

# An Overview of Qualitative Research

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# Outline

- Origins
- Defining qualitative research
- Differences between quantitative vs qualitative
- Research problem and research paradigm
- Qualitative research design
- Qualitative research approaches and methods
- Qualitative data analysis
- Challenges

# Origin

- Field of studies
  - ◆ social and behavioral sciences: sociology, anthropology and psychology.
- critique of natural science methods used in social science
  - ◆ positivist vs phenomenology
- Emergence of cultural and poststructural school

# Qualitative research

- Cresswell (1994) “as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting.



# What is qualitative research?

Qualitative research is an inquiry approach in which the inquirer (adapted from Creswell 2002, p. 58) :

- explores a central phenomenon (one key concept)
- asks participants broad, general questions
- collects detailed views of participants in the form of words or images

# What is qualitative research?

- analyzes and codes the data for description and themes
- interprets the meaning of the information drawing on personal reflections and past research
- writes the final report that includes personal biases and a flexible structure.

# Basic differences

## Qualitative



## Quantitative



Qualitative

Descriptive

Numbers not the  
primary focus

Interpretive,  
;

Quantitative

N for  
numbers

Statistical

Quantifiable

# Differences between quantitative and qualitative research

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Quantitative</i>	<i>Qualitative</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Paradigm</i></li> <li>• <i>Ontology (reality)</i></li> <li>• <i>Epistemology (knowing)</i></li> <li>• <i>Truth</i></li> <li>• <i>Logic</i></li> <li>• <i>Value</i></li> <li>• <i>Type</i></li> <li>• <i>Source of data</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Positivism</b></li> <li>• <b>Realism/materialism</b></li> <li>• <b>Objectivism</b></li> <li>• <b>Representational</b></li> <li>• <b>Fact</b></li> <li>• <b>Externalized</b></li> <li>• <b>Individual attribute</b></li> <li>• <b>Deductive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Theory → Data</b></li> <li>• <b>General to particular</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Value neutral/free</b></li> <li>• <b>explanatory</b></li> <li>• <b>Artificial /Control</b></li> <li>• <b>Numbers</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>InterpretivismConstructivism</b></li> <li>• <b>Relativism/idealism</b></li> <li>• <b>Subjectivism</b></li> <li>• <b>Transactional</b></li> <li>• <b>negotiated thru dialogue</b></li> <li>• <b>Internalized</b></li> <li>• <b>Collaborative meaning</b></li> <li>• <b>Inductive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Data → Theory</b></li> <li>• <b>Particular to general</b></li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>Value-laden/informed</b></li> <li>• <b>Explorative</b></li> <li>• <b>Natural/relax</b></li> <li>• <b>people's words, actions and records, visuals</b></li> </ul>

## Characteristics

- *Methods*

- *Query Structure*

- *Setting*
- *social distance (researcher-subject)*
- *Status of theory*
- *manipulation of subjects*
- *No. of respondents*
- *time to conduct*
- *Strength*

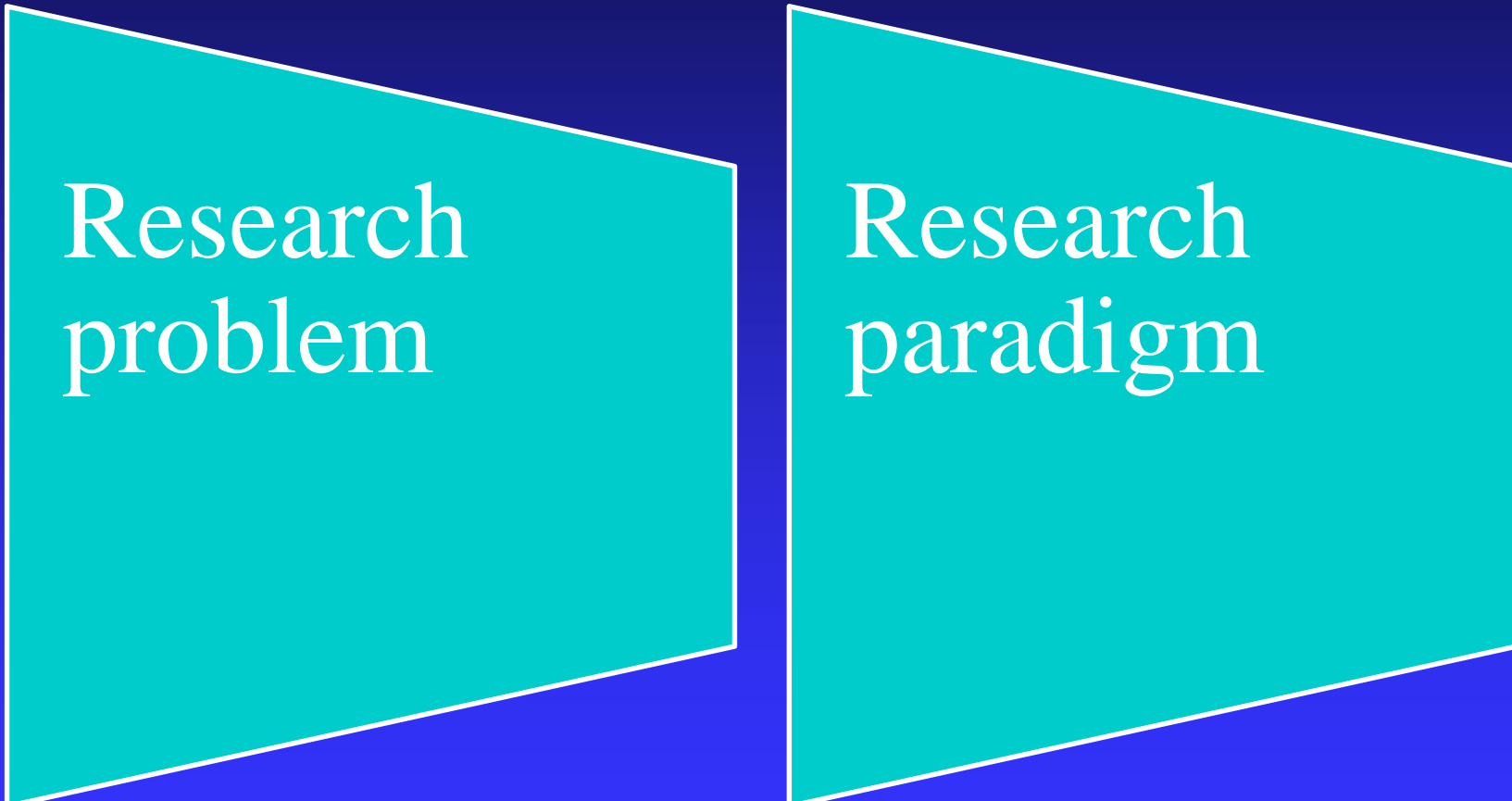
## Quantitative

- **experiments, survey interview, testing, & observation**
  - **More structured**
    - **Construct, variable**
  - **Control & formal**
  - **more**
- **confirmatory**
- **Some**
  - **More**
  - **little time**
  - **Validity & reliability**
  - **Predictive**

## Qualitative

- **unstructured interviews, observation, and content analysis**
  - **Less structured**
    - **Construct & reconstruct**
  - **Natural & informal**
  - **Less**
- **Emergent/tentative**
- **Little**
- **Fewer**
- **more time**
- **Discourse of the research community**
- **interaction**

# Research problem shapes research paradigm



The diagram consists of two teal-colored trapezoidal shapes with white outlines, positioned side-by-side. The left trapezoid is wider at the top and tapers towards the bottom, containing the text 'Research problem'. The right trapezoid is wider at the bottom and tapers towards the top, containing the text 'Research paradigm'. The shapes are set against a dark blue background with a vertical strip of lighter blue squares on the far left.

Research  
problem

Research  
paradigm

# research problem

- The practical issue that leads to a need for your study.
  - ◆ Empirical question
  - ◆ Theoretical question
  - ◆ Social change
- Participants
- Research site



# Research paradigm

“a basic set of beliefs that guide action”,  
dealing with first principles, ‘ultimates’ or the  
**researcher’s worldviews** (Denzin and Lincoln  
(2000: 157)

Variety in approaches to social science  
research is desirable, depending on **questions  
explored** and **philosophical position** (research  
paradigm)

Is it the ‘**real**’ world that we observe  
(**POSITIVISM**) or one **interpreted** through  
our own personal & subjective scheme of  
things (**INTERPRETIVISM**)?

# Possible aims & objectives of qualitative

- **Description:** what does it look like (what, when, where, who)?
- **Explanation:** why did it happen?
- **Prediction:** what is to be expected?
- **Understanding:** how is it grasped in human experience?
- **Interpretation:** what does it mean?
- **Prescription:** how ought it be?
- **Change and emancipation:** how can it be transformed for the better?
- **Critique and disruption:** what are the limitations and hidden assumptions? How can these assumptions be challenged/ interrupted?
- Etc. (e.g., exploration, demonstration, classification)

# Qualitative wording for research questions and objectives

## ■ Questions

- ◆ Begin with words such as “how,” “what,”

## ■ Objectives

- ◆ what you are attempting to “**discover,**”  
“**generate,**” “**explore,**” “**identify,**” or “**describe**”

## ■ Questions-objectives

- ◆ Ask “what happened?” to **describe**
- ◆ Ask “What was the meaning to people of what happened?” **to understand**
- ◆ Ask “What happened over time?” **to explore a process**

# What sort of research questions can interpretive paradigm best answer?

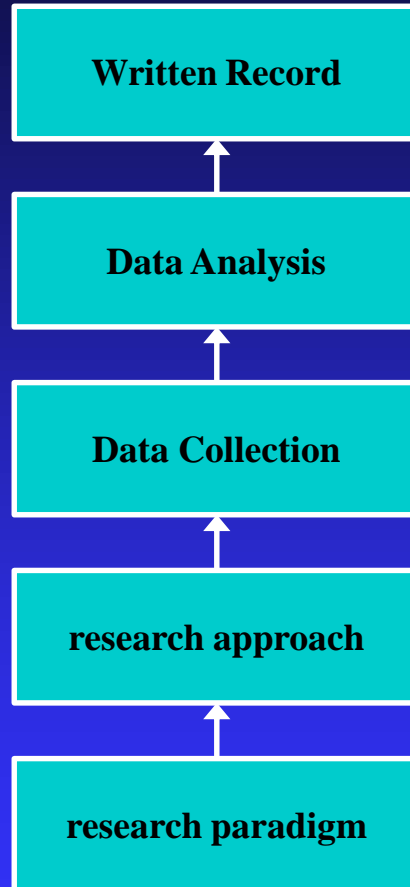
Consider the following:

- ‘Lived experience’
- ‘Insider’ perspectives
- Context/ Meaning oriented rather than measurement oriented

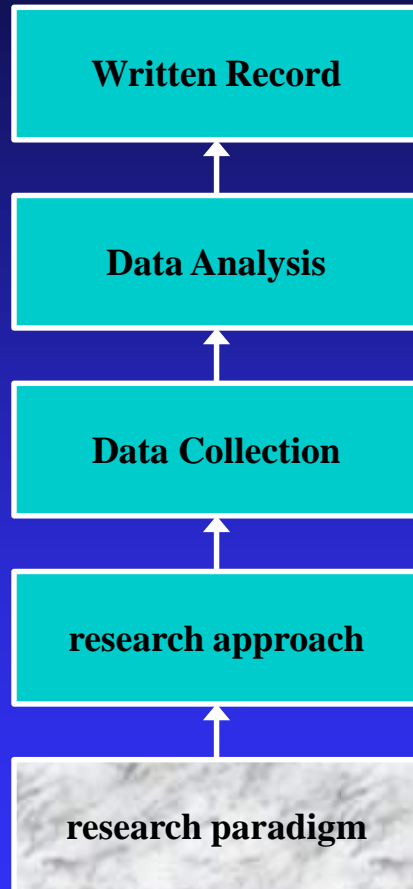
# Relevance of qualitative research

- provide you with details about human behavior, social relations, histories, places, imageries, emotion, and personality characteristics
- Increase knowledge of people or situations that are not usually studied (especially, the experiences of women, persons of color, and people who are often marginalized in society)
- Provide information that can be used for social change.

# A model of research design

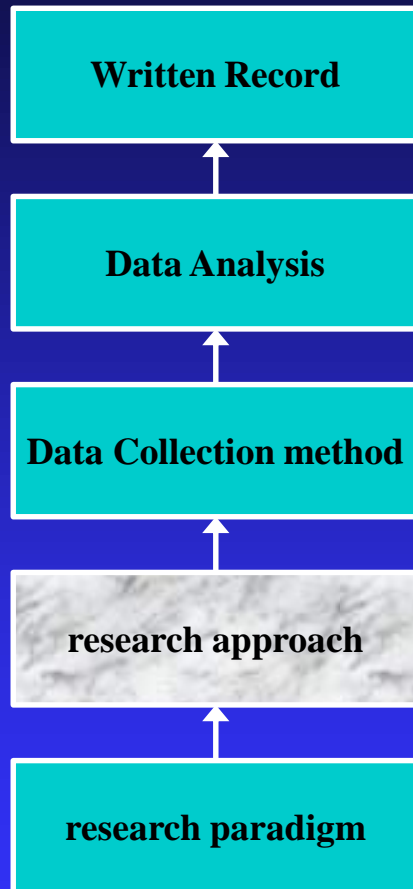


# research paradigm



- **Positivist research** – are you testing one or more hypotheses?
- **Interpretive research** – are you exploring a research topic or theory?
- **Critical research** – are you seeking to critique the status quo or help to emancipate people in some way?

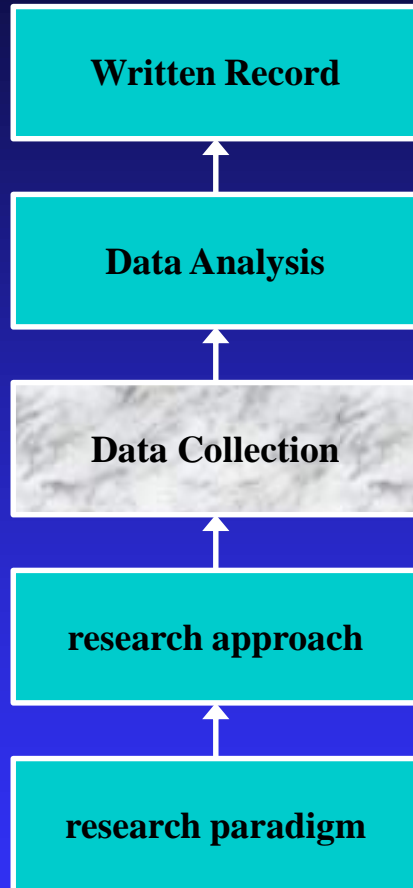
# research approach



- A research approach is a strategy of enquiry
- How are you going to find out about the social world?
- research approach– action research, case study research, ethnography, grounded theory
- Each can use any set of research paradigm

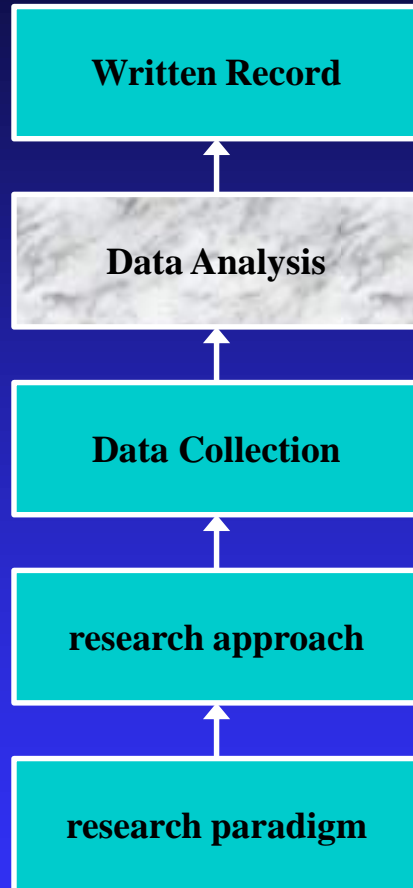


# Data Collection techniques



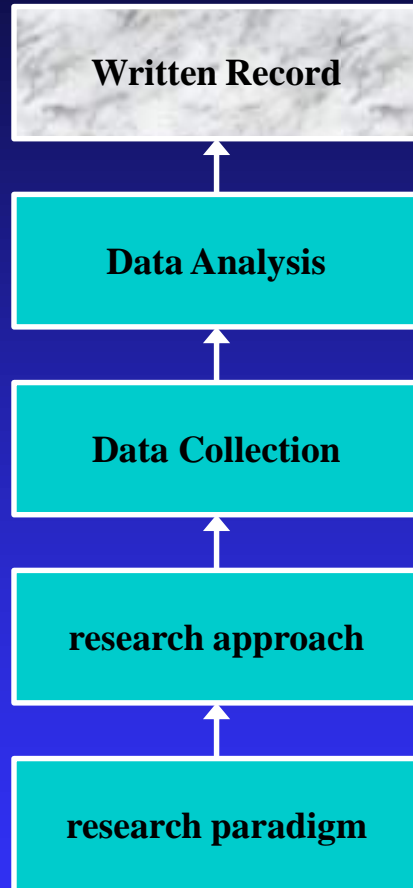
- Which data collection technique(s) will you use?
- Interviews
- Participant observation and fieldwork
- Documents

# Data Analysis



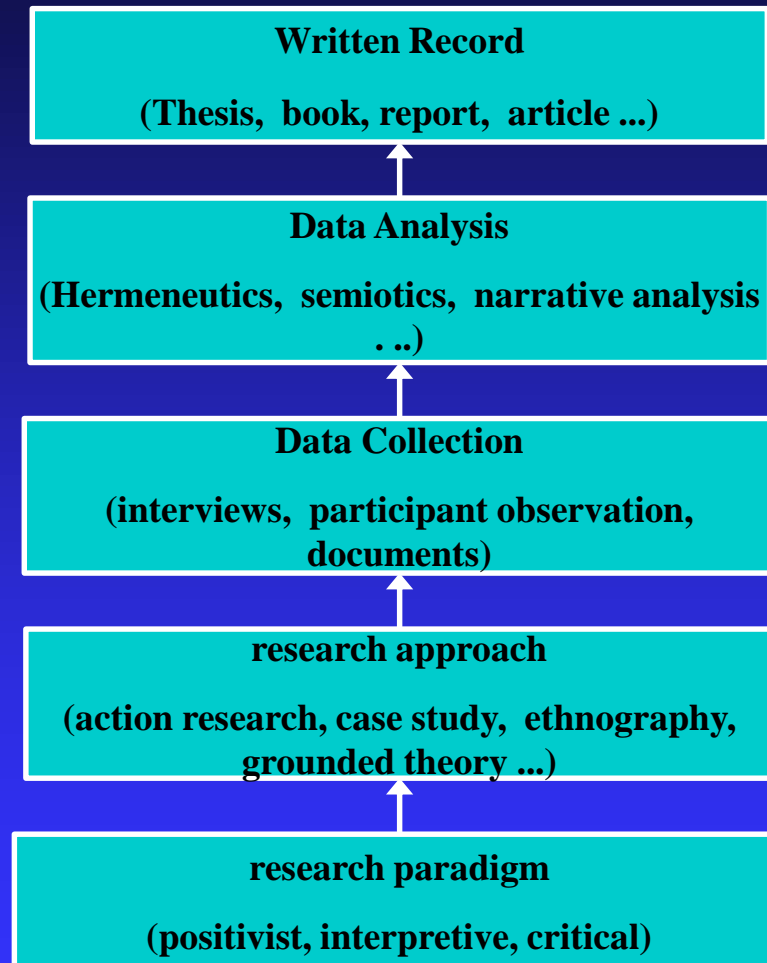
- **Many ways to analyse qualitative data:**
  - **Thematic analysis**
  - **Content analysis**
  - **Discourse analysis**
  - **Hermeneutics**
  - **Semiotics**
  - **Narrative analysis, etc.**

# Written record



- Are you writing a thesis, a book, a book chapter, a conference paper, or a journal article?
- The process of writing up is just as important as doing the research itself

# The model in perspective



# Qualitative research approaches

	<b>The Qualitative approaches</b>				
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Narrative</b>	<b>Phenomenology</b>	<b>Grounded Theory</b>	<b>Ethnography</b>	<b>Case Study</b>
<b>Focus</b>	•Exploring the life of an individual	• Understanding the essence of experiences about a phenomenon	• Developing a theory grounded from data in the field	• Describing and interpreting a cultural or social group	• Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases
<b>Data Collection</b>	• Primary interviews and documents	• Long interviews with up to 10 people FGD	• Interviews with 20-30 individuals to “saturate” categories and detail a theory	• Primarily observations and interviews with additional artifacts during extended time in the field (e.g. 6 months to a year)	• Multiple sources including documents, archival records, interviews, observations, • Physical artifacts
<b>Data Analysis</b>	• Stories • Epiphanies • Historical content	• Statements • Meanings • Meaning themes • General description of the experience	• Open coding • Axial Coding • Selective Coding • Conditional Matrix	• Description • Analysis • Interpretation	• Description • Themes • Assertions
<b>Narrative Form</b>	• Detailed picture of an individual’s life	• Description of the “essence” of the experience	• Theory or theoretical model	• Description of the cultural behavior of a group or an individual	• In-depth study of a “case” or “cases”

# Narrative

- Focus – Exploring the life of an individual
- Discipline origin – Anthropology, Literature, History, Psychology and Sociology
- Data collection – Primarily interviews and documents
- Data analysis – Stories, epiphanies, historical content
- Narrative form – Detailed picture of an individual's life

# Phenomenology

- Focus – Understanding essence of experiences about a phenomenon
- Discipline origin – Philosophy, Psychology and Sociology
- Data collection – Long interviews with up to 10 people
- Data analysis – Statements, meanings, meaning themes and general description of the experience
- Narrative form – Description of the “essence” of the experience

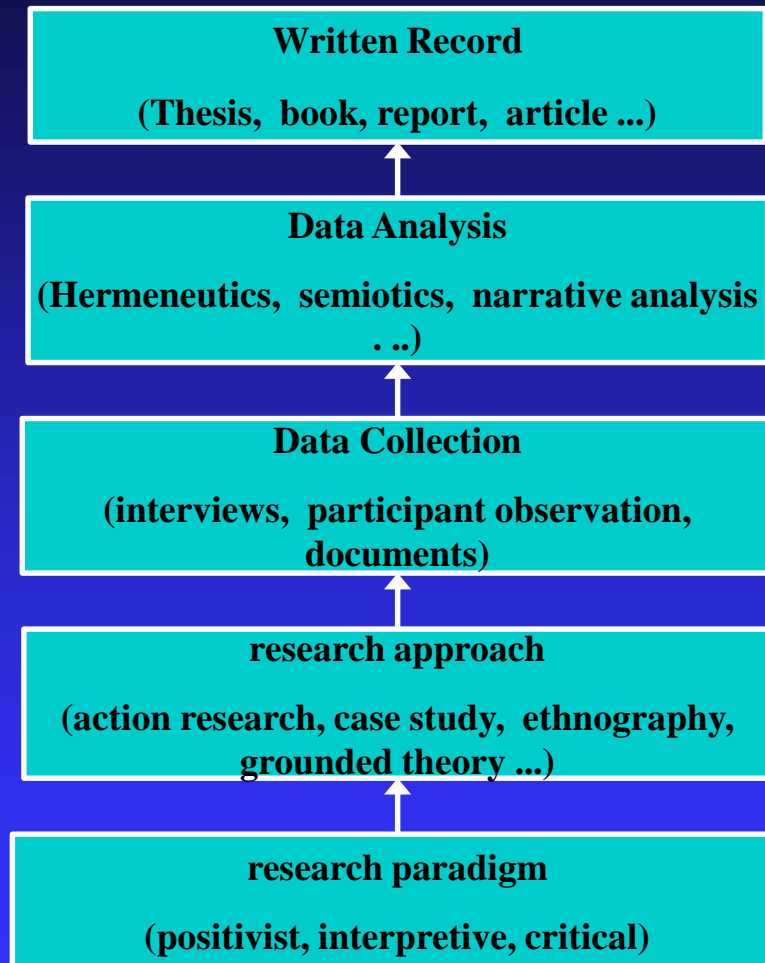


# Grounded Theory

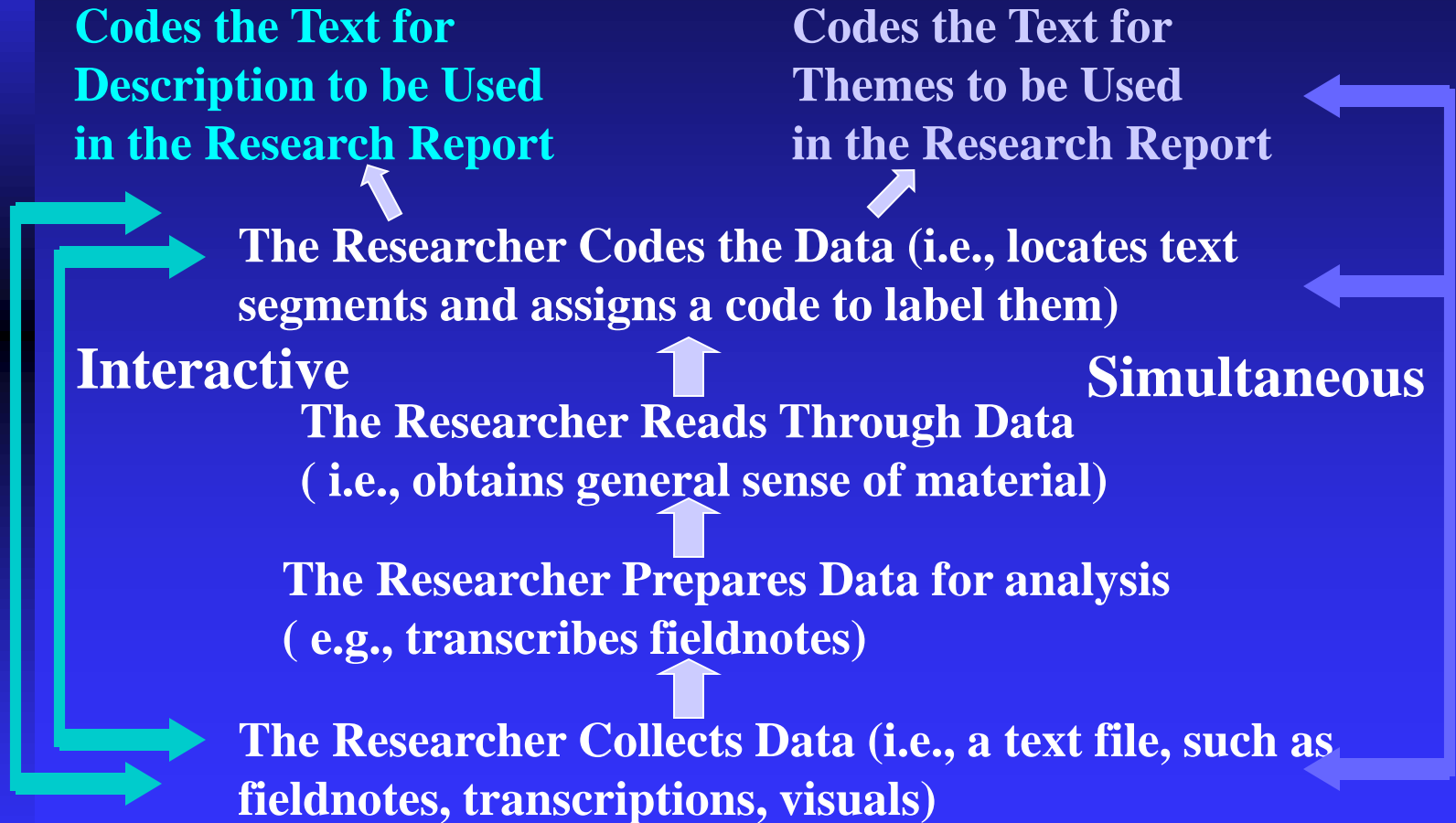
- Focus – Developing a theory grounded in data from the field
- Discipline origin – Sociology
- Data collection – Interviews with 20-30 individuals to “saturate” categories and detail a theory
- Data analysis – Open coding, axial coding, selective coding and conditional matrix
- Narrative form – Theory or theoretical model

# Case Study

- Focus – Developing an in-depth analysis of a single case or multiple cases
- Discipline origin – Political Science, Sociology, Urban studies, and other social sciences
- Data collection – Multiple sources: documents, archival records, interviews, observations and physical artifacts
- Data analysis – Description, themes and assertions
- Narrative form – In-depth study of a “case” or “cases”



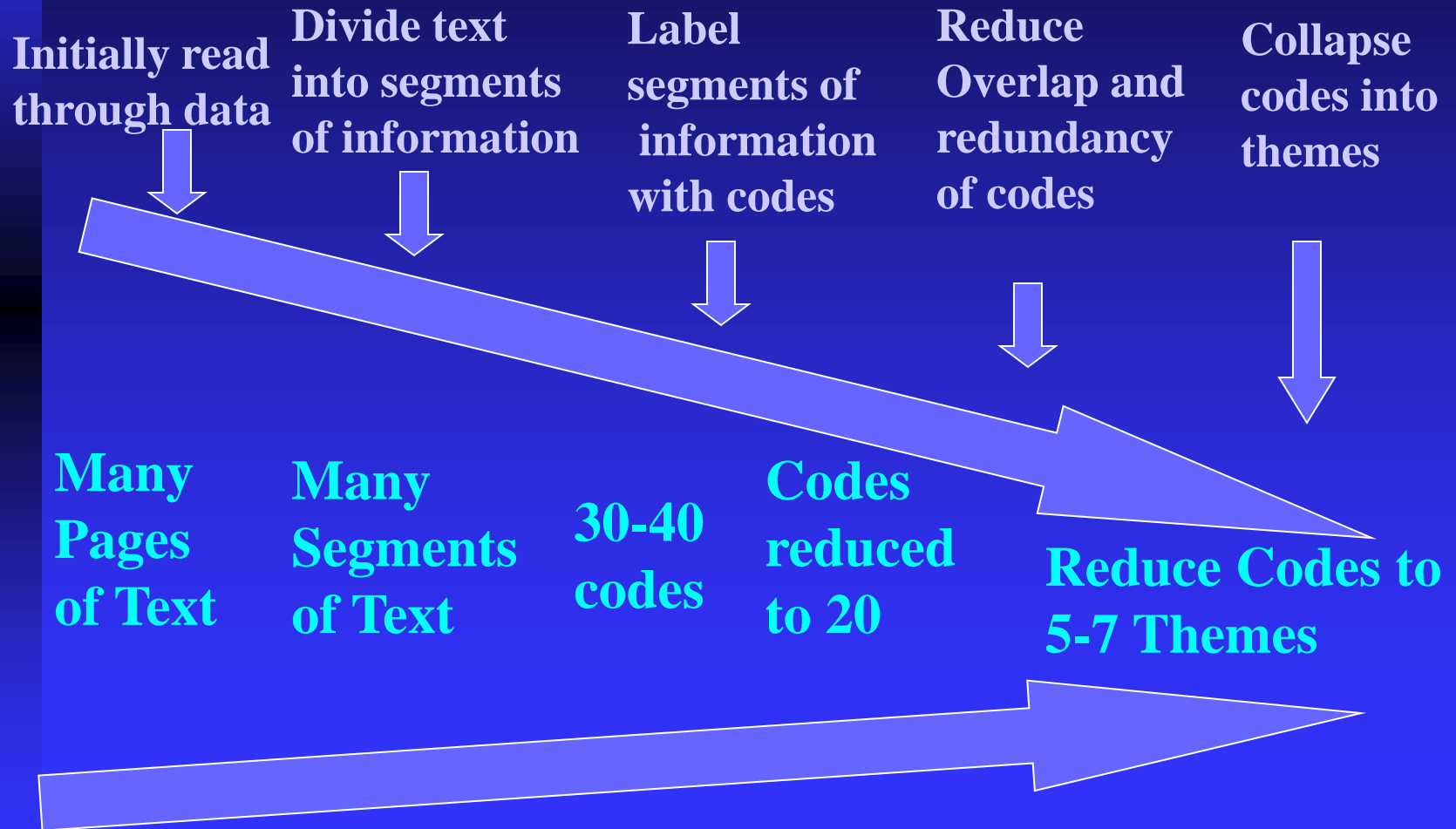
# analyze data: overall process



# More specific steps in the analysis process

- Exploring the data
- Coding the data
- Developing findings - a description and themes
- (Re) presenting the description and themes
- Interpreting the findings
- Validating the findings

# coding process involves several steps:



# CHALLENGES

1. The researcher needs to have a grounding in discipline (ex.cultural anthropology) and the meaning of a social-cultural system as well as the concepts typically explored by ethnographers.
2. The time to collect data is extensive, involving prolonged time in the field (say 3mths to 1 year).
3. There is a possibility that the researcher will “go native” and be unable to complete the study or be compromised in the study.

4. Unfamiliar with cultural group or system (such as the Orang Asli, Penan, Iban, bidayuh and other communities etc.).

5. The researcher needs to acknowledge his or her impact on the people and the places being studied.



# References

- 1. Creswell, John W. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998.
  - ◆ This is a good introductory text to five key areas of qualitative research—narrative research, grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and phenomenology [a technique that focuses on people's subjective experiences and interpretations of the world]—and describes factors to consider in selecting the appropriate approach.

- 2. Denzin, Norman K. and Yvonna S. Lincoln, eds. Handbook of Qualitative Research. First Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994.
  - ◆ This publication is now in its third edition [2005], but I find that the first edition remains the best at offering practical, introductory essays on the essential theories, methods, and techniques of qualitative inquiry. The introductory chapter of the third edition, however, provides an excellent historical overview of the practice of qualitative research in the social and behavioral sciences.

- 3. Flick, Uwe, Ernest von Kardoff, and Ines Steinke, eds. *A Companion to Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2004.
- A collection of essays covering a broad range of concepts, issues, and methods in qualitative research with a particularly European slant. As such, it offers a different perspective on a variety of topics. The essays are brief [no more than six pages] but they are very practical and can serve as a good introduction to a topic without being rooted too much in academic jargon.

- 4. Given, Lisa M., ed. The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods. 2 vols. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008.
- A useful source to consult that defines and explains core concepts, describes techniques involved in the implementation of a study using qualitative research methods, and presents an overview of qualitative-based approaches to research. Useful because imbedded throughout the text are practical examples of applying qualitative methods to research problems in the social and behavioral sciences.

- 5. Strauss, Anslem and Juliet Corbin. Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory. 2 ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Another comprehensive, accessible textbook on qualitative research that takes the reader through various stages of inquiry, from asking the research question, to gathering data, to coding the data, interpretation, and reporting. As the title suggests, the work is framed within the context of Grounded Theory, best understood as an analytical approach by which theory emerges from the data rather than the other way around.

# Appendix – additional notes

AIMS AND CLAIMS	KINDS OF RESEARCH QUESTION	EXAMPLES OF RESEARCH
Explanatory	What is the <b>relationship</b> between?	Survey, experiment
Explanatory Descriptive Prescriptive	<b>What happens if . . . ?</b>	Experiment, participatory research, action research
Descriptive Explanatory	<b>‘What’ and ‘why’?</b>	Mixed methods research
Explanatory Descriptive	<b>What happened in the past/ how to make sense of the past?</b>	Historical research
Understanding Interpretative	<b>How can we understand a situation?</b>	Ethnographic and interpretive/ Case study
Critique Emancipatory	<b>How to disrupt convention and empower participants?</b>	Critical approaches

As by Alis Oancea.



# Role of Values & of Researcher

- The value determined nature of enquiry in anti- positivist research such as Critical theory and Constructivism, Advocacy and activism encouraged, researcher *transformative intellectual* or *passionate participant*
- What can be known is mediated by interaction between investigator and subject of investigation
- For constructivists there are multiple realities, that depend on the individuals or groups holding constructions, constructions may change/be altered and thus so can 'realities'
- Researcher and subject are interactively linked and findings are created through hermeneutical and dialectical techniques and are relative
- Aims to critique & transform (critical theory) or to understand & reconstruct, subject to continuous revisions.



# Research paradigms

- Shift in research paradigms
  - ◆ Shift from positivism (natural science model) to interpretivism (humanistic/cultural science model)
  - ◆ Shift from modernism to postmodernism
  - ◆ Objectivism to Subjectivism
- Qualitative philosophies
  - ◆ Hermeneutics, Phenomenology and Semiotics

# Paradigm –method link

- Situating qualitative research methodology in the realm of scientific discourse
  - Suggests shift in theoretical positions/ning
- Paradigmatic shift
  - Shapes research approaches and research methods
- Methodological shift
  - Shift from Qt to Ql methodology

# The importance of subjectivity

- Attempts at (re) establishing **human subjectivity as a legitimate domain for social scientific endeavour** and thereby (re) establish a discontinuity between the natural and social sciences.
- This is illustrated by Laing (1967) who points out the **error of blindly following the approach of the natural sciences** in the study of the social world...

*“...the error fundamentally is the failure to realize that there is an **ontological discontinuity between human beings and it-beings**...Persons are distinguished from things in that **persons experience the world**, whereas **things behave in the world**” (Laing, *ibid.*: 53)*

- Here Laing draws attention to **how human action has an internal logic of its own** which must be **understood** in order to make it intelligible.

# Phenomenology

- phenomenology is more than a description of phenomenon (that which appears to someone )
- phenomenological emphasis - how individuals experience the world
  - ◆ Max Van Manen).
- "Phenomenology," as Merleau-Ponty (1964) says, "is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences."

# Phenomenology

- We “feel” sensations, which then convey messages to our brains: hunger, danger, thirst.
- And yet, we **over-ride these sensations and messages** with an **intellectualized thought process** that counter-acts the message: No, we are not hungry--it is not time to eat
- Thought counter senses, but sense of experience first

# Phenomenology

- Emphasizes idiosyncratic meaning to individuals, not shared constructions as much.
- Try to bracket self out and enter into the other person's perspective and experience.
  - ◆ Emphasizes the effects of research experience on the researcher-personal experience of the research.
  - ◆ How does this affect me as researcher.
  - ◆ Much like hermeneutical analysis, but even more focused on the researcher's experience.
- Some use the term "phenomenology" to describe the researcher's experience and the idea that this is all research is or can ever be (see Lofland and Lofland, p. 14).

# Hermeneutic

- hermeneutics :
  - ◆ making sense of a written text
- Not looking for objective meaning of text, but meaning of text for people in situation.
- Try to bracket self out in analysis - tell their story, not yours.
  - ◆ Use their words,
  - ◆ less interpretive than other approaches.

# hermeneutic study

- where continual engagement with the discourse as it was delivered gains entrance to the perspective of the speaker and the audience
- tracing the transfer of information and experience in a way that deepens our own understandings of what language and social life are all about



# Theoretical underpinnings of IPA:

## *Double hermeneutic*

- Dual interpretation process

“the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world.” (Smith & Osborn, 2003: 51)

# Social constructionism

- challenges the individualism of narrative
- denies the possibility and utility of objective knowledge of human affairs presented from one perspective
- insisting that each of us interprets and makes sense of the world from within a tradition (McIntyre, 1981) or "historical consciousness" (Gadamer, 1975)

# Social constructionism

- the way of being in the world of people are understood as culturally and historically constructed
- pursue inquiry that enriches our understanding of how the language and practices that we employ carry with them a cultural "archaeology" of meaning.

# Discourse analysis

- linguistic analysis of ongoing flow of communication
- Usually use tapes so they can be played and replayed
- Several people discussing, not individual person specifically
- Discourse analysis looks at interaction, narrative is more individual.

