Benchmarking Good Practice in Qualitative Management Research: The Facilitator's Guide

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Introduction

As part of the ESRC project entitled 'Benchmarking Good Practice in Qualitative Management Research' (Grant number H333250006) we have designed a series of workshops aimed at addressing the training needs that people have in this field. This handbook is intended to serve as a guide to these workshops, enabling individuals to successfully and effectively carry them out.

Background to the Workshops

The aims of the ESRC project were to:
- Conduct a systematic investigation into current perceptions of qualitative methods in management research, including perceived barriers to their use;
- Identify perceptions of good practice in conducting qualitative management research;
- Ascertain perceptions of skill deficits in this area and the factors viewed as contributing to these deficits;
- Develop materials and workshops to encourage informed and reflexive practice in qualitative management research;
- Develop appropriate, specific and accessible sets of criteria for assessing qualitative management research.

This project drew upon 45 semi-structured interviews with four different stakeholder groups. These were
- 'Epistemological gatekeepers' (eg: journal editors and funders of qualitative research);
- Research practitioners using qualitative research;
- Doctoral programme leaders;
- Qualitative researchers.

While the structure of these interviews did vary somewhat according to panel membership, generally these interviews focused on the following questions:
- Definitions of qualitative management research;

- Perceived problems in conducting and disseminating such research;

- Perceptions of good practice in undertaking qualitative management research;

- Beliefs about appropriate assessment criteria for evaluating such research;

- Perceptions of skill deficits in this area and the factors viewed as contributing to such deficits;

- Perceived training needs.

All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed for analysis. Given the size of the dataset, the qualitative data analysis package N-Vivo was used to enable effective data management. The analytic process adopted largely followed the conventions of template analysis (King, 2004). For further information on this project, please see the report 'Benchmarking Good Practice in Qualitative Management Research'.>>

Training Needs Identified in Qualitative Research

One of the key aims of the research was to identify the perceived skill deficits in the area of qualitative management research and to highlight what is needed to improve the situation. Interviewees identified a number of potential areas for training (See Table 1). Firstly, there was perceived to be a need for training in certain technical skills, including data collection, analysis, writing and reviewing as well as general awareness of the complex skills required in qualitative research. Secondly, it was felt that additional training was required in certain philosophical issues, specifically training in a range of philosophical approaches as well as training in assessment criteria and the differing philosophical assumptions which underpin them. Lastly more general training issues were flagged up such as the need for extra training in various areas for PhD students, post-doc and more inexperienced researchers, established researchers, the practitioner community and supervisors of qualitative research. We designed these training workshops directly in response to these needs. Therefore we did not aim to cover all of the training needs within the field of qualitative management research but just to respond to those needs identified by this broad range of interviewees. Subsequent piloting of the training workshops has demonstrated that there is a demand for training to meet the needs identified through this project.

How to use the Facilitator's Guide

The facilitator's guide is designed to serve as a handbook for these workshops. The guide is based around the workshop slides but has additional comments which are aimed at helping the individual to successfully carry out the workshop and to talk competently about the issues raised. These notes take the form of a commentary on issues raised along-side suggestions for prior reading both with regards to the literature and the other workshops. Additionally these notes offer guidance on how to carry out the workshop exercises. Where prior reading is required by the facilitator or the attendees this is indicated.

The workshops have been designed using a modular structure to enable a 'mix and match' approach to be used. Individuals do not need to study the individual workshops in the order set out but can select those which they feel are of most

relevance. Most of the workshops are designed to be used as either part of a course or else as a stand alone session. However, a few of the workshops do require participants to familiarise themselves with other workshops prior to attending. An electronic version of the workshop slides can be found on this website.

The workshops all have a uniform structure which consists of :
- Identification of the training need
- Workshop aims
- Workshop objectives
- Outline of the workshop
- Substantive content
- Exercises
- Conclusions
- Further sources

There is a space on our this website for feedback on the training workshops. Please use it to record any feedback including modifications/ adaptations made to the original workshops.

Table 1: Benchmarking Qualitative Management Research: Training Needs and Workshops

Workshop	Training Requirement	Objective	Content	Relevant Groups
1. Skills of the qualitative researcher >>	Derived from respondents' comments that the skills of the qualitative researcher are generally underestimated. Also it was suggested that new researchers think it's an easy option when they are lacking statistics confidence.	Gives fledgling researchers and those who judge qualitative research the idea that qualitative research is more complex than often assumed.	Explores a variety of qualitative research skills and suggests how they could be learnt. Signposts further sources in this area.	PhD students Policy makers Researchers
2. Philosophies that inform qualitative research >>	Derived from comments about the need for awareness of different approaches and their impact on methodology	Helps to increase understanding of the differences between methods and their underlying epistemological and ontological commitments.	Overview of underlying philosophies Signposts further sources in this area.	PhD students
3. Reflexivity >>	Derived from comments about the need to reflect on own practice and research in general.	To encourage critical appraisal of own research practices and more thoughtful research design and analysis.	Explores different aspects of reflexivity. Signposts further sources in this area.	Researchers PhD students

Workshop Title	Training Requirement	Objective	Content	Relevant Groups
4. Range of Qualitative Methods >>	Derived from comments about qualitative researchers staying with the methods they know best and seemingly unaware of other approaches.	Give researchers a better idea of the variety of methods available and insights possible. May lead to more diverse ways of addressing contemporary theoretical and practical issues.	Overview of range of qualitative methods. Lists further sources for specific methods	Researchers PhD students Policy makers
5. Qualitative analysis (inc software) >>	Derived from comments that this seems the least developed of all qualitative research skills and under reported in the literature	Provides some indication of how qualitative data analysis may be conducted and different assumptions and approaches possible.	Demonstrates actual analysis techniques using step by step exercises on data extracts. Explores the use of computer software. Signposts further sources for qualitative analysis inc analysis software	Researchers PhD students
6. Qualitative writing and publishing skills >>	Derived from comments about both the importance of engaging readers in writing and also the difficulties of writing qualitative research. This workshop is also a reaction to the dearth of qualitative research currently published in some areas.	Encourages the publication of qualitative research. .	Examines aspects of skilful and engaging writing. Explores publishing considerations for qualitative research. Signposts further sources in this area.	Researchers PhD Students Directors/Supervisors Journal Editors Review Boards

Workshop Title	Training Requirement	Objective	Content	Relevant Groups
7. Assessment Criteria >>	Derived from comments about the application of inappropriate criteria and concerns about how to assess qualitative research.	To demonstrate that different assessment criteria appropriate for different kinds of research. Provide criteria to enable contingent assessments.	Explores different assessment criteria and their underlying philosophical assumptions. Signposts further sources in this area.	Researchers PhD students and Directors/Supervisors Journal Editors and Review Boards
8. Reviewing Qualitative Papers and Research Grants >>	Derived from comments about the application of inappropriate criteria and concerns about how to assess qualitative research. Also responds to comments about inadequacy of training of many reviewers.	Encourage the publication of qualitative research through changing editors and reviewers' perceptions of the value of qualitative work. Applying the contingent assessment criteria to a specific and tangible issue. Provide some guidelines for competent reviewing.	The application of different assessment criteria. Considers the skills needed for effective reviewing.	Journal Editors Review Boards Researchers
9. Supervision for Qualitative Research >>	Derived from perception that insufficient expertise amongst potential supervisors in this area.	Improve the supervision of qualitative PhD students and overcome potential feelings of isolation (students and supervisors).	Particular difficulties that may face qualitative PhD students and how these might be overcome. Networking. Advice on resources and discussion groups etc	PhD Directors/Supervisors