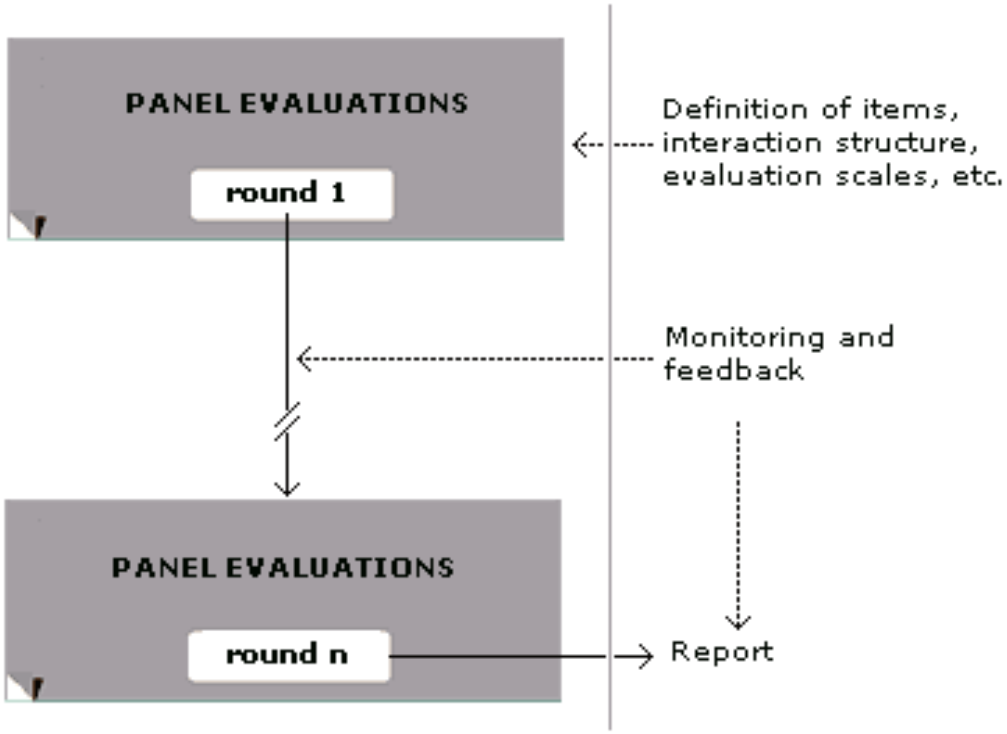
Next panel sessions:

- The work carried out since the previous session
- Findings from investigations which are completed or in process

- Problems encountered
- Progress in editing the various documents, the review process, and quality control over these documents
- The tasks to be achieved before the next session and its envisaged content
- Confidentiality of the panel's debates

And finally, a report

If desired, the report can be submitted for revission to the members of the panel, prior to public dissemination.



A hybrid method: Face-to-face workshop

The workshop group is intentionally kept very small in order to promote maximum interaction, and thus is not inclusive of all persons doing key research in this field. However, it is hoped that this face-to face workshop would build the basis for broader exchange of research approaches and results in a more continuous manner

Nominal Group Technique

> The NGT is a structured method for capturing and aggregating opinions emerging from a group of experts who physically coincide in terms of place and time [...] a particular case of FG
>
> Landeta *et al.* Hybrid Delphi, *Technological Forecasting & Social Change* 78, 2011: 1629-1641

When to use a NGT?

- To generate some ideas and be sure that all members participate free from other participants' influence.
- To identify priorities or select alternatives.
- When the ideas can be controversial or participants are shame

Recruiting the members of the group

Members of a research group or project

...and a facilitator

Procedures

A place for the participants to write

Explain the focus question(s)

Silent brainstorm ideas

A round for sharing ideas

Discussion and Considerations of Alternatives (even voting)

Ranking items (two or more rounds possible)

Final discussion

An (internal) report

Benefits and Weaknesses

Benefits	Weaknesees
Encourages equal participation and provides and structured framework	Forces everyone to have a voice
Identify issues and opportunities, strategic problems and solutions, and determine research items	Keeping all ideas equally visible is not always easy
Adopting collective decisions	Voting simplifies too much a further development of the ideas (list reduction) and minimizes discussion

It is focused on important topics	It focuses on a single-purpose and single-topic.

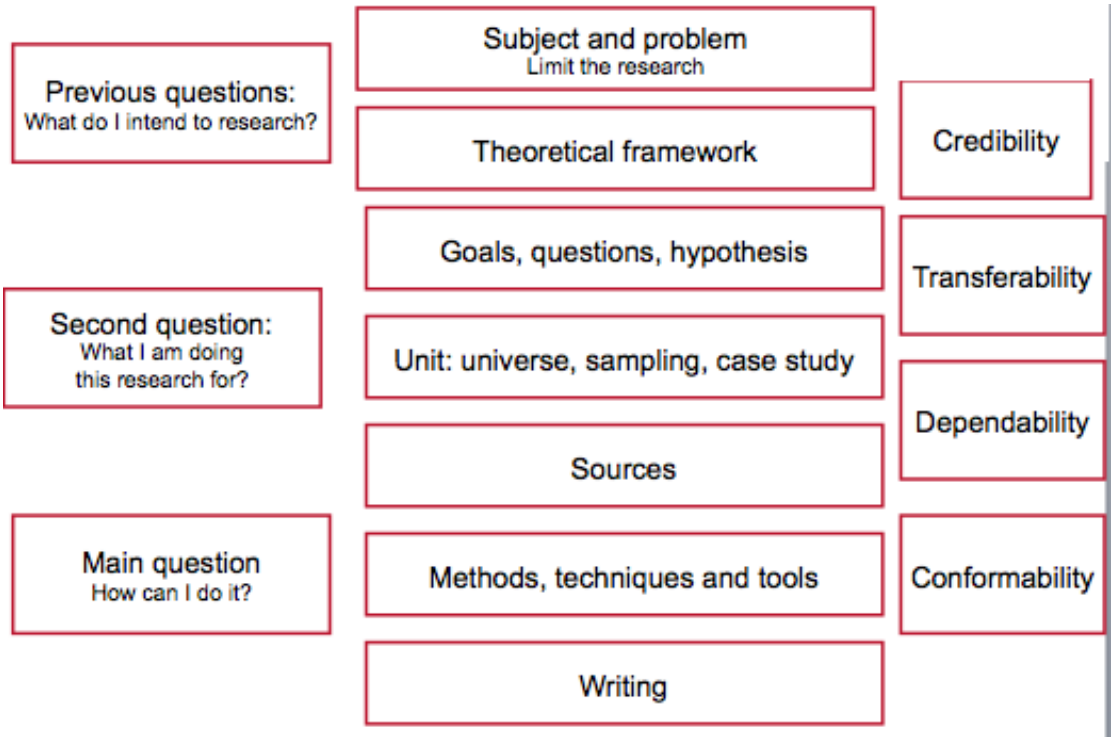
Further Readings (correspondence with the support stuff)
Methodological articles: Landeta, J.; Barrutia, J.; Lertxundi, A. Hybrid Delphi: A methodology to facilitate contribution form experts in professional contexts. [delphi.pdf] Estabrook, R. E.; Schutt, R. K.; Woodford, M. L. Translating Research intro Practice: The participatory expert panel approach [expert_panel.pdf] Participatory Methods Toolkit. Expert Panel [expert_panel_02.pdf] Gaining consensus among stakeholders through the Nominal Group Technique [nominal_group_technque.pdf]
Examples: De la Fuente, M. *et al.* Mass Media and Multimedia Convergence: A Research Proposal for Evaluation of Online Newspapers [evaluation_example.pdf]

5
...and finally: Writing the Paper

"Once the researcher has settled on a strategy, chosen a site, selected a sample, and determined the methods to be adopted for collecting data, he or she should discuss how he or she will record, manage, analyze, and interpret the data."

Source: Marshall, K. *Designing Qualitative Research*, p. 205

A Map of a Research Project



Preliminary Concerns

- Think about the Orientation
- Triangulation for Validity
- Searching for Patterns (of Thought and Behavior)

Data Collection

- Field Notes
- Memoranda (summaries)
- Interim Reports (preliminary summaries)
- Bibliography
- Text itself:

- Transcription (verbatim?)
- Use the present tense
- Disappear yourself
- Revise and edit the text

Source: Fetterman, D. *Ethnography*, p. 113 ss.

Organize your text

The process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to a mass of collected data

Source: Marshall, K. *Designing Qualitative Research*, p. 205

Table of Contents

- The Problem
- Review of Literature
- Methods of the Study
- The School in the Study
- Findings
- Summary & Conclusions
- References
- The Interviews

About the Author

Presentation and Justification

- Topic.
  - How you came to it?
- Interest
  - Personal
  - For the Scholarly Community (link to the State of the Art)
- Justify the approach to the topic based on references, trends, etc.

State of the Art

- Relevant bibliography
  - On the topic (general and specific)
  - On the methods
  - On other aspects:
    - Historical
    - Universe and Samples
    - Case Study.
- Remember to justify it all and link to the topic and approach

Goals

- Enumerate them (even as a list).
- Explain them clearly and link them to the topic and approach
- And to the trends of the state of the art

- Please remember:
  - Goals are not wishful thinking, or personal justification, which can be placed in the preliminary chapters (i.e., in a PhD dissertation that should be placed in the preface, not in the introduction.)

Research Problem and Hypothesis

- The problem is the core part of the research design, especially from an Anglo-Saxon, empirical, data-driven research approach.
- Concepts: It is extremely important to define them using bibliography, not to invent them.
- Hypothesis are few, hierarchized, linked to dependent-independent variables that can be
  - Isolated, define, delimited
  - Measured
- Please remember the type of hypothesis before writing them, and link to the approach and to the goals of your research.

Methodology and Techniques

- Methodology (qualitative, quantitative, mixed)
- Justification.
- Techniques:
  - Please mention concrete techniques, and be as concrete as possible.

Useful Tools

- Maps
- Flowcharts
- Organization Charts
- Matrices
- Statistics

Source: Fetterman, D. *Ethnography*, p. 93-112

References

- Bibliography
- Other Materials
- Please use a consistent citation method (recommended: APA Style)

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