

THE NATURE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

(Jane Ritchie)

Qualitative research is an attempt to present the social world, and perspectives on that world, in terms of the concepts, behaviours, perceptions and accounts of the people it is about.

Key features of qualitative research methodology:

NATURALISTIC
INDUCTIVE
HOLISTIC

CONCERNED WITH

- **DEPTH**
- **DETAIL**
- **CONTEXTS**
- **ACCOUNTS**
- **SYSTEMS**

RESEARCHER IS

- **PRIMARY INSTRUMENT**
- **CLOSE TO DATA SOURCE**

MAIN PURPOSES OF RESEARCH IN SOCIAL POLICY

- CONTEXTUAL:** to describe the form and nature of what exists
- DIAGNOSTIC:** to examine the reasons for, or causes of, what exists
- EVALUATIVE:** to appraise the effectiveness of what exists
- STRATEGIC/
GENERATIVE:** to aid the development of theories, plans or actions

CONTRIBUTIONS OF QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE METHODS TO DIFFERENT TYPES OF RESEARCH

	QUALITATIVE	QUANTITATIVE
Contextual	Form/nature of phenomena	Extent/location of phenomena
Diagnostic	Identifying underlying factors	Statistical correlation
	Exploring decision processes	Identification of discriminatory variables
Evaluative	Mapping range of contributory elements	Causal modelling
	Processes/systems	Outcomes
Strategic/ Generative	Generating ideas, theories, strategies	Predictive modelling
	Case testing of hypotheses	Numerical testing of hypotheses

**THE USE OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AS
AN INDEPENDENT RESEARCH STRATEGY**

Where subject matter of research is

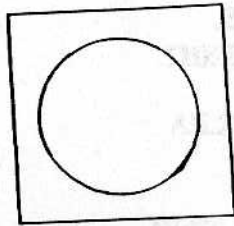
- ill-defined or not well understood
- complex
- sensitive
- concerned with systems or processes
- requires an understanding of detail
- requires new ideas or creativity

**COMBINED USE OF QUALITATIVE
AND QUANTITATIVE METHODS**

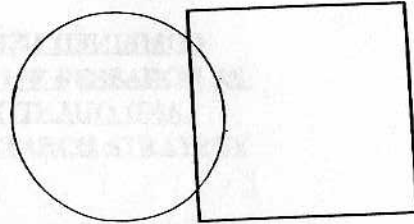
Qualitative

- **before quantitative** - to develop hypotheses, explore concepts, define terminologies, etc
- **alongside quantitative** - to explain, illuminate, qualify or illustrate
- **after quantitative results available** - to follow up sub-groups of interest, explore unexplained statistical relationships, illuminate decisions, processes etc.

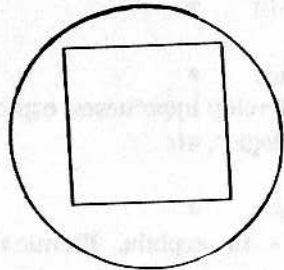
COMBINING QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE DATA



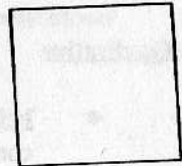
SAME PHENOMENA



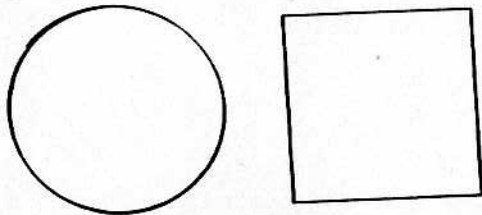
OVERLAPPING PHENOMENA



SURROUNDING PHENOMENA



UNDERLYING PHENOMENA



DIFFERENT PHENOMENA

METHODS USED IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Choice of methods

unstructured interviews

group discussions

observation (including use of videos)

documentary analysis

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS: OBJECTIVES

Search for

- conceptual definition
- typologies, classification
- form and nature of phenomena (eg processes, systems, attitudes, behaviours etc)
- associations between attitudes, behaviours, experiences etc
- explanations (explicit or implicit) of why phenomena occur
- new ideas, theories, strategies
- illuminative accounts

KEY FEATURES OF METHOD

- o **Systematic**
- o **Comprehensive**
- o **Enables easy retrieval**
- o **Allows between and across case analysis**
- o **Grounded/generative**
- o **Dynamic - open to change**
- o **Accessible to others**