

Service Science Workshop on Qualitative Field Research in Organizations

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Overall Description: This three-day workshop presents exemplars and strategies for doing qualitative field research in organizations. The activities of the workshop will alternate among presentations by the workshop leaders and discussions of workshop exercises and research experiences between workshop participants and leaders. Day 1 focuses on introducing the background and roles of qualitative methods in the research of workshop leaders and participants. During Day 2, we introduce and discuss methodological issues and exercises in qualitative field research. The final day of the workshop will focus on discussion and feedback on workshop participants' qualitative research experiences and goals.

Day 1: Getting to Know Each Other

Description

Workshop leaders describe their experiences with the process and outputs of qualitative research in relation to the questions above. Following these introductions, workshop participants are invited to join in a discussion about the motivations, contexts, and interests in conducting qualitative research.

Key Questions

- How did you come to study your research topic?
- Why did you choose qualitative field methods?
- Which principal research techniques did you use in your work?
- What are the principal findings and contributions from your research?
- What were the key challenges in your research and how did you manage them?
- What do you hope to accomplish with your findings?

Module 1.1: *Accountabilities of Presence: Reframing Location-Based Systems* (Paul Dourish)

Module 1.2: *Organizational Routines as a Source of Continuous Change* (Martha Feldman)

Module 1.3: *Institutional Conditioning of Youth Conflict in a Multiethnic High School*
(Calvin Morrill)

Discussion Questions

- What topics are participants interested in?
- What do participants hope to learn in the workshop?
- What kinds of challenges do participants face in their own research?

Observational Exercise

Spend one hour in a public place (a restaurant, public square, temple, retail store, train station, etc.) observing the types of people present, what they are doing, the types of social interactions in which they are engaged, the spaces in which their interaction occurs, and how people are giving and receiving service. Write up your observations; they will be used during module 2.2.2 and 2.2.4 during Day 2.

Day 2: Perspectives and Strategies of Qualitative Field Research

Module 2.1: *Appreciating Paradigms and Styles in Qualitative Field Research* (Martha Feldman and Calvin Morrill)

Description

This module first covers differences between interpretive and positivist paradigms with respect to data gathering, data analysis, and research design. We then introduce a brief overview of holistic, behavioral, interpretive, formal, analytic, post-modern, and critical styles of qualitative field research. Each style is discussed in relation to its focus (goals), interpretive level, research imagery, and exemplars.

Key Questions

- What differences exist between interpretive and positivist paradigms?
- How can researchers meaningfully interact across different paradigms?
- What are the different styles of doing qualitative field research?
- What are the objectives and limitations of each style?

Module 2.2.1: *Ways of Knowing in the Field: Observation* (Martha Feldman, Calvin Morrill, Paul Dourish)

Description

This module introduces different strategies for observing and sampling social behavior in the field. Also introduced are tips for representing what one comes to know in the field via fieldnotes and other means of representation.

Key Questions

- What are the major strategies and challenges for observing social behavior?
- Why are fieldnotes important for qualitative field research?
- What makes for good fieldnotes?

Module 2.2.2: *Ways of Knowing in the Field: Discussion of Observational Exercise* (Martha Feldman, Paul Dourish, Calvin Morrill)

Description

In this module we will break the workshop into three groups each facilitated by a workshop leader to discuss how participants approached their observational exercise and what they learned. Towards the end of this module we will convene for a few minutes as a whole to briefly recount the key issues that emerged in each group discussion. We will frame our discussions around the key questions that appear below.

Discussion Questions

- What did you see in your observational exercise?
- What did you look at? Why?
- How did you position yourself in the field as observers?
- How did people respond to you, if at all?
- What did you find interesting?
- What did you choose to include in your fieldnotes?

Module 2.2.3: *Ways of Knowing in the Field: Introduction to Interviewing* (Martha Feldman, Calvin Morrill, Paul Dourish)

Description

The forms, payoffs, and costs of different forms of qualitative interviewing, including semi-structured interviews, conversational interviews, and non-directed interviews are introduced. Tips for constructing interview protocols and conducting interviews are also briefly reviewed.

Key Questions

- How can qualitative fieldworkers elicit verbal information from informants?
- What are the major limitations of interview data and how can the field researcher manage those limitations?

Interview Exercise

During lunch break, pick a person to interview and a different person you can interview regarding your field observations from the previous afternoon. Each interview should last approximately 10-12 minutes. Structure your interview around these themes and questions: Where did you go for your observations? What was going on in the setting? What kinds of service was being given and/or received? Did you observe any trouble in the service processes you identified?

(Lunch)

Module 2.2.4: *Ways of Knowing in the Field: Discussion of Interview Exercise* (Martha Feldman, Paul Dourish, Calvin Morrill)

Description

In this module we will break into different groups each facilitated by a workshop leader to discuss what participants learned about themselves and others as interviewers and informants during the interview exercise. We will frame our discussions around the key questions that appear below. Towards the end of this module we will convene for a few minutes as a whole to briefly recount the key issues that emerged in each group discussion.

Discussion Questions

- How did you structure your interview?
- What kinds of tactics facilitated and/or constrained the flow of conversation?
- How did it feel to be interviewed?
- What did you learn about yourself as an interviewer? As an informant?

Module 2.3: *Analysis and Outputs* (Martha Feldman, Paul Dourish)

Description

This module is divided into three parts. In the first part, we examine the role of analysis in the research process, including generating doubt and making it useful, and data reduction and data expansion. In the second third of the module, we discuss the writing conventions and strategies that can be used to produce persuasive approximations and theoretically significant written accounts of the social world. The final part of the module introduces participants to other media, especially photographs and video materials that increasingly provide alternative sources of qualitative data as well as providing means for communicating qualitative findings to different audiences.

Key Questions

- How does one make sense (analyze) qualitative data?
- How can one structure textual representations (write-ups) of qualitative data such that they are persuasive and credible?
- What non-textual forms of representation can be used to organize, interpret, and communicate qualitative results?

Module 2.4: *Acting Upon Qualitative Field Research* (Paul Dourish, Calvin Morrill)

Description: Qualitative research methods are increasingly being incorporated into organizational and academic practice outside of their traditional origins in anthropology and sociology, and instead as part of an action research agenda focused on organizational change and technology design. This module takes a look at the challenges and opportunities for using qualitative research methods for design and intervention in organizational practice.

Key Questions

- What does it mean to “translate” qualitative research into design, intervention, and policy, or to connect qualitative research with specific goals of this sort?
- How does qualitative inquiry support these processes?

Day 3: Research Clinic for Qualitative Researchers

Module 3.1: *Social Service Research Briefs and Feedback* (Martha Feldman, Paul Dourish, and Calvin Morrill)

Description

Workshop participants and leaders will break into small groups to discuss participants’ research. We are especially interested in learning what qualitative research participants are involved in and what challenges they are facing in conducting their research. Towards the end of these break-out sessions we will reconvene as a whole to consider common themes across the break-out groups. The end of the workshop will consider what has been learned about the key challenges and opportunities of conducting qualitative field research in Taiwan, the U.S., and other contexts.

Exercise

One week in advance of the workshop, we ask that each workshop participant write a one-page description (in English) of a research project that she/he has conducted, is conducting, or is planning to conduct. In the one-page description, include the research topics/questions that frame the project, the kind of data (e.g., observations, interviews, other) that have been or will be collected, and the goals of the research. Also include the title of the project. Be thinking of the major challenges that you face in conducting your field research and how you have or will manage those challenges.

Note: In addition to discussing the content of your project during the workshop in break-out groups, we will use participants’ challenges and strategies for managing those challenges as a basis for thinking more generally about the common issues that field researchers face in conducting qualitative field research.