Mgt 661: Seminar in Qualitative Research Methods
New Mexico State University
Spring 2007
Mondays, 2:30 – 5:00, Room BC 247

Professor:

Michael R. Manning
Department of Management
Business Complex, Room 321
Office Phone: 646-2532
mmanning@nmsu.edu

Description and Overview:

This seminar will focus on the qualitative approach to designing social and organizational research. It will build upon the work started in the Quantitative Research Methods seminar. Qualitative research/methodology has a long and distinguished history in the human disciplines. In sociology the work of the “Chicago School” in the 1920s and 1930s established the importance of qualitative research for the study of human group life. In Anthropology, during the same period, the pathbreaking studies of Boas, Mead, Benedict, Bateson, Evans-Pritchard, Radcliffe-Brown, and Malinowski characterized the outlines of the fieldwork method (ethnography), wherein the observer went to a foreign setting to study the customs and habits of another society and culture. Soon, qualitative research was employed in other social science disciplines such as linguistics, literary studies, education, social work, communications, and the management and organizational sciences.

In basic terms, Qualitative Methods is a detailed description of situations, events, people, and behaviors. It includes what people say about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts through recordings, documents, transcripts, records, and narrative histories. Qualitative data sources include observation and participant observation, fieldwork, interviews, texts, and the researcher's diary of impressions and reactions. Qualitative methods are typically open-ended and do not impose, outsider, expert, academic, predetermined, categories (called Etic categories) such as the response choices that comprise typical questionnaires or tests. Instead qualitative methods begin with observations and conversations (interviews, etc.) about people's grounded, “real life” experiences (called Emic categories) and move toward building theory to help illuminate, explain, and extend those experiences.

Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matter. The philosophical roots of qualitative research/methodology span multiple schools of thought such as phenomenology, critical theory, post-structuralism, hermeneutics, feminism, deconstructionism, psychoanalysis, interpretivism, post-positivism, postmodernism, and social constructionism. In terms of methods, qualitative researchers use semiotics, narrative, content, discourse, archival and phonemic analysis, and sometimes even statistics. They also
draw upon and utilize the approaches, methods, and techniques of ethnomethodology, ethnographies, interviews, survey research and participant observation among others.

The following is a convenient and simple classification with which to approach qualitative methods:

**Research strategies:**
- Case study,
- Ethnography,
- Participant observation,
- Phenomenology,
- Ethnomethodology,
- Grounded theory,
- Biographical method,
- Historical method,
- Action and applied research,
- Clinical research
- Generative Theory

**Methods of data collection and analysis:**
- Interviewing,
- Observing,
- Collecting artifacts, documents and records,
- Visual methods such as photographs, filming and video-taping,
- Personal experience and methods,
- Data management methods,
- Computer assisted analysis,
- Textual analysis,
- Storytelling and other narrative approaches

The seminar is intended to provide students an overview and experience of qualitative methods. We will to the extent possible try and cover the major traditions associated with qualitative research and theory building during the semester. However, the major thrust of this seminar will be on developing an understanding of the ‘grounded theory’ methodology which in our opinion is an approach that cuts across several traditions of qualitative research. Grounded theory in combination with methods of data collection and analysis such as interviews, participant observation and analytical techniques such as the constant comparative method under girds several other forms of inquiry such as ethnography, biography, phenomenology, action research, and case-study approaches.

In addition to learning about qualitative methods, we will do them. The overarching goal of this seminar is to establish a forum to learn the “craft” of qualitative organizational research and its associated technologies so as to help you acquire the skills necessary in undertaking your dissertation-related research from a qualitative perspective. Reading methods texts and exemplary journal articles is crucial in this regard, but it is not sufficient. In order to understand
fully the intricacies and complexities of qualitative research, you have to go out and do it. This course will be structured to help you accomplish this. A broad overview includes:

- Introduction to Qualitative Methods
- Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry
- Methods of Collecting Qualitative Data

As we proceed you will be asked to go out and do at least three episodes (days if possible) of Participant Observation (with field notes) and three Qualitative Interviews.

- Analysis of Exemplary Qualitative Research
- Methods of Analyzing Qualitative Data
- The Art of Coding and First Order Interpretation

You will then be asked to code your field notes and interview transcripts, to identify categories and themes, and to write up a first order interpretation of the data.

- Second Order Analysis and Theory Building
- Writing Up Qualitative Research
- Publishing Qualitative Research

To conclude the seminar we will focus on second order analysis, theory building, and writing and publishing qualitative research. You will be asked to develop your qualitative research into a theoretical contribution and to write it up (maybe to be published).

**Seminar Design and Readings**

During the first part of the seminar we will focus on the development and increased understanding of three themes around qualitative methods: introduction to qualitative methods, strategies of qualitative inquiry (specifically case studies, ethnography, phenomenology, action research, and grounded theory), and methods of data collection (specifically interviewing and participant observation).

The readings reflect both philosophical/epistemological themes and practical applications. **Please read all of the articles and book chapters that are assigned.** It will be a lot of reading, but the readings are specifically selected to give you a firm understanding of the central methods of qualitative research. Reading them will allow you to know what your options are so that you can begin making choices and designing your dissertation research now (if you wish). **Be sure that you read the assigned page numbers.**

I’m not sure how readings will be assigned and if specific participants will present and/or facilitate class discussions. We will decide during the first class how we will structure our process.
* Readings marked with an asterisk are exemplars of the methods being discussed. When reading these articles, pay particular attention to the discussion of the methodology and the way the article is structured and crafted.

At the completion of the seminar you will orally present your research to the seminar and provide me with a written report.

In the first classes we will discuss the history and basic characteristics of qualitative methods and the different paradigms and perspectives that currently represent the field.

**Some Beginning Ideas: The Case For/Against Qualitative Methods**


Greenfield, T.B.1986. The Decline and Fall of Science in Educational Administration. *Interchange*, 57-90.


Additional Readings:


Introduction to Qualitative Methods


Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry

We will review five of the major approaches to qualitative research: case studies, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and action research.

1. Case Studies


2. Ethnography and Participant Observation


3. **Phenomenology and Interpretive Practice**


4. Grounded Theory


This book is a classic in sociology. It lays out a method for inductive discovery of theory from the ground up. It treats grounded theory as a craft. In order to fully appreciate the thrust of the argument in this book, it is important to understand the historical context in which it was written, and one that is still relevant today. At the time of the writing, the inductive generation of theory was not seen as a legitimate research activity compared to logical positivistic approaches. Also, qualitative data was seen as inferior to quantitative data. The book challenges the canon that research should only be concerned with accuracy and verification. Glaser and Strauss argue that the rules for what counts as evidence hinder creative discovery and the potential development of important theories. If we do not challenge this canon, Glaser and Strauss contend, we will be limited to verifying the theories of a few “great persons” who preceded us such as Weber, Durkheim and Marx. This book is significant to the field of inquiry. It stands as a challenge for researchers to stay alive and open to surprise at a time when they might be tempted to eliminate ambiguity and settle for premature closure. We will return to this book later in the Qualitative Methods course.


5. **Action Research**


Methods of Collecting Data: Interviewing and Participant Observation

We will discuss two main data collection methods, interviewing and participant observation. While it is difficult to develop mastery over these methods in just a semester, we will spend some time developing skills in each of these areas. To prepare for this discussion, please read the following book chapters.

Spradley, J. P. *Participant Observation*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace (pp. 1-84).

“Ethnography starts with a conscious attitude of almost complete ignorance” (p. 4). Well, since the postmodern turn, we know that this is naïve and impossible. Nevertheless, as a useful guide to the methods of ethnography and field work, Spradley introduces the notion that we need to train ourselves to notice the rich tapestry of social life that we have learned to ignore. He introduces the idea of observation as a discipline that requires focused practice. Even though this book is typically used to accompany the researcher while engaged in ethnography through Spradley’s proposed sequence, it is a very useful way of conceptualizing the entire cyclical research process. A most useful aspect of this book is the developmental sequence from general to more focused observation and the interplay between field notes taken soon after observation and the evolution of later concepts. Most important, pay attention to Spradley’s description of field notes. Taking good field notes is indispensable. Also, the book cites a number of interesting sociological studies that use ethnographic methods.


This book is a good introduction to interviewing and provides an easy read. It distinguishes between different kinds of interviews suitable for different purposes. The book should serve as a useful reference as your research proceeds. You will notice that the authors draw upon the work of Glaser and Strauss and go beyond discussing the interviewing as mere technique to discuss the process of inquiry and building concepts and theories throughout the data collection process. The early chapters on topic choice may be more relevant for some than others. The chapters on creating conversational partnerships (chpt. 6) and structuring the interview, especially the issue of probes following main questions, should be helpful for those who intend to use interview data. Chpt. 9 on topical interviewing might be relevant for those who are using interviews for very focused topics and research questions.
Biographical, Autobiographical, and Historical Methods


Methods of Collecting and Analyzing Qualitative Data


**Longitudinal Research and Working with Process Data**


**Coding and Analyzing Field Data in the Grounded Theory Tradition**


This book is the practical companion to Glaser and Strauss’s *Grounded Theory*. It walks you though the steps of doing a grounded theory, including getting started; how to use the
literature; how to do open, axial, and selective coding; how to create “working diagrams,” memos, and models; and how to build good, robust, compelling theory. For any of you who will be doing a qualitative dissertation of any kind (even if it is combined with quantitative), this book is an extremely useful tool.

**Generative Theory**


**Perspectives on Theory Building**


**The Practice of Building Theory**


**One Last Thing to Think About**

As mentioned above, over the course of the qualitative research methods course, you will conduct your own mini-qualitative research project (participant observation and interviewing → coding and first order analysis/second order analysis → theory building and writing for publication). Now is a good time to start thinking about what project you want to do. For example:

- You may want to use this project as a “pilot test” for your dissertation (i.e., do interviews and participant observation focused on your expected dissertation topic and use them as a way to get more familiar with the topic and try out your interview questions, etc.).
- You may want to do a “project of convenience” in which you study a phenomenon going on right in your place of work so that the participant observation and interviewing is easy to accomplish in the given timeframes.
- You may want to do a project that is completely out in left field. For example, during my sabbatical I was recently in Venice, Italy. I could have done some
participant observation and interviewing about the partying routines of middle-aged Italians during Carnival or about the eating rituals of Italian men and women in Venice!

- You may want to do your project alone, or you may want to do it in a “research team” with other cohort members. Research teams can be very rich in terms of the learning, dialogue and meaning making. A team approach also provides a larger “data base” and the potential for a higher level of “inter-rater reliability” if you want to push toward publication (although “inter-rate reliability” is not always necessary or even desirable in some forms of qualitative research). (If you take the team approach, each person will still be responsible for their own individual work).

So, be thinking about these things and talking about them with your fellow class members so that you can be ready to move forward.