Introduction to qualitative methods: theory and approach

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Knowledge Network Event

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What is science?

Empiricism:
- Inductive method
- Systematic observation
- Theory building
- Theory testing
- Negation/exclusion
- Critical analysis
- Ethical

Francis Bacon 1561 –1626
Positivism:

Auguste Comte 1798 – 1857
Positivism:

- Deductive method
  - general - specific - general
- Rule of one variable
- Objective
- Quantitative

Auguste Comte 1798 –1857
Relativism:

“Science may be described as the art of systematic oversimplification.”

*The Open Universe: An Argument for Indeterminism* (1992), p. 44

Karl Popper 1902 - 1994
Relativism:

- Science cannot be objective
- Importance of experience
  - both the scientist and participant

“Science may be described as the art of systematic oversimplification.”
*The Open Universe: An Argument for Indeterminism* (1992), p. 44

Karl Popper 1902 - 1994
**Positivism:**
- Quantitative
- Objective
- Reductionist - observable behaviour
- Hypothesis testing
- Value free

**Relativism:**
- Qualitative
- Subjective
- Constructivist - reality/meanings
- Hypothesis generation
- Context dependent
Critical realism:

John Dewey 1859 - 1952
Critical realism:

- Research a process
- Encompasses a range of approaches
- Triangulation
  - accounts for limitations inherent in all research methods

John Dewey 1859 - 1952
Realism

- Accepts the ‘fuzzy’ nature of science
- Puts science in a social context
- Holistic – considers the individual, group and society
- Triangulation enables both theory generation and testing
The quantitative versus qualitative debate?
The quantitative versus qualitative debate?

Deep
Gathering in-depth information but narrow (few participants)

Shallow
Less in-depth information, but wide (many participants)
### Qualitative
- Inductive
- Small sample
- In depth
- Understanding
- Meaning
- Dynamic
- Generate theory
- Authentic

### Quantitative
- Deductive
- Large sample
- General
- Prediction
- Causation
- Controlled
- Test theory
- Reliable
When is a qualitative approach appropriate?

- Sensitive issues
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- Vulnerable groups
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- New topic of enquiry
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- Design of quantitative studies
- Interpretation of quantitative findings
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- Design of quantitative studies
- Interpretation of quantitative findings
- Triangulation
Why adopt a qualitative approach?

Strengths

- Allows depth of understanding
- Naturalistic – minimal control
- Interactive – uses social context
- Dynamic – deploys a range of tools and techniques – can be prospective or longitudinal
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**Strengths**
- Allows depth of understanding
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**Limitation**
- Cannot generalise
Approaches to qualitative data collection:

- Case study
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- Diary
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- Case study
- Diary
- Ethnography
Approaches to qualitative data collection:

- Case study
- Diary
- Ethnography
- Observation
  - participant
  - non participant
Approaches to qualitative data collection:

- Case study
- Diary
- Ethnography
- Observation
  - participant
  - non participant
- Interview
  - individual
  - (focus) group
Approaches to qualitative data collection:
Interview:
- Time intensive
- Private
- Cognitive/Affective
- Greater range of ideas
- Greater researcher bias

Focus group:
- Time efficient
- Social
- Opinions/Attitudes
- Problem of consensus
- Lesser researcher bias
Procedure

- Topic Guide
- Interview schedule
  - No leading questions
  - Focus on topic
  - Probe/prompt
- Data collection complete when no new themes are emerging ‘saturation’
- Record (2 recorders) dialogue
- Transcribe verbatim