Research Approach: Qualitative Approach
Qualitative Research

*Qualitative research reveal people’s values, interpretive schemes, mind maps, belief systems and rules of living so that the respondents’ reality can be understood.

*Emphasizes careful and detailed descriptions of social practices in an attempt to understand how participants experience and explain their own world (Jackson, 1995).

*Seen to be depth understanding of human behavior.

*Aim: to discover how humans construct meanings in their contextual setting.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantitative research</th>
<th>Qualitative research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reality is objective and singular, and apart from the researcher</td>
<td>Reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in a study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher is independent of that being researched</td>
<td>Researcher interacts with that being researched</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research is assumed to be value-free and unbiased</td>
<td>Research is value-laden and biased, with values generally made explicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theory is largely causal and deductive</td>
<td>Theory can be causal or non-causal, and if often inductive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hypotheses that the researcher begins with are tested</td>
<td>Meaning is captured and discovered once the researcher becomes immersed in the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concepts are in the form of distinct variables</td>
<td>Concepts are in the form of themes, motifs, generalisations, taxonomies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measures are systematically created before data collection and are standardised</td>
<td>Measures are created in an ad hoc manner and are often specific to the individual setting or researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative research (cont.)</td>
<td>Qualitative research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Data are in the form of numbers from precise measurement</td>
<td>• Data are in the form of words from documents, observations and transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There are generally many cases or subjects</td>
<td>• There are generally few cases or subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Procedures are standard, and replication is assumed</td>
<td>• Research procedures are particular, and replication is rare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Analysis proceeds by using statistics, tables or charts, and discussing how what they show relates to hypotheses</td>
<td>• Analysis proceeds by extracting themes or generalisations from evidence and organising data to present a coherent, consistent picture.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sources:** Cresswell (1994:5); Neuman (1997:14, 329).
Study design in Qualitative Research

- Case study
- Oral history
- Focus groups / group interviews
- Participant observation
- Holistic research
- Community discussion forums
- Reflective journal log
Case study

- A case could be an individual, a group, a community, an instance, an episode, an event, a subgroup of a population, a town or a city.
- Should focus on a bounded subject/unit that is either very representative or extremely atypical.
- Is characterized by a very flexible and open-ended technique of data collection and analysis.
- Exploring an area where little is known or where you want to have a holistic understanding of the situation, phenomenon, episode, site, etc.
- Exploring and understanding rather than confirming and quantifying.
- Overview and in-depth understanding of case(s).
- Cannot claim to make generalizations to a population.
Methods to collect data in case study

- In-depth interviewing
- Obtaining information from secondary records
- Gathering data through observations
- Collecting information through focus groups and group interviews
Oral history

To study perception, experiences and accounts of an event or gathering historical knowledge, viewed by individuals – eye-witness evidence.

First person narratives that researcher collects using extensive interviewing of a single individual (Burns, 1997).

Steps:
1) Decide what you want to find about
2) identify the individuals/source that can provide information.
3) Collect information
4) Analyzed and interpreted
Focus groups / group interviews

- Strategy to explore issue, products, service, etc. through a free and open discussion between the group members and researcher.
- Often use in social, political, behavioral, market, product testing, marketing research, etc.
- Useful for exploring the diversity in opinions on different issues.

- Advantages:
  - Low cost
  - Less time to complete
  - Information are detailed and rich

- Disadvantage:
  - Domination in group – if the discussion is not carefully directed
Participant observation

- Developing a close interaction with members of a group / ‘living’ in the situation which is being studied.
- An observation is always recorded in a descriptive format.
- The information can be collected through informal interviewing, in-depth interviewing, group discussion, previous documents, oral histories.

- Advantages:
  - Spend sufficient time with the group/in the situation
  - Gain much deeper, richer and more accurate information
- Disadvantage:
  - Own bias
Holistic research

- Based upon the philosophy that we cannot understand a phenomenon from just one/two perspectives.

- To understand a situation/phenomenon – need to look at it in its totality from every perspective.
Community discussion forums

- Designed to find opinions, attitudes and/or ideas of a community – issues and problems.
- E.g. Developing town planning options, Community health programmes for community
- Very similar to group discussion except that these are on a bigger scale (number of participants).

**Advantages:**
- Economical and quick

**Disadvantage:**
- Very low attendance
- Dominated by few people
Reflective journal log

- Keeping a reflective journal log of your thought as a researcher whenever you notice anything, talk to someone, participate in an activity or observe something
  - helps to understand or add whatever you are trying to find out about

- Can be used in combination with other method such as interviewing or secondary sources.
Have traditional career paths given way to protean ones?
Evidence from senior managers in the Australian public sector

Paula McDonald, Kerry Brown and Lisa Bradley
School of Management, Faculty of Business, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia

Abstract

Purpose – This mixed method study aims to determine the extent to which the career paths of senior managers conform with the traditional versus protean elements described in the careers literature and whether these paths vary by gender.

Design/methodology/approach – A total of 15 senior managers (seven women and eight men) in a large public sector agency in Australia were interviewed about their career trajectories to date. Data were coded according to four major areas which characterise and distinguish between traditional and protean careers: development, orientation of the employee, definition of success, and organisational environment. A total of 81 managers (34 women and 47 men) from the same organisation were also surveyed. Variables of interest were those that could be triangulated with qualitative data such as the availability of career opportunities.

Findings – Results suggest that, contrary to much existing literature which proposes that all careers have been fundamentally altered, the traditional career which relies on length of service, geographic mobility and a steady climb up the corporate ladder, is still the dominant model in some organisations. However, the trend towards protean careers is evident and is more pronounced for women than for men.

Research limitations/implications – The specific nature of the organisation (large, male dominated, public sector) may limit the generalisability of results.

Practical implications – The framework used to explore career paths according to traditional/protean elements in this study may assist human resource practitioners to develop appropriate strategies which maximise the professional development of employees.

Originality/value – The results of this research challenge the universality of change in the nature of careers, particularly in public sector environments.

Keywords Career development, Careers, Public sector organisations, Australia, Skills flexibility

Paper type Research paper