Chapter 19
Challenges in Collecting Qualitative Data for Information Systems Studies

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a shift towards understanding why things happen in the way that they do from the qualitative perspectives. However, the qualitative methods are sometimes considered either too trivial or difficult by many postgraduate students. This is attributed to the fact that there is a lack of formula or specific procedure in the application of the methods, which manifest from its subjective nature. The subjectivism makes it even more difficult during data collection and analysis, mainly because it requires special skills and knowledge to interrogate the subject within context. Many postgraduate students fall short in their attempts to exhume quality and rich data from the participants in their natural settings as they develop, implement, use, and interact with systems. This is the main reason why two empirical studies of the same objectives could possibly produce different results.

INTRODUCTION

In research, problem is not necessarily something that is broken, but phenomenon which require further or an in-depth investigation for a fresh perspective. Thus, every research necessitates a problem statement, goal and objectives, which determines the data collection methods. The data type can be either quantitative or qualitative. According to Seidman (2012), depending on the objectives of the study, either the qualitative or quantitative research methods are selected for data collection. However, both methods can be selected, which is referred to as a mixed method (Barbour 2013; Silverman 2013).

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The choice of research methods is critical in that they influences the way in which data is collected and analysed. According to Myers and Avison (2002,p70), qualitative research methods were developed in the social sciences to enable researchers to study social and cultural phenomena. The primary purpose of qualitative research is to understand a phenomenon as it is seen by respondents within a period and space. This is achieved by studying the respondents in their natural environments. Yin (2010) takes the argument further and states that the events and ideas emerging from qualitative research can represent the meanings given to real life events by the people who live them, not the values, perceptions or meanings held by researchers. However, the meaning which individuals and groups give or associate to events of Information systems and technologies (IS/IT) has never been easy for researchers to understand.

BACKGROUND

IS/IT are used to support and enable organisations' operations including strategic intents. IS/IT does not operate in vacuum, but in socially constructed environments. According to Iyamu, Sekgweleo and Mkhmazi (2014), IS is not only made up of technology by its self, it also includes human and non-human actors, making it more complex than often seen from afar. The multifaceted nature of information systems does not make studies in the field easier. Also, there is a great diversity in the research methods and approaches that are employed in IS studies (Myers & Avison, 2002). However, it is believed that qualitative research methods are being used increasingly in evaluation of IS/IT studies (Kaplan & Maxwell, 2005). Qualitative methods are often employed to study the socio-technical aspects of IS, and to help researchers including postgraduate students to draw conclusions on why things happen in the way that they do (Iyamu, 2010).

Theoretically, many postgraduate students in the field of IS are knowledgeable about data collection methods, techniques and approaches. However, in practice, there are numerous challenges in how their knowledge is applied (Hennink, Hutter & Ajay, 2011). This has led to many students not able to complete their studies, or take longer to do so. This is the primary motivation of this study. This chapter discusses hands-on experience, reveals pitfalls and challenges in collecting qualitative data, using semi-structured technique, towards achieving research objectives. The remainder of this article is divided into six main parts. The first and second covers literature review. The third discusses the processes that are involved in data collection. The fourth presents the major challenges that are encountered when the semi-structured method is employed in data collection. Future research is stated in the sixth part. Finally, a conclusion is drawn.

RESEARCH QUALITATIVE DATA

The qualitative research methods are considered to be most appropriate for studying the social world. Hence the type of data is critical, from the perspectives of actors' intentional and unintentional acts. Erickson (2012) emphasises that the essential purposes of qualitative research methods are to document in detail, the conduct of everyday events, and to identify the meanings according to those who participate and witness them. According to Kaplan and Maxwell (2005), qualitative methods are primarary