

Introduction

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduces the reader to the coauthors' perspectives about the nature, goals, and selected genres of qualitative research, and the interconnected components of qualitative data analysis. We offer recommended guidance for the various audiences of this book and establish the parameters of what we will cover in the text.

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The Purpose of This Book

We wrote this book to address a need faced by researchers in all fields of the human sciences. Put simply, how can we draw valid and trustworthy meaning from qualitative data, and what methods of analysis can we use that are practical and will get us knowledge that we and others can rely on?

Qualitative data are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of human processes. With qualitative data, one can preserve chronological flow, see which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations. Then, too, good qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings and to new integrations; they help researchers get beyond initial conceptions and generate or revise conceptual frameworks. Finally, the findings from well-analyzed qualitative studies have a quality of “undeniability.” Words, especially organized into incidents or stories, have a concrete, vivid, and meaningful flavor that often proves far more convincing to a reader—another researcher, a policymaker, or a practitioner—than pages of summarized numbers.

The expansion of qualitative inquiry from the 1970s onward has been phenomenal. There are now numerous handbooks (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln’s, 2012, *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*; Gubrium, Holstein, Marvasti, & McKinney’s, 2012, *The SAGE Handbook of Interview Research*), exemplary textbooks (Charmaz’s, 2006, *Constructing Grounded Theory*; Creswell’s, 2013, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*), prestigious peer-reviewed journals (*Qualitative Inquiry*, *Qualitative Health Research*), online newsletters and forums (SAGE Publications’ Methodspace, *The Qualitative Report*), annual conferences (International Congress for Qualitative Inquiry, International Institute for Qualitative Methodology), and qualitative special-interest groups in several major professional associations (American Educational Research Association).

Yet, in the flurry of this activity, we should be mindful of some pervasive issues that have not gone away. These issues include the labor intensiveness (and extensiveness over months or years) of data collection, frequent data overload, researcher integrity, the time demands of processing and coding data, the adequacy of sampling when only a few cases can be managed, the generalizability of findings, the credibility and quality of conclusions, and their utility in the world of policy and action.

Although many researchers, from graduate students writing their dissertations to experienced researchers, work alone on their projects and often focus on single cases, qualitative work is becoming more complex. Increasingly, we see mixed-methods studies that combine qualitative and quantitative inquiry, carried out by research

teams working with comparable data collection and analysis methods. And exciting new approaches to qualitative inquiry draw their inspiration from poetry, dramatic literature, visual art, and other creative genres to present and represent social life in fresh, evocative ways.

Some qualitative researchers still consider analysis to be an art form and insist on intuitive approaches to it. We are left with the researcher telling us of categories and patterns drawn from the welter of field data, in ways that are irreducible or even incommunicable. We do not really know how the researcher got from 1,000 pages of field notes and transcriptions to the final conclusions, as sprinkled with vivid illustrations as they may be.

This book is written in the belief that, as qualitative researchers, we need to keep sharing our *craft*—that is, the explicit, systematic methods we use to draw conclusions. We need methods that are credible, dependable, and replicable in *qualitative* terms. That is the need our book addresses.

The Nature of This Book

This is a practical methods sourcebook for all researchers who make use of qualitative data. But it is not intended as a comprehensive text; we do not address matters such as how to gain entry into a site, how to write field notes, or how to facilitate participant interviews. We want to share our experiences and those of other colleagues in the design and use of *qualitative data analysis methods*. Strong emphasis is placed on data displays—matrices and networks—that go beyond ordinary narrative text. Each method of data display and analysis is described and illustrated in detail, with practical suggestions for the researcher's use and adaptation with accessible software and basic programs.

Audiences

This book is for practicing researchers in all fields whose work, whether basic or applied, involves actual qualitative data analysis issues.

An important subset of that audience is the *beginning researcher*—a graduate student or early-career faculty member—working with qualitative data. We have encountered many students who launch into qualitative dissertations or research projects who sometimes feel overwhelmed and undertrained. With them in mind, we keep the language accessible and supportive, and we offer suggestions for using the book in qualitative research methods courses.

Another audience is *staff specialists and managers*, who rely on qualitative information as a routine part of their work and who need practical methods for making the best use of it.

Many examples used in the book are drawn from educational research, both ours and others'. We also include relevant discussion for other disciplines—health care, anthropology, sociology, psychology, business, political science, public administration, program evaluation, the arts, library science, organizational studies, criminology, human communication, family studies, and policy research—to underline that the methods are generic, not field limited.

Some of the methods reported here grew out of multiple case studies of organizations carried out by a research team. But do not despair if you are working alone, your study has just one case, or you are focusing at the individual or small-group level. There are many relevant examples for you, along with targeted advice.

Approach

This is a sourcebook, not a comprehensive handbook. We have tried to bring together a serviceable set of resources to encourage their use and, above all, to stimulate their further development, testing, and refinement. We also tend to be pragmatic. We believe that any method that works—that will produce clear, verifiable, and credible meanings from a set of qualitative data—has utility, regardless of its origins.

This book is about *doing analysis*. We cover questions of research design and data collection only as they bear on analysis and only glancingly address matters such as access to field sites and trust building with participants. Others have dealt with these issues repeatedly and well; we cite their work along the way and refer you to the Appendix's annotated bibliography for more information.

We have taken as concrete and direct an approach as possible, staying close to the reader's elbow and serving as a helpful guide through uneven territory. Although in each chapter we aim to provide a coherent intellectual frame for specific methods, we always emphasize hands-on work with actual data. For each of the methods outlined, we give specific examples with enough detail so that the reader can see how things work, can try the method, and, most important, can revise the method in future work.

These methods are manageable and straightforward, though some displays may, at first, appear daunting. Don't let them intimidate you; they are *examples*, not standards of practice. They do not necessarily require prolonged training or a specialized vocabulary. We can add that the experience of inventing analysis methods and of using/adapting those of others has been a productive one. The strongest message of this book is not that these particular methods should be applied scrupulously but that the creation, testing, and revision of simple, practical, and effective analysis methods remain the highest priority for qualitative researchers.

Finally, this book was written to share the experimentation, dialogue, and learning that good qualitative data analysis requires. We remain convinced that concrete, sharable methods do indeed belong to all of us. In the past few decades, we've found that refining and developing analysis methods on new projects had a clear payoff; also, our confidence in our findings was greater, and credibility for our research, practice, and policy audiences was enhanced. We hope that our experiences will be helpful to our colleagues, as theirs has been to us.

Our Orientation

It is worthwhile, we think, for researchers to make their preferences clear. To know how a researcher construes the shape of the social world and aims to give us a credible account of it is to know our conversational partner.

We label ourselves *pragmatic realists*. We believe that social phenomena exist not only in the mind but also in the world—and that some reasonably stable relationships can be found among the idiosyncratic messiness of life. There are regularities and sequences that link together phenomena. From these patterns, we can derive the constructs that underlie individual and social life. The fact that most of those constructs are invisible to the human eye does not make them invalid. After all, we all are surrounded by lawful physical mechanisms of which we're, at most, remotely aware.

Human relationships and societies have unique peculiarities and inconsistencies that make a realist approach to understanding them more complex—but not impossible. Unlike researchers in physics, we must contend with the institutions, structures, practices, and conventions that people reproduce and transform. Human meanings and intentions are worked out within the frameworks of these social structures—structures that are invisible but nonetheless real. In other words, social phenomena, such as language, decisions, conflicts, and hierarchies, exist in the world and exert strong influences over human activities because people construe them in common ways. Things that are believed become real and can be inquired into.

We agree with interpretivists who point out that knowledge is a social and historical product and that “facts” come to us laden with theory. We affirm the existence and importance of the subjective, the phenomenological, and the meaning making at the center of social life. Our goal is to register and transcend these processes by making assertions and building theories to account for a real world that is both bounded and perceptually laden—and to test these assertions and theories in our various disciplines.

Our tests do not use the deductive logic of classical positivism. Rather, our explanations flow from an account of how differing structures produced the events we observed. We want to account for events, rather than simply document their sequence. We look for an individual or a social process, a mechanism, or a structure at the core of events that can be captured to provide a causal description of the most likely forces at work.

The paradigms for conducting social research are always shifting beneath our feet. Our view is that sharing more about our craft is essential and that it is possible to develop practical methods for judging the goodness of our conclusions. We may face the risk of formalization when we dissect and reassemble the analytic procedures used by qualitative researchers, but not a large one. To us, research is actually more a craft (and sometimes, an art) than a slavish adherence to methodological rules. No study conforms exactly to a standard methodology; each one calls for the researcher to bend the methodology to the uniqueness of the setting or case. At the least, we need to find out what qualitative researchers actually *do* when they assemble and analyze data from the field.

Readers looking at the methods in this sourcebook will find them to be orderly ones, with a good degree of formalization. Many colleagues prefer more relaxed and open-ended voyages through their data, and we wish them well. We have opted for thoroughness and explicitness in this book, not just because it suits us but because vague descriptions are of little practical use to others. Note, however, that some techniques in this book call for metaphorical thinking, creative representations, and even free associations. And the overall structure of the text allows for some techniques to be used and others to be left aside. We advise you to look behind any apparent formalism and seek out what will be *useful* in your own work.

Genres of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research may be conducted in dozens of ways, many with long traditions behind them. To do them all justice is impossible here. For our purposes, the questions are as follows: What do selected genres (types) of qualitative research have to say about *analysis*? And can we see some common themes and practices?

Saldaña (2011b) describes more than 20 different qualitative research genres out of many more available to investigators, ranging from well-established traditions such as ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, case study, and content analysis to more progressive genres of qualitative research, such as poetic inquiry, narrative inquiry, ethnodrama, autoethnography, and duoethnography.

Each approach (several of these will be discussed later) will generally employ particular forms of analysis with their data. Grounded theory, for example, uses a series of cumulative coding cycles and reflective analytic memoing to develop major categories for theory generation. Phenomenology tends to look at data thematically to extract essences and essentials of participant meanings. Mixed-methods research integrates both qualitative and quantitative data and analyses for a more multidimensional approach to inquiry. Poetic inquiry, narrative inquiry, and ethnodrama adopt and adapt the conventions of fictional literature to render nonfictional participant experiences in poetic, prosaic, and dramatic forms, as opposed to the traditional and conventional formats of scholarly/academic writing.

The primary methodology of social anthropology—ethnography—stays close to the naturalist form of inquiry: that is, (a) extended contact within a given community; (b) concern for mundane, day-to-day events as well as for unusual ones; (c) direct or indirect participation in local activities, with particular care given to the description of local particularities; (d) a focus on individuals' perspectives and interpretations of their world; (e) relatively little pre-structured instrumentation, but often a wider use of audio and video recordings; and (f) more purposeful observation than in other research traditions.

Ethnographic methods tend toward the descriptive. The analysis task is to reach across multiple data sources and to condense them. Of course, in deciding what to leave in, what to highlight, what to report first and last, what to interconnect, and what main ideas are important, analytic choices are being made continuously.

Genres such as content analysis, conversation analysis, and discourse analysis pay meticulous attention to the nuances and embedded meanings of literally every single word in a data corpus as part of their analytic processes, while genres such as visual arts–based research and photovoice place primacy on the power of the image to represent human experience. Oral history documents the past, while action research envisions and works for a better future. Autoethnography examines the self, while duoethnography examines the self in relationship with another—who is also examining one's self.

The purpose of this section is not to describe every single genre of qualitative research available to you but to focus on some common features that occur in most genres of qualitative inquiry. We list some of them here, aware that some exemplars are missing:

- Qualitative research is conducted through intense and/or prolonged contact with participants in a naturalistic setting to investigate the everyday and/or exceptional lives of individuals, groups, societies, and organizations.
- The researcher’s role is to gain a holistic (systemic, encompassing, and integrated) overview of the context under study: its social arrangement, its ways of working, and its explicit and implicit rules.
- Relatively little standardized instrumentation is used. The researcher himself or herself is essentially the main instrument in the study.
- The researcher attempts to capture data on the perceptions of local participants from the inside through a process of deep attentiveness, of empathetic understanding, and of suspending or bracketing preconceptions about the topics under discussion.
- Most of the analysis is done with words. The words can be assembled, subclustered, or broken into segments. They can be reorganized to permit the researcher to compare, contrast, analyze, and construct patterns out of them.
- Reading through these empirical materials (i.e., data), the researcher may construct certain themes and patterns that can be reviewed with participants.
- The main task is to describe the ways people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations.
- Many interpretations of this material are possible, but some are more compelling for theoretical reasons or on grounds of credibility and trustworthiness.

These features may be more relevant for naturalistic studies, but they are configured and used differently in any particular research tradition.

An Approach to Qualitative Data Analysis

When you’ve been doing qualitative research as long as we have, the genres start to blur. As pragmatic realists, we no longer adhere slavishly to one school of thought, or practice solely within the boundaries of one particular philosophical approach. The data-analytic methods and techniques we’ve employed over the past few decades have been “a little bit of this and a little bit of that,” used on an “as needed” basis. This is not to suggest that we were being improvisationally foolhardy as we figured out what to do next. On the contrary, we have been quite deliberate and diligent in our analytic methodologies and work.

Over time, the methods included in this book have become almost signature works—the “Miles and Huberman” way of analyzing qualitative data. But if you ask established qualitative researchers to describe Miles and Huberman’s methods, you’ll hear diverse opinions, ranging from positive descriptors such as “systematic,” “rigorous,” and “authoritative” to negative descriptors such as “old fashioned,” “confusing,” and (a personal favorite) “positivists in sheep’s clothing.” Add Saldaña as a new coauthor to the third edition of this text, and the evolution of these methods continues.

The three of us do not subscribe to any one particular genre of qualitative research—we are “shamelessly eclectic,” as the popular saying goes. But our analytic sequence depicted throughout the book is probably closest to ethnographic

methods, with some borrowed techniques from grounded theory. It moves from one inductive inference to another by selectively collecting data, comparing and contrasting this material in the quest for patterns or regularities, seeking out more data to support or qualify these emerging clusters, and then gradually drawing inferences from the links between other new data segments and the cumulative set of conceptualizations.

Analytic Methods: Some Common Features

We've observed features that recur in many approaches to qualitative analysis. On the face of it, there may be some irreconcilable pairs—for example, the quest for lawful relationships (social anthropology) versus the search for essences—that may not transcend individuals and that lend themselves to multiple compelling interpretations (phenomenology). Still, some analytic practices may be used across different qualitative research types. Here is a fairly classic set of analytic moves arranged in sequence:

- Assigning codes or themes to a set of field notes, interview transcripts, or documents
- Sorting and sifting through these coded materials to identify similar phrases, relationships between variables, patterns, themes, categories, distinct differences between subgroups, and common sequences
- Isolating these patterns and processes, and commonalities and differences, and taking them out to the field in the next wave of data collection
- Noting reflections or other remarks in jottings, journals, and analytic memos
- Gradually elaborating a small set of assertions, propositions, and generalizations that cover the consistencies discerned in the database
- Comparing those generalizations with a formalized body of knowledge in the form of constructs or theories

The analytic challenge for all qualitative researchers is finding coherent descriptions and explanations that still include all of the gaps, inconsistencies, and contradictions inherent in personal and social life. The risk is in forcing the logic, the order, and the plausibility that constitute theory making on the uneven, sometimes random, nature of social life.

We'll return to recurring features such as these, while acknowledging the desirable diversity of analytic approaches now in use. Next, however, we need to take a step back to ask, "What kind of data are we actually faced with in qualitative studies?"

The Nature of Qualitative Data

General Nature

In this book, we focus primarily on data in the form of words—that is, language in the form of extended text. Qualitative data also can appear as still or moving images, but we do not deal with these forms extensively (see the Appendix for recommended titles and guidance for visual data).

The words we collect and analyze are based on *observations, interviews, documents,* and *artifacts*. These data collection activities typically are carried out in close proximity to a local setting for a sustained period of time. Such data are not usually immediately accessible for analysis but require some type of processing: Raw field notes need to be expanded and typed up, audio recordings need to be transcribed and corrected, and photographs need to be documented and analyzed.

But the words we attach to fieldwork experiences are inevitably framed by our implicit concepts, and the processing of field notes is itself problematic. The words we choose to document what we see and hear in the field can never truly be “objective”; they can only be *our interpretation* of what we experience. Similarly, transcription of audio recordings can be done in many ways that will produce rather different texts. And the influence of the researcher’s personal *values, attitudes, and beliefs* from and toward fieldwork is not unavoidable.

To put it another way, qualitative data are not so much about behavior as they are about *actions* (which carry with them intentions and meanings and lead to consequences). Some actions are relatively straightforward; others involve “impression management”—how people want others, including the researcher, to see them. Furthermore, those actions always occur in specific situations within a social and historical context, which deeply influence how they are interpreted by both insiders and the researcher as outsider.

Thus, the apparent simplicity of qualitative data masks a good deal of complexity, requiring plenty of care and self-awareness on the part of the researcher.

Strengths of Qualitative Data

One major feature of well-collected qualitative data is that they focus on *naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings*, so that we have a strong handle on what “real life” is like. That confidence is buttressed by *local groundedness*, the fact that the data were collected in close proximity to a specific situation. The emphasis is on a specific *case*, a focused and bounded phenomenon embedded in its context. The influences of the local context are not stripped away but are taken into account. The possibility for understanding latent, underlying, or nonobvious issues is strong.

Another feature of qualitative data is their *richness and holism*, with strong potential for revealing complexity; such data provide “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) that are vivid, are nested in a real context, and have a ring of truth that has a strong impact on the reader.

Furthermore, the fact that such data are typically collected over a *sustained period* makes them powerful for studying any process (including history); we can go far beyond snapshots of “what?” or “how many?” to just how and why things happen as they do—and even *assess causation* as it actually plays out in a particular setting. And the inherent *flexibility* of qualitative studies (data collection times and methods can vary as a study proceeds) gives further confidence that we really understand what is going on.

Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people’s lived experiences, are fundamentally well suited for locating the *meanings* people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives and for connecting these meanings to the *social world* around them.

We make three other claims for the power of qualitative data, to which we will return in later chapters. They often have been advocated as the best strategy for discovery, for exploring a new area, and for *developing hypotheses*. In addition, we underline their strong potential for *testing hypotheses*, seeing whether specific predictions hold up. Finally, qualitative data are useful when one needs to supplement, validate, or illuminate *quantitative* data gathered from the same setting.

The strengths of qualitative data rest centrally on the competence with which their analysis is carried out. What do we mean by analysis?

Our View of Qualitative Data Analysis

We see analysis as three concurrent flows of activity: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification. We will explore each of these components in more depth as we proceed through the book. For now, we make only some overall comments.

Data Condensation

Data condensation refers to the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appear in the full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents, and other empirical materials. By condensing, we're making data *stronger*. (We stay away from *data reduction* as a term because that implies we're weakening or losing something in the process.)

As we see it, data condensation occurs continuously throughout the life of any qualitatively oriented project. Even before the data are actually collected, anticipatory data condensation is occurring as the researcher decides (often without full awareness) which conceptual framework, which cases, which research questions, and which data collection approaches to choose. As data collection proceeds, further episodes of data condensation occur: writing summaries, coding, developing themes, generating categories, and writing analytic memos. The data condensing/transforming process continues after the fieldwork is over, until a final report is completed.

Data condensation is not something separate from analysis. It is a *part* of analysis. The researcher's decisions—which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which category labels best summarize a number of chunks, which evolving story to tell—are *all analytic choices*. Data condensation is a form of analysis that sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards, and organizes data in such a way that “final” conclusions can be drawn and verified.

By data condensation, we do *not* necessarily mean quantification. Qualitative data can be transformed in many ways: through selection, through summary or paraphrase, through being subsumed in a larger pattern, and so on. Occasionally, it may be helpful to convert the data into *magnitudes* (e.g., the analyst decides that the program being looked at has a “high” or “low” degree of effectiveness), but this is not always necessary.

Data Display

The second major flow of analysis activity is data display. Generically, a *display* is an organized, compressed assembly of information that allows conclusion drawing

and action. In daily life, displays vary from gasoline gauges to newspapers to Facebook status updates. Looking at displays helps us understand what is happening and to do something—either analyze further or take action—based on that understanding.

The most frequent form of display for qualitative data in the past has been *extended text*. As we will note later, text (in the form of, say, 1,000 pages of field notes) is terribly cumbersome. It is dispersed, sequential rather than simultaneous, poorly structured, and extremely bulky. Using only extended text, a researcher may find it easy to jump to hasty, partial, and unfounded conclusions. Humans are not very powerful as processors of large amounts of information. Extended text overloads our information-processing capabilities and preys on our tendencies to find simplifying patterns. Or we drastically overweight vivid information, such as the exciting event that jumps out of page 124 of the field notes after a long, “boring” passage. Pages 89 through 123 may be ignored, and the criteria for weighting and selecting may never be questioned.

In the course of our work, we have become convinced that good displays are a major avenue to robust qualitative analysis. The displays discussed and illustrated in this book include many types of matrices, graphs, charts, and networks. All are designed to assemble organized information into an immediately accessible, compact form so that the analyst can see what is happening and either draw justified conclusions or move on to the next step of analysis that the display suggests may be useful.

As with data condensation, the creation and use of displays is not separate from analysis—it is a *part* of analysis. Designing displays—deciding on the rows and columns of a matrix for qualitative data and deciding which data, in which form, should be entered in the cells—are analytic activities. (Note that designing displays also has clear *data condensation* implications.)

In this book, we advocate more systematic, powerful displays and urge a more inventive, self-conscious, and iterative stance toward their generation and use. As we’ve coined in our previous writings, “You know what you display.”

Drawing and Verifying Conclusions

The third stream of analysis activity is conclusion drawing and verification. From the start of data collection, the qualitative analyst interprets what things mean by noting patterns, explanations, causal flows, and propositions. The competent researcher holds these conclusions lightly, maintaining openness and skepticism, but the conclusions are still there, vague at first, then increasingly explicit and grounded. “Final” conclusions may not appear until data collection is over, depending on the size of the corpus of field notes; the coding, storage, and retrieval methods used; the sophistication of the researcher; and any necessary deadlines to be met.

Conclusion drawing, in our view, is only half of a Gemini configuration. Conclusions are also *verified* as the analyst proceeds. Verification may be as brief as a fleeting second thought crossing the analyst’s mind during writing, with a short excursion back to the field notes; or it may be thorough and elaborate, with lengthy argumentation and review among colleagues to develop “intersubjective consensus” or with extensive efforts to replicate a finding in another data set. The meanings emerging from the data have to be tested for their plausibility, their sturdiness, their

confirmability—that is, their validity. Otherwise, we are left with interesting stories about what happened but of unknown truth and utility.

We have presented these three streams—data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification—as interwoven before, during, and after data collection in parallel form, to make up the general domain called “analysis.” The three streams can also be represented as shown in Display 1.1—our first network display. In this view, the three types of analysis activity and the activity of data collection itself form an interactive, cyclical process. The researcher steadily moves among these four nodes during data collection and then shuttles among condensing, displaying, and conclusion drawing/verifying for the remainder of the study.

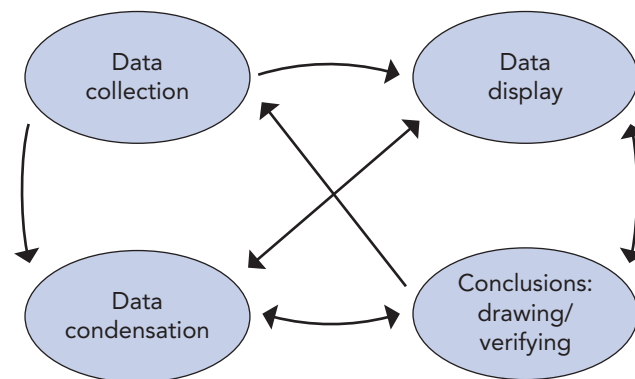
The coding of data, for example (*data condensation*), leads to new ideas on what should go into a matrix (*data display*). Entering the data requires further data condensation. As the matrix fills up, preliminary *conclusions* are drawn, but they lead to the decision, for example, to add another column to the matrix to *test* the conclusion.

In this view, qualitative data analysis is a continuous, iterative enterprise. Issues of data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing/verification come into play successively as analysis episodes follow each other. Such a process is actually no more complex, conceptually speaking, than the analysis modes quantitative researchers use. Like their qualitative colleagues, they must be preoccupied with data condensation (calculating means, standard deviations), with display (correlation tables, regression printouts), and with conclusion drawing/verification (significance levels, experimental/control group differences). But their activities are carried out through well-defined, familiar methods; are guided by canons; and are usually more sequential than iterative or cyclical. Qualitative researchers are in a more fluid and more humanistic position.

Thus, as we’ve suggested, qualitative analysis needs to be well documented as a process—mainly to help us learn. We need to understand more clearly just what is going on when we analyze data, in order to reflect, refine our methods, and make them more generally usable by others.

Display 1.1

Components of Data Analysis: Interactive Model



Source: Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Suggestions for Readers

Recommendations for what a reader should do with any particular book are often presumptuous, mistaken, or both. Authors have no control over who reads their books or what readers may find useful. Nevertheless, we offer a few suggestions for different types of users.

Students and Other Novice Researchers

We give some direct advice here, keeping in mind that you will often be working alone, usually on a single case, and may be feeling worried about the quality of your study—dissertation or not.

1. *This book* focuses on *analysis*. Use other, introductory books to help with the basics of fieldwork (see the Appendix for recommended titles and resources).
2. Learn by doing. Use your own study (whether it is in the planning stage or under way) as a vehicle and apply it to relevant methods in each chapter.
3. Compensate for the problem of having to work alone by finding someone to be a critical friend or mentor to respond to your work as you proceed.
4. Keep an informal log or journal of what you are running up against. This tactic will help your learning and will be useful when you write up your study.
5. Don't worry about the jargon-like names of particular displays; the issue is what a display can do for you.
6. The biggest enemy of your learning is the gnawing worry that you're not "doing it right." Dissertation work tends to encourage that. But any given analytic problem can be approached in many useful ways. Creativity—that is, inventing your way out of a problem—is definitely the better stance.

Experienced Researchers

This is a sourcebook. Colleagues have told us that they have used it in several ways:

1. *Browsing*: The book contains a wide range of material, so simply exploring it in an unstructured way can be fruitful.
2. *Problem solving*: Anyone opening the book comes to it with more or less specifically defined problems in doing qualitative data analysis. The index has been designed to be "problem sensitive" to permit easy access to appropriate sections of the book. The Contents can also be used in this way.
3. "A to Z": Some readers prefer to go through a book sequentially, from start to finish. We have organized the book so that it makes sense that way.
4. *Operational use*: For readers conducting an ongoing qualitative research project, either alone or with colleagues, it's useful to read particular sections focusing on upcoming analysis tasks (e.g., the formation of research questions, coding, time-ordered displays), then discuss them with available colleagues, and finally plan

the next steps in the project, revising the methods outlined here or developing new ones.

5. *Research consulting*: The book can be used by people with an advisory or consulting role in the start-up and ongoing life of research projects. Assuming good problem identification, a research consultant can work with the client in either a problem-solving or a direct-training mode to aid in thoughtful project design and coping with early problems.

Teachers of Qualitative Research Methods Courses

Some colleagues have used this book as a primary text, others as a supplementary one. In either case, our advice is to engage students in active data collection and analysis. The book is not designed to be helpful in the type of methods course that is “about” qualitative research and provides no direct experience in doing it. Actual data are needed.

For each topic, we have used a learning approach like this, carried out by individuals or working pairs, who stay together throughout a workshop:

1. *Introductory* lecture and/or reading to clarify the main conceptual points of the section
2. A brief learning task (e.g., drawing a conceptual framework, coding a data excerpt, designing a matrix template, drawing a network, interpreting a filled-out matrix, or writing an initial analysis)
3. Comparing the products of individuals or pairs, drawing generalizations, and discussing future applications of the method

The same general principles apply when the book is used in a semester-long course, although the coverage will be deeper. Interim exercises focusing on actual research tasks, critiqued in class, are particularly productive. Active, reflective self-documentation through personal logs or journals is also beneficial.



Closure and Transition

This Introduction provided some brief groundwork for the rest of the book. Analysis is doing, so let's proceed in the next chapter to preparatory research design decisions that will later play important roles in analytic work.