UNE Center for Community and Public Health

Summing it Up 2012

PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM PLANNING, EVALUATION, AND SURVEY DESIGN AND USE

Qualitative	Quantitative
"All research ultimately has a qualitative grounding" - Donald Campbell	There's no such thing as qualitative data. Everything is either 1 or 0" - Fred Kerlinger
The aim is a complete, detailed description.	The aim is to classify features, count them, and construct statistical models in an attempt to explain what is observed.
Researcher may only know roughly in advance what he/she is looking for.	Researcher knows clearly in advance what he/she is looking for.
Recommended during earlier phases of research projects	Recommended during latter phases of research projects.
The design emerges as the study unfolds.	All aspects of the study are carefully designed before data is collected.
Researcher is the data gathering instrument.	Researcher uses tools, such as questionnaires or equipment to collect numerical data.
Data is in the form of words, pictures or objects.	Data is in the form of numbers and statistics.
Subjective - individuals' interpretation of events is important ,e.g., uses participant observation, in-depth interviews etc.	Objective - seeks precise measurement & analysis of target concepts, e.g., uses surveys, questionnaires etc.
Qualitative data is more 'rich', time consuming, and less able to be generalized.	Quantitative data is more efficient, able to test hypotheses, but may miss contextual detail.
Researcher tends to become subjectively immersed in the subject matter.	Researcher tends to remain objectively separated from the subject matter.

(the two quotes are from Miles & Huberman (1994, p. 40). *Qualitative Data Analysis*)

Main Points

- **Qualitative research** involves analysis of data such as words (e.g., from interviews), pictures (e.g., video), or objects (e.g., an artifact).
- **Quantitative research** involves analysis of numerical data.
- **The strengths and weaknesses** of qualitative and quantitative research are a perennial, hot debate, especially in the social sciences. The issues invoke classic 'paradigm war'.
- **The personality / thinking style** of the researcher and/or the culture of the organization is under-recognized as a key factor in preferred choice of methods.
- **Overly focusing on the debate** of "qualitative *versus* quantitative" frames the methods in opposition. It is important to focus also on how the techniques can be integrated, such as in mixed methods research. More good can come of social science researchers developing skills in both realms than debating which method is superior.

Recommended Links

1. Qualitative versus Quantitative - http://www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/research/Qualitative/qualquan.htm - a table (similar to above), summarizing characteristics of qualitative and quantitative research in more detail
2. Qualitative versus Quantitative Design - http://www.kelcom.igs.net/~nhodgins/quant_qual.html - another table (like above)
3. The Qualitative versus Quantitative Debate - http://writing.colostate.edu/references/research/gentrans/pop2f.cfm - good overview, but the layout is flat and difficult to skim-read
4. Qualitative vs Quantitative analysis - http://www.ling.lancs.ac.uk/monkey/ihe/linguistics/corpus3/3qual.htm - reasonable overview, with linguistics focus
5. Qualitative Research Designs (notes from a post-graduate research methods class)
6. Quantitative Research Designs (notes from a post-graduate research methods class)
7. Qualitative Research Exam
8. Quantitative Research Exam