

Chapter 10

Qualitative Data Analysis

ABSTRACT

This chapter illustrates how to do qualitative data analysis. The principles of grounded theory methodology are taken as the main reference for developing a rigorous analysis of the data. Several examples and case studies are discussed to show the practicalities of qualitative data analysis. While explaining the mechanisms of qualitative data analysis, this chapter frames data analysis as part of the overall research process. Methods used in qualitative research give access to people's stories and experiences through language and captures the complexities of social processes. Grounded theory methodology is used to illustrate an approach to coding. Coding is about finding key themes in qualitative data in the form of a text and developing explanations of the research questions. Several approaches to coding—from open and axial coding to selective coding—are systematically presented. Issues of validity and reliability of qualitative data are also addressed within the overall process of research and data analysis leading to the writing-up.

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapters have illustrated what the different types of research and the different types of methods are. Qualitative Methodologies and Ethnography have been discussed and presented respectively in chapter 6 and chapter 7. This chapter focuses on data analysis in Qualitative Research and introduces the reader on the procedures and techniques necessary for this analysis.

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Qualitative data analysis is, of course, linked to qualitative research and this chapter will show that these approaches are not part of two different stages, but they feed into each other and the one informs the other. As the researcher gathers the data and works in the field, an analysis of the data is already occurring because people will produce narratives that either answer the initial research questions, and thus invite further, more detailed questions, or open up different perspectives, which need to be analysed during the research to assess their explanatory potential.

This chapter illustrates how to do qualitative data analysis through examples, showing how qualitative research produces rich data and how its analysis can formulate answers to the initial research questions and still allow new themes to emerge from the data itself. Qualitative research can be very flexible in that sense and the analysis of qualitative data can take the researcher to unexpected issues. Qualitative data analysis finds a rigorous approach in Grounded Theory (Flick, 2018), which is here at the centre of the argument. In the first sections, qualitative data analysis has been framed as part of the overall qualitative research process and show how these can be conducted in parallel. A detailed case study of qualitative data analysis is then presented to illustrate how it is done in practice, what kind of issues may emerge during the process of data analysis and what solutions can be found. After the case study, issues of validity and reliability are briefly discussed. Grounded Theory Methodology as a rigorous approach for coding is then explained. A good number of examples of coding is proposed. The last section provides suggestions on how to conclude data analysis and do the writing up.

By the end of this chapter, readers should be able to develop an initial understanding of what is data analysis in qualitative research and how, in principle, data analysis is not separate but part of the qualitative research process. Furthermore, the reader should be able to utilise the approach of Grounded Theory and various forms of coding, be able to let theories emerge from the data (or “*in situ*”) and appreciate issues of validity and reliability in the analysis of qualitative data.

BACKGROUND

Qualitative data analysis is very much linked to the process of qualitative research design and the process of empirical research effectuated in the field. Qualitative methods facilitate a holistic approach to analysing social processes (Flick, 2014), where the explanation of these processes is based on how

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