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GENERIC QUALITATIVE RESEARCH IN MANAGEMENT STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Although qualitative research becomes more widely accepted, however, its role in management studies is still underrepresented. This is because qualitative research requires an understanding of philosophy, terminology and theories which often presents conflicting perspectives. However, it should be noted that various qualitative research approaches started with generic qualitative research, which was considered easier to implement. Therefore, this article is aimed to provide insight into generic qualitative research and explain how to do it.

Keywords: *Generic qualitative research, Basic qualitative research, Methodology, Method*

INTRODUCTION

Background

Recently, qualitative research is gaining more acceptance. For more than fifty years, qualitative research methods experiencing significant growth (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Bamberg. et al., 2018). Because scholars recognized that to understand complex social phenomena requires in-depth examination and inner reflection, something that quantitative research does not offer (Hill & Knox, 2021). Creswell & Poth (2018) state that exploration of a social phenomenon is conducted by listening to the voices of the participants, researchers' reflections that produce interpretations, and in-depth explanations of the issues. It also provides a rich description that is well-grounded and context bounded (Miles et al., 2014). Thus, qualitative research is no longer conducted by a minority of researchers, it is now embedded globally into the social sciences (Morse, 2019).

On the other hand, in the management discipline, the role of qualitative research is still underrepresented. Mukhopadhyay & Gupta (2014) showed that amidst increasing publications using qualitative methodologies, leading journals in management still published a relatively small number of articles that use the qualitative methodology. Subsequently, they found, in the top three journals in strategic and general management, only nine per cent articles employed qualitative inquiry. Runfolo et al. (2016), based on his study of the 20 highest-impact management and business journals, found that those journals publish relatively few articles in qualitative case studies. They said that for academicians, qualitative research is still less appealing, perhaps those publishers are more stringent in selecting qualitative research articles than quantitative research. Additionally, to make qualitative research articles, researchers are required to read voluminous

journal articles, books, and numerous guidance in qualitative research methodology, methods and techniques (Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014).

The literature shows that qualitative research methodology and methods are wide-ranging. The diversity in its methodology makes it difficult for the researcher to determine the method used that fit to the problem being investigated (Hill & Knox, 2021). Unfortunately, the various qualitative methods have not provided clear enough descriptions of the methods, and, there are numerous debates about the epistemological basis of qualitative methodology (Smith et al., 2011). As an illustration, Table 1 shows the types of approach in qualitative research as stated by some scholars. Thus, more effort is required to study various philosophical foundations, methodologies, and methods in qualitative research.

In this regard, basic qualitative research or generic qualitative research becomes important. According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), basically, every qualitative research starts at generic qualitative research, and the chosen approach is merely an additional dimension. By using this approach, the researcher can carry out qualitative research without having to associate it with narrative inquiry, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, or case study (Merriam, 2016). This is an easier approach to conduct qualitative research (Bellamy et al., 2016; Caelli et al., 2003; Kennedy, 2016).

In a field with diverse philosophical assumptions, methodologies, and terminologies, it may be difficult for novice researchers to do qualitative research. As for generic qualitative research, Kennedy (2016) states that there is no definite guideline for conducting generic qualitative research. Additionally, there are many discussions related to the methodology of generic qualitative research with conflicting arguments (Caelli et al., 2003). Consequently, those who are interested in this approach need an explanation that is easy to understand. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to provide insight into generic qualitative research and present explanation of how to do it.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Generic Qualitative Research

Scholars give different names for this methodology: basic, generic or interpretive qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), interpretive description (Thorne et al., 1997), and basic or fundamental qualitative description (Sandelowski, 2000). Figure 1 shows the association of generic qualitative research with other methodologies.

Essentially, qualitative research is concerned with how individuals perceive the reality around them. The meaning of reality is constructed from the interaction between humans and their world in the social context (Scotland, 2012). Therefore, Merriam & Tisdell (2016) state, constructivist epistemology underpinned generic qualitative research. The constructivist epistemology is different from the objectivist epistemology. The constructionist epistemology rejects the idea that the objective truth is independent of human beings (Gray, 2014; Moon & Blackman, 2014; Neuman, 2014). Objectivist epistemology assumes that reality is independent and located outside the individual. Empirical evidence is required to verify the reality and to prove that the reality is considered as a truth. Through the investigation, objective knowledge is obtained. While in the constructionist epistemology, the truth is just emerging from human involvement with

the surrounding, so the reality is a product of the human mind. Individuals build knowledge through their engagement and their interpretation of the world around them. While objectivist

Table 1. Types of Qualitative Research

Merriam and Tisdell, 2016	Creswell and Poth (2018)	Patton (2015)	Tesch (2013)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Basic qualitative research 2. Narrative inquiry 3. Phenomenology 4. Grounded theory 5. Ethnography 6. Qualitative case studies 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Narrative 2. Phenomenological 3. Grounded theory 4. Ethnographic 5. Case study 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ethnography 2. Autoethnography 3. Reality-testing, foundationalist epistemologies: positivism, postpositivism, empiricism, and objectivism 4. Grounded theory 5. Realism 6. Phenomenology 7. Heuristic inquiry 8. Social constructionism and constructivism 9. Narrative inquiry 10. Ethnomethodology 11. Symbolic interaction 12. Semiotics 13. Hermeneutics 14. Systems theory 15. Complexity theory 16. Pragmatism and generic qualitative inquiry 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Action research 2. Case study 3. Clinical research 4. Cognitive anthropology 5. Collaborative inquiry 6. Content analysis 7. Dialogical research 8. Conversation analysis 9. Delphi study 10. Descriptive research 11. Direct research 12. Discourse analysis 13. Document study 14. Ecological psychology 15. Educational connoisseurship and criticism 16. Educational ethnography 17. Ethnographic content analysis 18. Ethnography 19. Ethnography of communication 20. Ethnomethodology 21. Ethnoscience 22. Experiential psychology 23. Field study 24. Focus group research 25. Grounded theory 26. Hermeneutics 27. Heuristic research 28. Holistic ethnography 29. Imaginal psychology 30. Intensive research 31. Interpretive evaluation 32. Interpretive interactionism 33. Interpretive human studies 34. Life history study 35. Naturalistic inquiry 36. Oral history 37. Panel research 38. Participant observation 39. Participative research 40. Phenomenography 41. Phenomenology 42. Qualitative evaluation 43. Structural ethnography 44. Symbolic interactionism 45. Transcendental realism 46. Transformative research

Source: Creswell and Poth (2018), Merriam and Tisdell (2016), Patton (2002), and Tesch (2013).

epistemology is the foundation for the positivist or post-positivist paradigm, constructivist epistemology is the foundation for the interpretivist paradigm (Crotty, 1998; Gray, 2014).

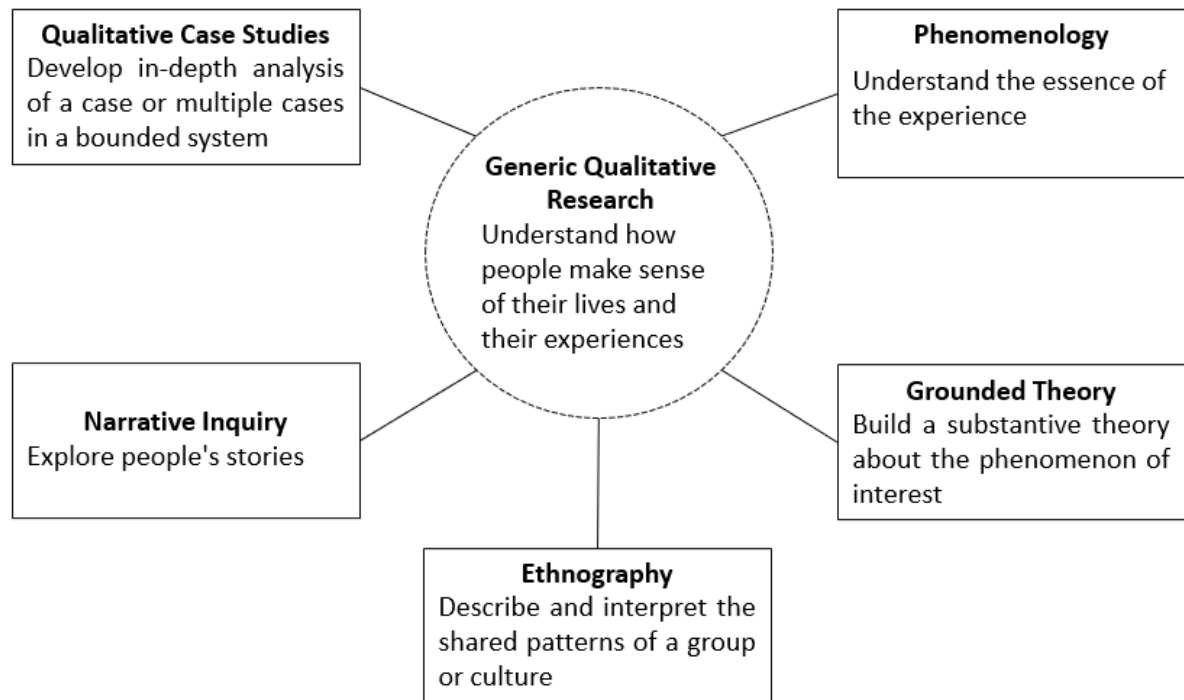


Figure 1. Generic Qualitative Research and Other Methodologies
Source: Merriam and Tisdell (2016)

This paper describes generic qualitative research using the interpretivist paradigm. However, it should be noted that generic qualitative research can be implemented using other paradigms, namely post-positivist and pragmatism (Kennedy, 2016). Post-positivist is different from positivist. Positivists have been criticized because the scientific method in researching human affairs ignores human uniqueness, individuality, cultural context and values, by treating humans as natural objects (Hussain et al., 2013). Hence, post-positivists opined that reality is beyond human minds, it cannot be understood exactly, it should be understood probabilistically; therefore, the truth is approached not with absolute objectivity but with a certain level of objectivity (Mack, 2010; Porta & Keating, 2008). On the other hand, pragmatism is not committed to a certain philosophical assumption (Creswell & Poth, 2018); it rejects to engage in the concept of reality and truth (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). For pragmatists, the reality is true as long as it helps human to acquire satisfactory relations with human experiences (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). Pragmatism focuses on the research problem, then uses multiple methods to understand (Creswell, 2013), and solving the practical problem. According to Morgan (2014), pragmatism is a paradigm. Thus, generic qualitative research can be carried out using interpretive, post-positivist paradigm, and pragmatic paradigm.

The relationship between various methodologies and generic qualitative research needs to be understood. In this respect, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) emphasized that all of the qualitative research methodologies contain common characteristics, and they are under the umbrella of qualitative research. It should be noted that every methodology has a different focus which causes different ways of formulating questions, sampling methods, data collection, analysis, and reporting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this regard, generic qualitative research can be implemented without having to adhere to a particular qualitative research methodology. The goal of generic qualitative research is not to explore, analyze and interpret someone's experience as in narrative inquiry, not to understand the substance and underlying structure of phenomenon as in phenomenology, not to discover substantive theory about the phenomenon as in grounded theory, not to seek, understand, or explain the interactions between individuals and with their culture as in ethnography, and not to explore a process as in a case study (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

DISCUSSION

Method of Generic Qualitative Research

Generic qualitative research with interpretivist paradigm is intended to understand how people interpret their experiences, construct the reality around them, and understand the meaning they give to their experiences (Merriam, 2002; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this regard, the researcher acts as an instrument that provides meaning obtained from document analysis, observation and interviews (Merriam, 2002). Furthermore, the data is analyzed inductively to identify main themes and then processed into a rich description which is written based on the research framework (Merriam, 2002).

Thus, it is necessary to understand further the “how” aspects of this kind of research. In this matter, the method is the systematic approach towards the data collection and interpret information. A variety of methods can be employed as long as in line with research objectives and contribute to the research trustworthiness (Bradshaw et al., 2017). This section describes the sampling method, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethics.

1. Sampling

The sampling method in qualitative research is theoretical or purposive sampling instead of statistical sampling. Unlike sampling method in quantitative research, this sampling method is determined by relevance to the research objectives rather than the representativeness (Flick, 2011). Thus, purposive or purposeful sampling is used to reveal rich information about the issue being investigated (Patton, 2015). In this respect, the researcher determines the sample based on the consideration that participants can provide insights (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) that can be used to answer research questions. The next issue is, how many samples are considered adequate?

The number of samples in qualitative research is less than in quantitative research. Because, the main purpose of sampling in qualitative research is to acquire rich information rather than representing the population (Gentles et al., 2015). By using a small sample, the qualitative researcher can obtain in-depth information (Patton, 2015). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), in purposeful sampling, the sample size is determined by saturation or redundancy; the sampling is ended when no new information or insights is emerging from new sampled units (Merriam, 2016). According to Gentles et al., (2015), sample saturation is extensively discussed in qualitative

methods literature because it is crucial. In this regard, Ando et al. (2014), Hennink et al. (2017); Tran et al. (2016), and Van Rijnsoever (2015), among others, provide guidelines to justify sample size determination in qualitative research.

However, the saturation approach in determining the sample size is debatable. Boddy (2016) argues, in practice, saturation data does not appear to be used in estimating actual sample sizes before data collection. He reported, in a meta-analysis of 560 academic qualitative research, the amount of sample data is always a multiple of ten, this clearly shows that the determination of the sample in advance is not completely in line with the saturation data theory. Additionally, the investigation of 81 qualitative studies found that the saturation concept applied in these studies was not explained in detail how they did it and was not supported by sufficient evidence (Boddy, 2016). Bradshaw et al. (2017) said that the saturation of data can never really be achieved. Sim et al. (2018) problematized the determination of sample size using the saturation method for two reasons. Firstly, because of the use of questionable assumptions. Secondly, because of importing inappropriate methodological or statistical principles from quantitative research into qualitative research methodology. They argue that saturation is not determined in advance, because researchers do not know what their analysis will be until they do it. They argued, sample size determination depends on interpretative judgment related to the purpose and objectives of the research.

Nevertheless, basically, all scholars agree that samples size determination in the research proposal is indispensable. Refutation of the saturation approach was also debated by other scholars. Blaikie (2000) states that the debate about sample size in qualitative research has been going on for 20 years and becoming more intense. In this way, Patton asserted that there is no logical or theory-driven reason why the number of samples of one research is more prevalent than others. Thus, in responding to different views on sample size, the researcher can choose the argument that becomes the basis for determining the sample size, whether to use a statistical calculation on saturation or not. In this way, the researcher must build plausible reasons to justify their choices. However, it should be noted that in the end, the determination of sufficient sample size depends on peer review, consensual validation, and judgment (Patton, 2015).

2. Data collection

Qualitative data include direct quotes about knowledge, opinions, feelings and experiences from resource persons obtained through interviews, observations, audiovisual materials, and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Generic qualitative research method often uses semi-structured in-depth interviews, although other methods are possible (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In conducting interviews, an interview protocol is needed as a guide in gathering information. The interview protocol contains an introduction, a list of questions, and closing instructions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Interviews allow the researcher to collect data from informants or participants while allowing some related issues, information or new insights emerge during the interview.

In practice, interviews can be implemented face to face, by telephone, or by video conferencing. As an illustration, to perform a face-to-face interview, in the preliminary session the researcher introduces himself, conveys the intent of the interview, asks for participant's consent, and asks for permission to use the recorder device. During the interview, the researcher could take notes. To create a relaxed atmosphere, the sitting position in the interview need to be made as comfortable as possible, conducted at convenience time, comfort location, and free from

distractions. Interviews supposed to be managed in a fluid dialogue using semi-structured or open-ended questions to gather rich and detailed information about participant's experiences, knowledge and feelings. At the closing of the interview, the researcher must reaffirm whether confidentiality will be maintained, ask for permission to follow-up or for asking extra information, and finally, thanks to the participant.

3. Data analysis

In conducting data analysis, the researcher transforms abundant data into insightful and understandable information. Qualitative data analysis mostly is conducted using the content or thematic analysis (Bradshaw et al., 2017). According to Vaismoradi (2013), content analysis is used to analyze data qualitatively and at the same time quantitatively, whereas in thematic analysis the data is analyzed in a qualitative, nuanced, and detailed manner. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explain that data analysis starts from the beginning of data collection, so that investigators during interviews, observation, or reading documents can capture and apprehend insights, impressions, understandings, and feelings. Subsequently, improvements can be made for the next data collection, questions formulation, and other steps, to get trustworthy results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

As an illustration, data analysis can be implemented using the following steps. First, data familiarization. The researcher conducts qualitative data immersion in his/her mind by reading the transcription and listening to the interview recording delicately to capture the impressions and emerging new themes (Green et al., 2007). This process is carried out in an open-minded manner to acquire unusual, unexpected, or novice themes (Green et al., 2007). Second, coding is executed by assigning descriptive labels toward sentences, phrases, or words that contain ideas that are considered relevant, important, or repetitive (Green et al., 2007). In this regard, the research instrument is the researcher itself because he/she determines which sentence or phrases to encode and which to exclude (Miles et al., 2014). Third, categorizing. In conducting the coding process, the researcher can choose which codes are considered very important and relevant and then those codes are grouped into categories or sub-categories if possible (Saldaña, 2009). Fourth, the categories and sub-categories are logically connected. Furthermore, the researcher can read the pattern of relationships and the hierarchy of categories and subcategories, as a basis for making plausible explanations.

4. Trustworthiness

In any research endeavor, researchers are strived to achieve trustworthiness, equivalent name of valid and reliable knowledge. For this reason, rigor procedure is needed. Rigor refers to the researcher's effort and attention to ensure that the research is conducted appropriately (Tracy, 2013). In the past (the 1950s and 1960s), many researchers strived to justify qualitative research methodology by using quantitative research standards, so the concepts of validity and reliability which are positivists' tradition were transformed into qualitative research methodology (Taylor et al., 2016). Subsequently, Lincoln & Guba (1985) proposed the concept of validity and reliability in qualitative research sense which is represented by the word trustworthiness. It refers to the quality of inquiry and its results that makes it noteworthy and valuable. Trustworthiness consists of four criteria that are the substitute terms for objectivity, reliability, internal validity, and external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sharan B. Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Petty et al., 2012):

- a. Confirmability is the degree to which the findings are not the bias of the researcher, but the product of the research,
- b. dependability is the degree to which the findings are consistent with the data collected,
- c. credibility is the extent to which the results of the research match reality, and finally,
- d. transferability is the extent to which the results can be applied in other contexts.

A number of scholars explain the strategies in achieving trustworthiness. Some of them described it as shown in Table 2. In selecting strategies to achieve trustworthiness, the researcher needs to develop reasons for selecting strategies. The views of those scholars can be used as a reference in developing arguments. In practice, some researchers determine strategies to achieve the four criteria of trustworthiness, while others are not. In this regard, Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 343) advise researchers to engage in at least two of those strategies in any given qualitative study.

5. Ethics

Ethical issues cannot be separated from the researcher's personality and ethical practices. Since all research aims to achieve trustworthiness, and data is tied directly to those who collect and analyze it, the researcher's competence and integrity are critical (Patton, 2015). Thus, the researcher needs to have sufficient skills to carry out the inquiry process. Additionally, the honesty of the researcher also determines the quality of the research. Because, even though there is a code of ethics or regulations related to academic integrity, however, there is no guarantee of trustworthiness. It entirely depends on researchers' skills and ethical behavior.

Regarding ethical procedures in conducting interviews with participants, four provisions need to be attended (Tracy, 2013). First, do no harm. It is important to bear in mind that qualitative research is highly personal, participants should be treated with respect, and do not offend them in the interview. Researchers are required to behave in accordance with the prevalent ethical values. Second, the researcher should explain the objectives of the research to participants honestly to build their trust and their willingness to openly provide information, opinions and feelings. Third, each participant is informed about their consent prior to the interview. Lastly, the researcher should respect the confidentiality and privacy of the participants.

CONCLUSION

While qualitative research becomes common in social science fields, it is still relatively underrepresented in management studies. Qualitative research is known as a field that presents debates on philosophy and methodology. In addition, there are various qualitative research types, each of which has certain philosophical and methodological assumptions. In this regard, generic qualitative research can be used because it is not too tied to various existing qualitative research methodologies, therefore, it is easier to understand.

This article provides a simple description of what and how generic qualitative research is. Mostly, articles on generic qualitative research topic are written by scholars in fields other than management. However, their articles contain universal principles ideas, therefore, can be applied in the management field of study. Through this paper, it is hoped that generic qualitative research can be easily understood and practiced, thus, contributing to the development of qualitative research in the management research area.

Table 2. Criteria and strategies to achieve trustworthiness

	Petty et al., (2012)	Bradshaw et al., 2017	Merriam and Tisdell (2016) ¹	Welch et al. (2011)
Confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit trail of the process of data analysis • Triangulation • Member checking • Reflexive research journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notes recorded in a reflective journal. • An audit trail used to capture data collection and analysis process. • Description of demographics of participants. • Utilizing member-checking processes to verify data accuracy. • Findings represent the data gathered and not biased by the researcher, evidenced by inclusion of direct quotations from participants. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry audit • Triangulation • Reflexivity
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit trail of procedures and processes • Triangulation • Reflexive research journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of an audit trail describing the study's procedures and processes. • Account for any changes that occur within the study 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflexivity • Triangulation • audit trail 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry audit
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged engagement • Persistent observation • Referential adequacy materials • Peer debriefing • Member checking • Triangulation • Negative case analysis • Reflexive research journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Established rapport prior to commencing interviews. • Developing a trusting relationship (willingness to exchange information). • Express compassion and empathy during interviews. • Prolonged engagement • Participants to verify the accuracy of the interview transcript (member checking). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triangulation • member checks • Adequate engagement in data collection • peer review • reflexivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prolonged engagement • Peer debriefing • Negative case analysis • Archiving of raw data (if possible) • member checks
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick description • Purposive sampling • Reflexive research journal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purposeful sampling. • Maintaining a reflexive journal. • Providing sufficient study details so recreation could occur. • Rich description. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rich, thick description 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thick description

¹ According to Merriam (1995), the positivist's validity and reliability need to be grounded in the worldview of qualitative research. To the specific concerns in constructivist qualitative research, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) mention three criteria: credibility, dependability, and transferability.

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