Using Qualitative Methods in Your Evaluation

HOW ARE QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYZED?

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The intent of the qualitative process is to classify and categorize the material collected, interpret the findings, and draw conclusions.

- Marshall & Rossman, 2006
Thinking back to your first job, how successful were you in your first position?

a) Very successful
b) Somewhat successful
c) A little successful
d) Not at all successful

Thinking back to your first job, how successful were you in your first position?

Why?
Overview of Presentation

- Data analysis methods
  - Transcribing
  - Coding
  - Themes
- Reporting
  - Participant voice
- Challenges
  - Avoiding pitfalls

An opportunity to ask questions will be available at the conclusion of each section
Analysis of Data

How do we analyze the information we have collected?

- **Complete Transcription**
  - Data must be in a reviewable format, hard copy or electronic

- **Conduct a Review**
  - Examine and read all of the data

- **Develop Codes**
  - Identify pieces of data that are similar

- **Identify Patterns and Themes**
  - Determine the commonalities across the data
Coding Process: Overview

Coding is a process that involves purposefully interpreting information:

What is/are the intent and meanings of the individuals involved?
What is the context of the situation?

Codes are based on:
Important keywords and phrases, critical evaluation concepts and topics, participant behavior, etc.

Only relevant data is coded
Creating and using a code book helps to keep track of work.
Coding Process

• Deductive Coding
  ○ Prior to beginning coding, you create a list of codes to use when analyzing your data
  ○ Pre-set themes/codes/categories
    ▪ Provides direction to how you break the data into snippets or chunks
    ▪ Based on previously known information, theory, data, etc.
    ▪ Known as “a priori” codes
      ○ From generality to a particular instance
Coding Process

- **Inductive Coding**
  - More commonly known as Grounded Analysis
    - Codes are developed as you read through your data and think about what it says
    - Codes emerge from the data
  - Typically involves three types of coding
    - **Open coding**
      - Use the text to find concepts and categories within the data
    - **Axial coding**
      - Use your concepts and categories while re-reading the text
      - Confirm accuracy and explore relationships
    - **Selective Coding**
      - Review with the intent to eliminate and/or combine codes
Coding Process

Steps in the coding process

- **Code**
  - Read through data
  - Systematically mark similar types or strings of text with the same code name
    - Apply codes to groupings of text (snippets, blocks, chunks)
- **Categorize**
  - Overall intent is to identify categories and meanings within the text
  - Group codes and concepts together
    - Look for connections between codes
  - Read for commonalities and differences
Coding Process

Steps in the coding process, continued:

- **Analyze**
  - Systematically retrieve pieces of text that are related
  - Identify patterns in data
    - Look for themes
  - Draw conclusions
- **Finish**
  - Done when saturation is reached of codes, concepts, and themes
Berkowitz (1997) suggests considering six questions when coding and analyzing qualitative data:

- What common themes emerge in responses about specific topics? How do these patterns (or lack thereof) help to illuminate the broader central question(s)?
- Are there deviations from these patterns? If so, are there any factors that might explain these deviations?
- How are participants' environments or past experiences related to their behavior and attitudes?
Coding Process

- Berkowitz’s six, continued:
  - What interesting stories emerge from the responses? How do they help illuminate the central question(s)?
  - Do any of these patterns suggest that additional data may be needed? Do any of the central questions need to be revised?
  - Are the patterns that emerge similar to the findings of other studies on the same topic? If not, what might explain these discrepancies?
The coding process is not lateral
- You will likely code and re-code
- You should group codes together
- As you code, you will be looking for themes
- Time consuming process

Creating a visual matrix or display may help with the analysis
Coding Process

- Computer-assisted coding
  - Advantages to having data on the computer
    - Provides you with the ability to more easily manipulate / handle / play with the data
    - Allows for organization and re-organization
    - Able to create and explore different possibilities of data analysis and interpretation
  - Ways to make use
    - Highlight groups of text in color
    - Insert memos and notes
    - Link codes and themes by moving data around
Qualitative Reporting

HOW ARE QUALITATIVE DATA REPORTED?
Reporting the Findings

- Using qualitative methods allow for the added advantage of including participants’ voices through the use of quotes
  - Direct quotes give you the ability to illustrate your findings in a much more powerful way:
    - “How can I be expected to get to the literacy program on-time when the bus doesn’t show up at the same time each day. It isn’t reliable, so I can’t rely on it.”
Reporting the Findings

- Important to document your methods for the reader
  - Choice of the method and how the analysis is completed are critical parts of your evaluation
  - This is especially true for qualitative evaluation, due to the variety of options to collect, code, and analyze
    - Options many are not familiar with
Challenges

WHAT TO WATCH OUT FOR...
Challenges of Qualitative Data

- Lots (and lots) of data
  - Data reduction is an ongoing goal during and following data collection
    - Thoroughly and extensively coding helps with data management
  - Collect enough to meet your evaluation goals and stop
    - Known as saturation

- The clock doesn’t stop
  - Be sure to allow for a realistic time frame for collecting data, transcribing (if necessary), coding, and writing
  - Qualitative process is time consuming
Challenges of Qualitative Data

• Why are we here again?
  ○ Align your method choice with the evaluation objectives
    ▹ Collect data in a way that:
      ○ Provides answers to what you are seeking
      ○ Matches what is available to you
  ○ Create a data plan at the beginning of your evaluation and keep it
Challenges of Qualitative Data

- Is this qualitative evaluation data strong enough?
  - Triangulation
    - Cross-check your data to reduce bias
    - Use multiple methods of data collection, gather multiple viewpoints, etc.
  - Validation
    - Also called ‘member checking’
    - Some participants are given the opportunity to review copies of the transcribed data and the results section
Questions?

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