

Qualitative Research 101

Erin E. Sullivan, PhD, Research Director
Harvard Medical School Center for Primary Care
October 25th, 2017



Audience Poll



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

How comfortable are you with qualitative research?

1. Not at all/don't use qualitative skills
2. I formally learned about qualitative research (for example in graduate school), but do not use regularly
3. Somewhat comfortable
4. Very comfortable

Webinar Agenda



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

1. What is qualitative research?
2. Why qualitative research?
3. What are some limitations?
4. What are some data collection methods and how are they used?



Qualitative Research



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

- Answers the *why's* and *how's* of human behavior, opinion, and experience
- Addresses questions about people's ways of organizing, relating to, and interacting with the world



QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Traditional definitions



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

Quantitative Methods

- Founded in the positivist paradigm - views the object of the study as independent of the researcher
- Reality as a concrete structure which can be tested and measured and generalizable rules generated
- Tend to be deductive in nature

Qualitative Methods

- Funded in subjectivist paradigm - sees the object of study as something that is socially constructed to a greater or lesser extent
- Knowledge is context and time dependent
- Tend to be inductive and descriptive in nature

(Morgan and Smircich, 1980; Krauss, 2005)

Comparing qualitative with quantitative data



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

Qualitative Data	Quantitative Data
Open-ended information, gathered through interviews, observing sites, or gathering documents from a public or private source	Closed-ended information, often on attitude, behavior, or performance instruments
Constructivist philosophy: value-bound research with explanations generated inductively from the data	Positivist philosophy: social science inquiry revealing time- and context-free generalizations
Used to answer questions about why a given intervention does or does not work	Used to answer questions about whether or not a given intervention works
Analysis entails aggregating the words or images collected into information categories and presenting the diversity of ideas	Analysis entails statistically analyzing scores collected on instruments, checklists, or public documents to test hypotheses

What a qualitative approach brings...



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

Qualitative

- 'Complex', rich data
- Meaning
- Understanding
- Interpretation
- Contextual Account
- Purposive
- Representative/ perspective sample
- Exploratory
- Accepts Subjectivity
- Open system (ecological validity)

Quantitative

- 'Simple', numeric data
- Measurement
- Explanation
- Prediction
- Generalizable account
- Representative Population Sample
- Hypothesis-testing
- Claims objectivity
- Closed system (experimental control)

Methodological Fit Archetypes in Field Research



**CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE**
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

State of Prior Theory and Research	Nascent	Intermediate	Mature
Research Questions	Open-ended inquiry about a phenomenon of interest	Proposed relationships between new and established constructs	Focused questions and/or hypotheses relating existing constructs
Type of data collected	Qualitative, initially open-ended data that need to be interpreted for meaning	Hybrid (both qualitative and quantitative)	Quantitative data; focused measures where extent or amount is meaningful
Illustrative methods for collecting data	Interviews; observations; obtaining documents or material from field sites relevant to phenomena of interest	Interviews; observations; surveys; obtaining material from field sites relevant to the phenomena of interest	Survey; interviews or observations designed to be systematically coded and quantified; obtaining data from sites that measure extent or amount of salient constructs

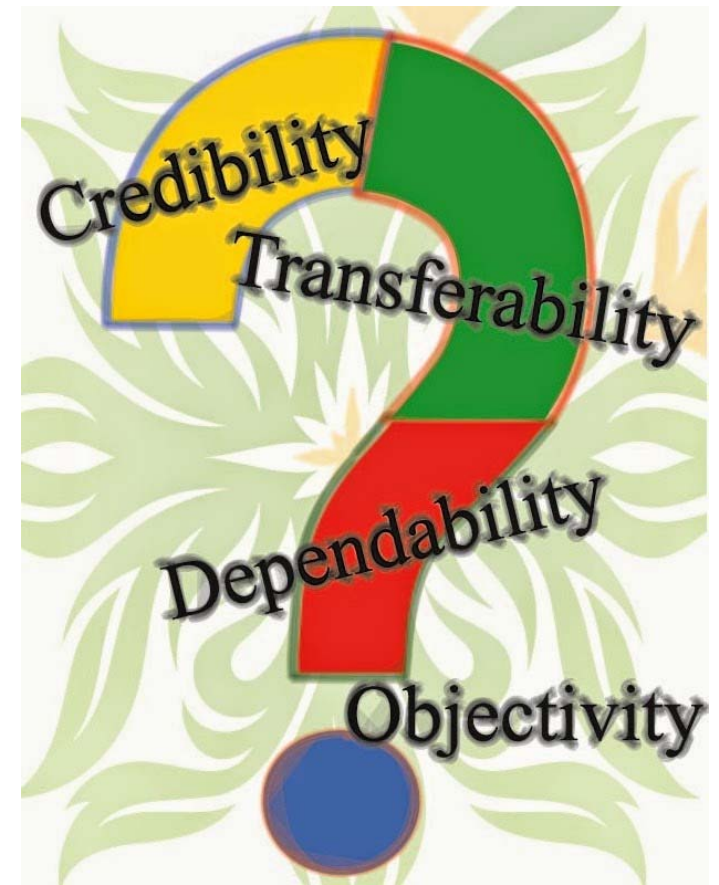
(Edmondson and McManus, 2007)

Limitations of qualitative approaches



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

- Sample sizes are small
- Snowball sampling can bias the sample and reduce replicability
- Open to different interpretations by different analysts
- Causal relationships are difficult to establish since variables are not controlled for
- Labour intensive and time consuming



How do we overcome these limitations?



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL



Commonly used methods of overcoming qualitative research limitations include the triangulation of data and use of mixed methods research approaches

Audience Word Cloud



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

In one word, what would you like to use qualitative methods for in your current role?

Qualitative Data Collection Methods



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL



Qualitative Data Collection Methods



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL



Conversation vs. Interview



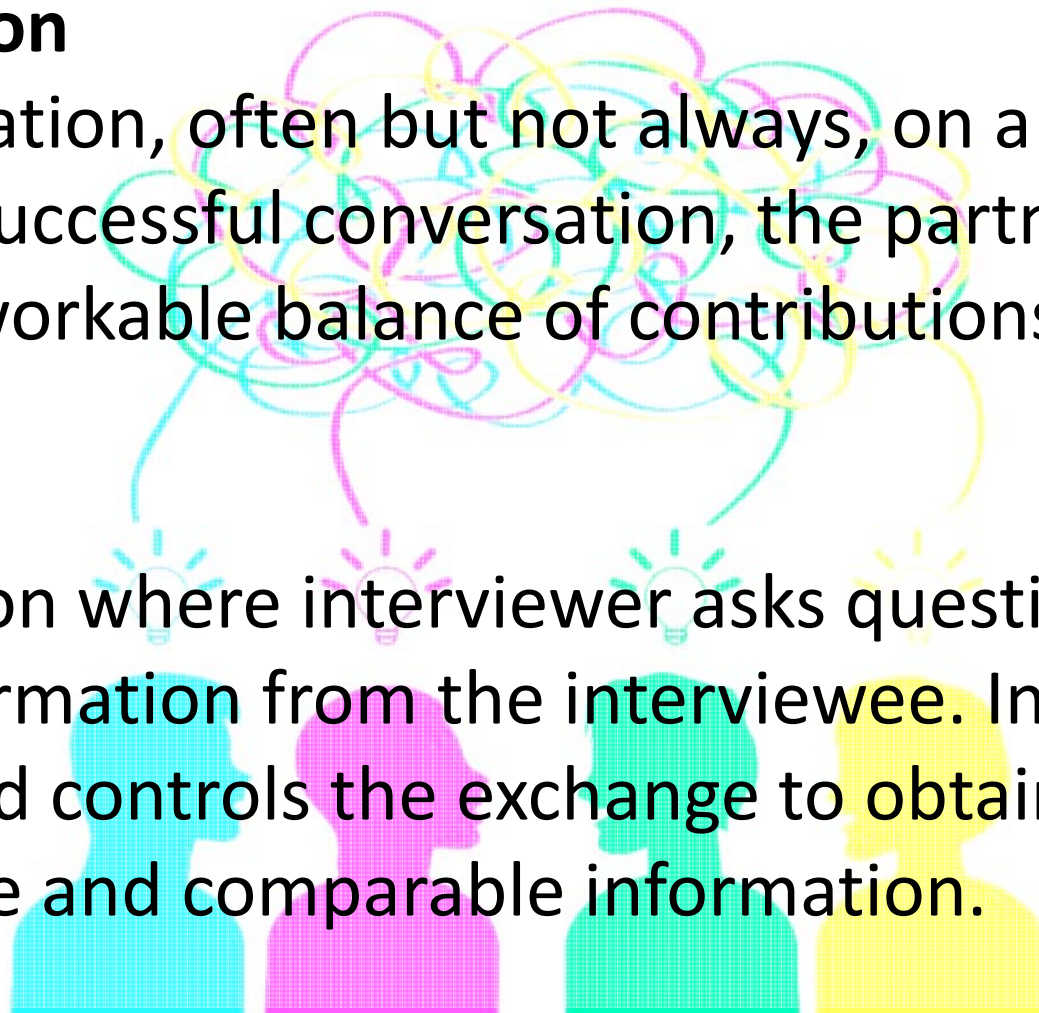
CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

Conversation

Communication, often but not always, on a particular topic. For successful conversation, the partners must achieve a workable balance of contributions.

Interview

Conversation where interviewer asks questions to obtain information from the interviewee. Interviewer initiates and controls the exchange to obtain quantifiable and comparable information.



Semi-structured Interview Technique



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

1. There is an attempt to establish rapport with the participant
2. The ordering of questions is less important
3. The interviewer is free to probe/ prompt discussion of interesting issues that may arise
4. The interviewer can follow the respondent's interests or concerns
5. Questions to be open-ended, rather than closed
6. Questions should be neutral rather than leading
7. Questions to be framed in the language and terms of the participant

(Adapted from Smith, 1995)

Focus Groups



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

Focus groups can be used to gather information on collective views, and the meaning that underpins those views. They generate a rich understanding of participant' experiences and beliefs.

Suggested criteria for using focus groups includes:

- A standalone method, for understanding and analyzing group norms, meanings, and processes
- In a multi-method design, to explore group language and narrative at a later point
- To clarify, qualify, extend, or challenge data collected using other qualitative approaches
- To communicate results to research participants

(Gill et al 2008)

Skills for Effective Communication



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

Sender	Speaking and gesturing
Receiver	Active listening and seeing
Active listening skills	Reflecting back and summarizing, eye-contact, facial expression, and nodding

Interview Preparation



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

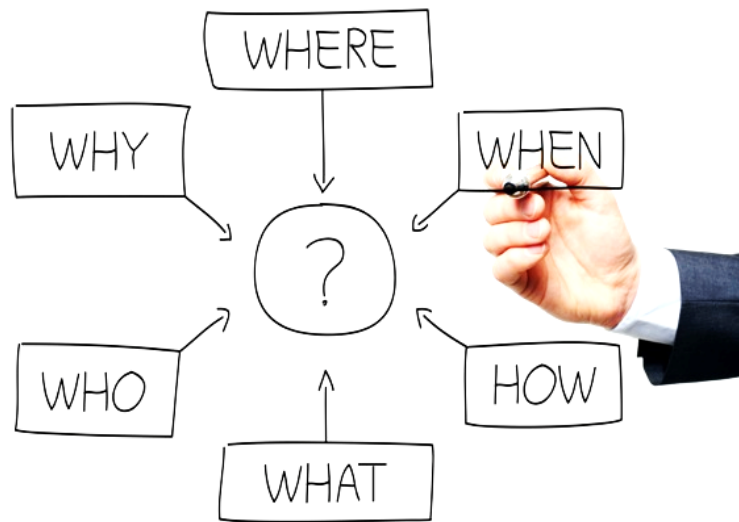
- Selected key informants and interview subjects
- Write questions in advance and have them out at the time of the interview
- Be familiar with the questions and practice beforehand
- Have recording equipment on hand and ready for immediate use
- Know how long the interview will take



More Tricks of the Trade



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL



- Be on time and prepared
- Maintain eye-contact
- Keep in mind the interviewees' responses may be affected by their relationship to you
- Give the interviewee time to think as well as talk
- Use probing questions to clarify responses and obtain more information

Managing Your Data



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

Transcription should be:

- Be immediate
- Use transcription protocols
- Be stored in a way that preserves confidentiality (as per the terms of your IRB/institutional standards)



Analyzing Your Data



CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

Beyond the scope of what we have time for today

- NVivo (QSR International)
- Atlas.ti
- Dedoose





**CENTER FOR
PRIMARY CARE**
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL

THANK YOU!

Erin E. Sullivan, Ph.D.

Research Director

Erin_Sullivan@hms.harvard.edu