

## Qualitative

Observation  
Interview  
Focus groups  
Texts/documents  
Audio / video  
Small number  
In depth  
Focused (fewer)  
How, what, how come  
Social, cultural (naturally occurring)<sup>2</sup>

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## Quantitative

Social Surveys  
- Questionnaires  
- Cards  
- Logs  
Statistics  
large number  
quantity = quality  
broad (many)  
why<sup>1</sup>

### What is best?

- No method of research, quantitative/qualitative is better than any other
- In choosing a method, everything depends upon what we are trying to find out
- Thus, it depends on your research question

(Silverman 2005)

### Qualitative research

“Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts within which they live. [...] The goal of understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and its particular social and institutional context is largely lost when textual data are quantified.” (Myers living version)

## 3 PARADIGMS WITHIN THE IS-FIELD:

### Positivist Research

- \* Reality is objectively given
- \* Reality can be described by measurable properties – independent of the observer and his instruments
- \* Theory testing
- \* Variables: emphasis on quantitative data
- \* Statistical tools and packages are an essential element (Myers living version)

### Interpretive Research

- \* The aim is to understand phenomena through the meanings people assign to them
- \* Interpretive methods of research in IS are "aimed at producing an understanding of the context of the information system, and the process whereby the information system influences and is influenced by the context"
- \* Not predefine dependent and independent variables, but focuses on the full complexity of human sense making as the situation emerges (Myers living version)

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<sup>1</sup> 'Why' questions can be asked within qualitative research, but avoid using them (or wait as long as possible with asking them) – they lead to a path of means and ends / assume that the person knows why / mute open-ended answers / mute the relational. (The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research 2005 + Silverman 2005). 'Why' shouldn't be rubricated under quantitative, but rather under a heading of 'positivism' (Silverman 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Remember that interviews are not naturally occurring, they are 'constructed' by researchers - other artificial research environments: focus groups, experiments, survey, questionnaires. Also, remember that naturally occurring data is coined by what you want to do with them; that is, no data is 'untouched by human hands' (Silverman 2005).

## Critical Research

- \* Social reality is historically constituted and it is produced and reproduced by people
- \* People's ability to change social and economic circumstances is constrained by various forms of social, cultural and political domination
- \* Focuses the oppositions, conflicts and contradictions in contemporary society, and seeks to be *emancipatory* (i.e. help eliminate the causes of alienation and domination)  
(Myers living version)
- \* Within IS the Scandinavian Approach (Participatory Design) is an example of critical research (e.g. Ehn, P. & M. Kyng (1987): *The Collective Resource Approach to Systems Design*. Bjerkenes, G., P. Ehn & M. Kyng (eds.): *Computers and Democracy—A Scandinavian Challenge*. Aldershot, UK: Avebury, pp. 19-57).

One overall issue to be learned is from this is that both within the IS-field and other research fields different philosophical assumptions (paradigms) reside about the world: how we are to understand it, and how we are to study it. This, by turn, has lead to different strategies of inquiry (methodologies) and to different ways of approaching how we gather empirical material and analyze it (methods): "Strategies of inquiry put paradigms of interpretation into motion. At the same time, strategies of inquiry also connect the research to specific methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials. For example, the case study strategy relies on interviewing, observing, and document analysis." (Denzin & Lincoln 2005:25).

## METHODOLOGIES, focus will primarily be on:

- \* Action Research
- \* Case Study
- \* Ethnography
- \* Grounded Theory

## Action Research

History of development within social psychology

- \* Places researchers in a 'helping-role'
- \* Iterations of AR: diagnosing a problem, action planning, action taking implementing and evaluating outcomes. Evaluation leads to a new diagnosis...
- \* Contribution to the practical concerns
- \* Joint collaboration with the people experiencing the problem
- \* Contextuality and participation
- \* Vision: researchers have a vision on how the reality should be – not value free
- \* AR can be both positivist, interpretive, critical  
(Myers living version)

## Case Study

Social science – refined and further developed by the founding fathers of GT Glaser and Strauss.

- \* Case studies involve in-depth examination of a single instance, event or example: a case.
  - \* A case study is an empirical inquiry that:
    - investigates a contemporary instance or event within its real-life context,
    - boundaries between instance, event or example and context are not clearly evident
  - \* IS research: the study of information systems in organizations (not just technical issues)
  - \* Case study research can be positivist, interpretive, or critical.  
(Myers living version)
- Basic resources: interview, observation, document analysis.

## Ethnography

Social and cultural anthropology

- \* Explicit interest in understanding social practices and interactions in diverse communities as they unfold in everyday life.
- \* It's an analytical endeavor.
- \* It seeks descriptions in terms relevant and meaningful to the people studied
- \* It seeks descriptions of what people do rather than what they ought to do (Blomberg et al. 1993)
- \* "Behavioral and organizational patterns [do not] exist "out there" in the world. [...] Patterns of human thought and action are no more visible than the diagnosis of an individual's illness" (Forsythe, 1999:132)
- \* Ethnographers immerse themselves in the world / lives of the people they study
- \* Researcher's positioning, descriptive, reflexivity, longitudinal studies, study natural settings / 'real world', description (vis-à-vis prescription), from the members point-of-view, holism.
- \* Basic resources: *participant* observation, interview, note taking, photo, drawings, documents, (objects, artifacts)

## Grounded Theory

Developed by the sociologists Glaser and Strauss

- \* Theory should be grounded - to take an existing (...) theory or a set of pre-defined concepts as point of departure (...) is a risky endeavor. It means that an external structure is imposed on the data. (Thoresen 1999)
- \* To develop theory that is grounded in data
- \* Special emphasis on continuous interplay between data collection and analysis
- \* "Grounded theorists give priority to developing rather than verifying analytical propositions". (Emerson et al. 1995:143)

### Techniques of grounded theory:

- \* Asking questions aimed at exploring properties, connections, similarities and dissimilarities.
- \* Open coding (process of analysis - breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, categorizing data) reading data carefully to identify and form ideas, themes, or issues provided by the data - generation of analytical categories
- \* Axial coding (process analysis - focus on the phenomena's relationship to the context in which they occur + their relationship to each other) - relate the (above separate) pieces of data
- \* Code notes (memos - writing / forming theoretical propositions - focus on phenomena - breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and putting together data in new ways) - locating series of phenomena, topic or categories
- \* Open and axial coding serves to make complexity visible and systematic (Thoresen 1999).

## METHODS:

- \* Observation (passive, participant): objects, people, events, place (naturally occurring)
- \* Text and document analysis (e.g. screen dumps, newspapers, letters, agreements, brochures, etc.)
- \* Interviews: structured, semi-structured, open-ended (not naturally occurring settings)
- \* Video / audio -> tapes can be studied over and over and be re-transcribed.
- \* Focus groups -> group discussions usually based upon stimuli (topics, visual aids) provided by the researcher
- \* Note taking. Describe what you observe / encounter / hear / smell / engage in. Remember: date, time, place, persons present (roles, occupation, affiliation). Video, photos, tape recordings serve as good memorable-tones, but remember to 'log' them. (Blomberg et al. 1993 + Silverman 2005)

### **Analyzing field material you can ask the following questions:**

- \* What are people doing? What are they trying to accomplish?
- \* How, exactly, do they do this? What specific means and/or strategies do they use?
- \* How do members talk about, characterize, and understand what is going on?
- \* What assumptions are they making?
- \* What do I see going on here? What did I learn from these notes?
- \* Why did I include them? (Emerson et al. 1995:146)

### **Concepts:**

- \* Paradigm -> a pattern of thinking, a set of philosophical assumptions.
- \* Theory -> a set of propositions providing the principles of analysis or explanation.
- \* Analysis -> breaking something down into smaller parts to gain understanding of it.
- \* Ontology -> theory of reality, existence, being (what is reality, how does something come into being).
- \* Epistemology -> theory of knowledge (why do we believe as we do? – how do I know the world?).
- \* Methodology -> research strategy, strategy of inquiry (how do we gain knowledge of the world).
- \* Method -> a way to arrange the generation and/or analysis of material + write up your research.
- \* Reflexivity -> the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher. (Denzin & Lincoln 2005 + Mautner 2005)<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Literature not listed on syllabus:

Denzin, N. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005): Introduction. The Discipline and Practice of qualitative Research. In Denzin & Lincoln (eds) 2005: *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Sage Publications.  
Mautner, T. (2005): *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*. Penguin Books.  
Silverman, D. (2005): *Doing Qualitative Research*. Sage.