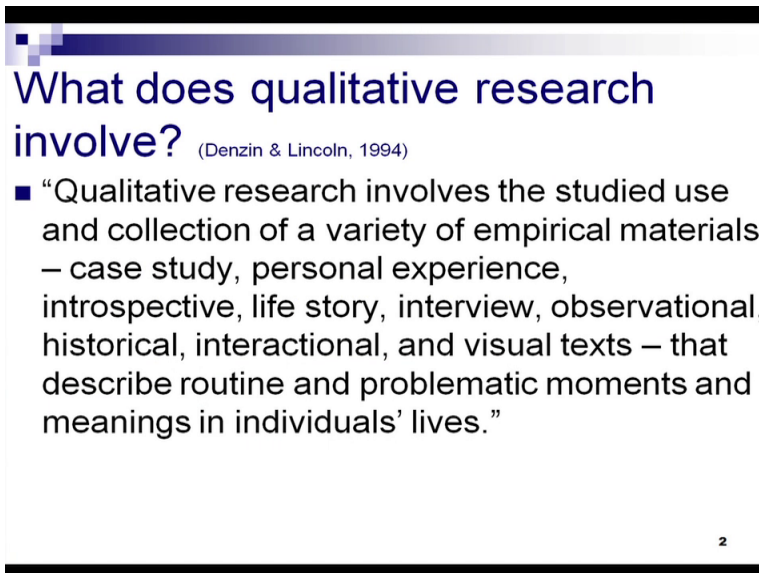


Qualitative Research Methods
Assistant Prof. Aradhna Malik
Vinod Gupta School of Management
Indian Institute of Technology – Kharagpur

Lecture – 2
The Qualitative Researcher

Welcome to the NOC course titled qualitative research methods being offered through the National Program on Technology, enhanced learning Ministry of Human Resource Development Committee of India. My name is Aradhna Malik, I am an assistant professor in Vinod Gupta School of Management, at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, West Bengal, India, and I will be helping you with this course. Today in this lecture, we are going to talk about, what qualitative research is? What do qualitative researchers actually do? What kind of material do they deal with, etc?

(Refer Slide Time: 00:57)



What does qualitative research involve? (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994)

- “Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives.”

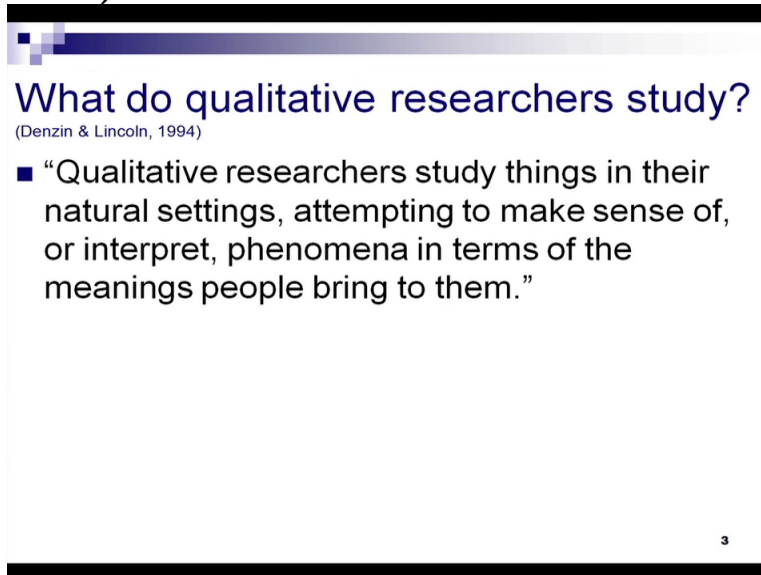
2

So, let’s move on with this, what is qualitative research involves? Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials including case studies, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interaction and visual texts - that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives.

When we talk about research, we essentially talk about discovering things, we talk about solving problems, but qualitative research studies life as it is. Qualitative research involves the study of

life as it is going on; it involves the study of the normalcy of life in most situations. So qualitative research goes into the depths of the normal routine of life as it goes on, which is why it makes it a very, very it becomes a very important, very essential tools of enquiry into human behavior and the social science.

(Refer Slide Time: 02:05)



What to qualitative researchers study? Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena, in terms of the meanings people bring to them and we will discuss more about this, when we discuss interpretivism, when we discuss constructivism and when we discuss ethnography. But qualitative researchers essentially study things as they are not, as they should be, not as they will be when they are replicated.

Qualitative researchers believe that life goes on and a large number of events and factors influence life, as it goes on and they study these factors, they study this ongoing life as it is embedded within its own context. They try to make sense of the meaning people whose lives are going on, bring to the lives that are going on. So you know it is this study, how we understand our life as it goes on, how we understand different phenomena in our lives as our lives go on, be it in some problems we face, be it that the cultural that we are in, be it at any phenomenon that we are trying to study, be it changed, be it whatever.

So we study natural phenomena in their natural settings and we study them, in terms of the meanings we assign today these phenomena. What, how do we define these phenomena? What impacts, how we define these phenomena? Etc, so that is what, qualitative researchers do, okay.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:53)

The qualitative researcher as a bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994)

- “The qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur* uses the tools of his or her methodological trade, deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials are at hand. (Becker, 1989). If new tools have to be invented, or pieced together, then the researcher will do this. The choice of which tools to use, which research practices to employ, is not set in advance. The ‘choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked, and the questions depend on their context’ (Nelson et al., 1992, p.2), what is available in the context, and what the researcher can do in that setting.”

4

The qualitative researcher as a bricoleur, now a bricoleur is a, the dictionary meaning is a Quilt maker, you know, you have seen those Quilts, where, I mean the elderly ladies in the family would take scraps, bits and scraps of cloth and make very interesting patterns and then make Quilts, out of these interesting patterns, so you know, making, that is a bricolarge, bricolarge is a pattern Quilt, is made out of bits and pieces of cloth that are left over.

And bricoleur is one who makes this bricolarge with bits and pieces of things that, that are seemingly not connected to each other, come together and join with each other, in such a way, that a beautiful picture, emerges, so that is what a bricoleur does. A bricoleur, the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur uses the tools of his or her methodological trade, deploying whatever strategies, methods or empirical materials are at hand. If new tools have to be invented or pieced together, then the researcher will do this.

The choice of which tools to use, which research practices to employ is not set in advance. The choice of research practices depends upon the questions that are asked and questions depend on their context, what is available in the context and what the researcher can do in that setting. So

qualitative researcher as a bricoleur does not plan for using certain tools ahead of time, some amount of planning is required, but they go into the context.

They first develop an understanding of the context, then they understand what can be done, what they want to study in the context and as they go along with their knowledge of the different tools that they can use to understand the context. They pick and choose different tools at different stages of enquiry and pieces these tools, they add tools to each other if required.

They make, you know that they hybridize tools if required, they amalgamate tools if required and then they come up with their own ways of enquiry into the situations that they are studying, depending on what the context offers to them. So the context achieves a high importance and tools that are employed to study, because of the simple reason that the qualitative researcher believes that the context is a dynamic phenomenon.

So when we talked about, now I'm talking about the context as a phenomenon, the context is dynamic, the context is ongoing, its constantly changing and we need to go in and one needs to be sensitive to the signals, one receives from the context and according to the signals, one develops an understanding of the context and then one select the tools that are available and puts them together in such a way that one can derive the maximum amount of information from the context one intends to study and that is why the researcher is also a labeled as a bricoleur, by some researchers.

(Refer Slide Time: 07:25)

Characteristics of the qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994)

- Ability to perform "... a large number of diverse tasks ranging from interviewing to observing, to interpreting personal & historical documents, to intensive self-reflection and introspection."
- Ability and willingness to read a lot and understand the connections between "... the many interpretive paradigms (feminism, Marxism, cultural studies, constructivism, etc.) that can be brought to any particular problem."
- Ability to "...work together and between competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms."

Characteristics of the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur: Research is an art; qualitative research is an even more difficult, more complex, more refined art. So the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur, develops an ability to perform a large number of diverse tasks ranging from interviewing to observing, to interpreting personal and historical documents, to intensive self-reflection and introspection.

And we will discuss this more when we talk about the different paradigms of qualitative researcher, you know where do qualitative researchers come from, what do they think about their own settings, what do they think about where they are coming from, how do they situate themselves in this whole process of enquiry.

The quantitative researcher is able to disconnect from the object that is being studied, but the qualitative research it becomes a part of the context that they are studying, sometimes they become actors in the context, sometimes they are within the context, they feel everything, they become empathic, non actors, empathic observers, within the context they are studying.

And so the qualitative researcher as a bricoleur, as a person who's going to piece these beautiful leftover scraps of information, together into something meaningful, develop the ability to form a large number of diverse tasks, ranging from interviewing, to observing, asking questions to just taking a step back and seeing what is going on and then to interpreting personal and historical

documents, to intensive self-reflection to understanding how one fits into that context and introspection.

The qualitative researcher as a bricoleur also develops an ability and willingness to read a lot and understand the connections between the many interpretive paradigms that can be brought to any particular problem. So in order to be able to piece this diverse pieces, these diverse facets of the situation one finds, oneself in, in order to be able to understand the different aspects of the context one wants to study one has to be, able to read, one has to want to read, one has to want to understand the connections between the different ways in which people interpret things.

Paradigms are the ways in which we interpret things, the different integrative paradigms are the ways of knowing, how we see things, not only how we see things, how the context views us as a person observing it, that can be brought to any particular problem. So we developed an ability to read a lot, to understand things and to understand the connections between how and why different people interpret the same phenomenon differently, the same facet of the context differently.

All of us view things from our own perspectives and the Qualitative researcher develops an understanding in and through reading, through self reflection, into how and why the people within that context interpret, the same phenomenon, the same aspect of the same phenomenon differently and how these different interpretations are connected with each other, Okay. The qualitative researcher also develops an ability to work together and between competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms. Now nothing is mutually exclusive.

Interviewing and observation go hand-in-hand, there is an overlap, when one is interviewing somebody, one is also observing, whoever one is interviewing. So the qualitative researcher understands that is, you know that the overlapping perspectives and paradigms are starkly different and they develop an ability to work together and between a competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms.

So they could be some paradigms that becomes some ways of understanding that become that require a high importance, but the qualitative researchers develop an ability, to also take into account the ways of knowing, that do not seem to be as important as the ones, that seem to be more important and they also develop an ability to form connections between these two and they also form an ability to see both of them between the two and as an outsider both of them separately divorced from each other as independent objective, independent entities, independent paradigms that are not connected to each other so that is the kind of ability a qualitative researcher develops.

(Refer Slide Time: 13:08)

Characteristics of the qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur* (Contd.)

(Denzin & Lincoln, 1994)

- Understanding that "... research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity, and those of the people in the setting."
- Knowing that "...science is power, for all research findings have political implications."
- Acknowledging, accepting, and understanding that "... researchers all tell stories about the worlds they have studied. Thus the narratives, or stories, scientists tell are accounts couched and framed within specific storytelling traditions, often defined as paradigms (e.g., positivism, postpositivism, constructivism, etc.)."

The qualitative researcher as a bricoleur develops an understanding that research is an interactive process shaped by his or her personal history, biography, gender, social class, race and ethnicity and those of the people in the settings. The qualitative researchers develop an understanding that the researcher himself or herself is an integral part of the context that one wants to study.

So one is not divorced from the context, one becomes a part of the context, that one wants to study and the qualitative researchers develop an understanding that, this is an interactive process, that research is an interactive process that is shaped by the personal history of the researcher, by the biography, the gender, the social class, which will again help the researcher, form an relationship with the context the researcher wants to study and those of the people in the setting.

So the researcher understands the value or understands how one fits into a context that one is studying and how one can be removed from the context that one is going to study. So the researcher develops an understanding of how one fits into the context that one is studying, how one can be removed from the context one is studying and how these two aspects are connected and the researcher understands how his or her personal background effects, what one is trying to study, how it helps one, with oneself as a researcher as an enquiry into the context that one is to study.

The researcher as a bricoleur also develops also knows that science is power for all research findings have political implications at the end of the day, whatever information is generated has political and social implications, because research is not done just for the sake of research. Research is conducted and the findings are shared by the stakeholders, people who have either funded the research or people who are going to use the research to get their degrees or people who are going to use their research to you know to develop new ideas, materials understanding ways of knowing, to form policies etcetera.

So everything that one does has implications for people, other than the researcher himself or herself and they understand that knowledge's is that the kind of science is power and they become more responsible in the way they do, they are conducted research. The Researcher as a bricoleur also acknowledges, accepts and understands that researchers all tell stories about the words they have studied.

The research report is a story, about the world that is being studied, about what one has studied, after all the research papers; the published papers are stories, of what was studied, why it was studied, how it was studied and what are its implications. So they understand a research studies social world, studies the world around himself or herself and the researcher understands, that is all stories does the narratives, or stories, scientists tell are accounts couched and framed within specific storytelling traditions, often defined as paradigms.

We may conduct the research from a disconnected perspective, I see things in a write them up as third person, but at the end of the day, the way I write the story of what I have studied, is

governed by the rules of writing that are acceptable to the people, who are going to help me share this story with a larger audience. In our case, these are the rules that govern the acceptability, of a piece of or acceptability of a research report; they are also the way a research, qualitative research is presented.

The stories are presented, are also couched and framed within specific ways of writing, we are taught the ways of writing, there are standardized ways of writing of interpreting of presenting information and the specific story telling traditions as they are called, are what help us share what we know to the rest of the world and in doing so in confining the stories that we are generated through our research, we end up missing out on some information, even in Qualitative research and the researcher understands this.

And the researcher tries to bring in as much information into the story as possible, to fit it into the boundaries of acceptable storytelling traditions and then in order to do that the researcher has to keep reading, has to keep understanding, has to keep in respect.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:42)

What do qualitative researchers as *bricoleurs* produce? (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994)

- "... a bricolage, a complex, dense, reflexive, collagelike creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings, and interpretations of the world or phenomena under analysis. This bricolage will [...] connect the parts to the whole, stressing the meaningful relationships that operate in the situations and social worlds studied (Weinstein & Weinstein, 1991, p.)"

7

What do qualitative researchers as bricoleurs produce? Qualitative researchers as bricoleurs produce a bricolage. They produce a bricolage, a complex dense, reflexive, collage like creation that represents the researcher's images, understandings and interpretations of the world or phenomena under analysis. So it is a beautiful piece of art a researcher collects the meaningful pieces of information, from the context one studies.

The researcher understands that these pieces of information acquire a certain meaning when they are happening within the context, they are happening in and when they are taken out of that context and interpreted, even with reference to that context and pieced with other information, that may or may not relate to the context, that is being, that they are actually happening in, some of the meaning maybe lost or some of the meaning may change.

And these pieces of information ensconced in specific context, when they come together they acquire a new meaning, because in order to make something into a collage some pieces need to fit some links need to be made, within these different pieces of information that are gathered from different parts of what one is studying and in order to fit them together, some parts need to be chipped of the need to be fit in with each other connections need to be made, gaps need to be filled up and the collage is created.

So there are some overlaps, there are some places where other bits and pieces need to be fit in. A collage, a complex dense reflexive collage like creation that represents the researcher's images, now in all of this, the researchers' ability to interpret events and phenomena as they are happening within their natural context also comes in and that is what the researcher does.

An interpretation of the world of phenomena and analysis this bricolage will connect the parts to the whole, stressing the meaningful relationships, that operate in the situations and social world that are studied. So the meanings are created and then this collage is then connected to what one already knows about that phenomenon, which is again a collage of pieces of information in different context, that have been brought out and meanings have been created and these connections are formed, so that is what the bricoleur, the researcher as a bricoleur produces. And all of this may seem quite complicated for you, at this point but it's really not that difficult to understand once we start discussing, how qualitative search takes place.

That is all I have for you in this lecture, we will continue in the next lecture, with some more understanding of what qualitative research is? And how it takes place? Thank you for listening.