

Analyzing, Reporting, and Disseminating Qualitative Research

Key Takeaways:

- Qualitative analysis in implementation research is often about informing, describing, and evaluating implementation processes and outcomes in a timely manner. It tends to be influenced by conceptual models and may involve deductive and inductive techniques. With deductive (top-down) techniques, we aim to determine how a study's textual data support existing conceptualizations, explanations, results, or theories. With inductive (bottom-up) techniques, we seek to identify new concepts, explanations, results, or theories. Implementation researchers must be open to situations when their findings do not keep with their conceptual models and bring multiple analytic and interpretative strategies to bear.
- The challenge of qualitative analysis—whether in implementation science or a different field—is making sense of massive amounts of data, reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, assuring rigor and credibility, and communicating what it all means to different audience groups.
- Solid data management practices can help overcome some of the challenges. They include keeping an audit trail that is more than a log or a file of meeting minutes. The research team should generate a solid data management protocol for how it stores and tags data, such as field notes, recordings, transcripts, and site documents. Other items of importance are data dictionaries, codebooks and the coded data, analytic memos, data displays, and a record of decision-making influencing changes to these items as the analysis unfolds. Ultimately, the team should compile what amounts to a carefully organized database of files that records all steps of the data management and analysis processes. Reflexive notes should be maintained during each step of the way.
- There is no single right way to do qualitative analysis. In implementation research, we may apply classic thematic analysis using a constant comparative approach, rapid qualitative analysis (e.g., the Rigorous and Accelerated Data Reduction technique), and the Framework Method. Most analyses consist of four non-linear phases: coding, categorizing, conceptualizing, and interpreting. A “code” is a short name or phrase for a group of similar items, ideas, or phenomena noticed in a dataset. Common steps also include (1) identifying themes and subthemes by first identifying codes; (2) describing core and peripheral elements of themes; (3) building hierarchies of themes or codebooks; (4) applying themes; and (5) linking themes to conceptual or theoretical models.



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Key Takeaways, cont.

- Qualitative software helps a research team organize their coding and analysis. Most software facilitates data storage, coding, retrieval, and linkages and can speed up the process of locating coded themes, growing data into categories, comparing passages in transcripts, and so on. All persons tasked with using the software must be trained to do so. It is also imperative to remember that the researcher—not the software—still decides what goes together to form a pattern, what constitutes a theme, and what to name it.
- Some questions to ask when considering what qualitative findings mean include: How solid, coherent, and consistent are the data supporting the findings? How do they deepen our understanding of what is being studied? How do they keep with existing knowledge? Lastly, to what extent are they useful for an intended purpose (i.e., informing implementation, evaluation, theory, policy, etc.)? When analyzing and interpreting the data, the results must represent what is real or true for the participants. To ensure that the results are not based on the beliefs or biases of the research team, there must be a systematic process to establish credibility. An interpretation that enhances credibility typically involves investigating rival explanations, accounting for disconfirming evidence and data irregularities, and undertaking triangulation.
- When writing up findings, remember that the best qualitative writing tells a story about the research. This story should include a rich (but not overly detailed) description that enables the reader to enter the situation, helps the reader build an understanding of the thoughts of the people represented in the dataset, does not include trivial or mundane information, and provides a judicious selection of examples (e.g., participant quotes) to illustrate results. Using metaphors and analogies can be a useful way to communicate findings. However, the metaphors and analogies must derive from the data and should not be manipulated to fit the data. When applying such tools to make a key point about the data, it is important to think of potential cultural associations and avoid outdated or inappropriate sayings. Researchers must also be mindful of their position of power when reporting research results. Being mindful means being reflective of this position and how shapes the research and the portrayal of results. Such reflection includes carefully considering how the story being told will likely benefit or harm the participants and their communities.

Useful Resource Texts

- Abraham, T. H., Finley, E. P., Drummond, K. L., Haro, E. K., Hamilton, A. B., Townsend, J. C., & Hudson, T. (2021). A method for developing trustworthiness and preserving richness of qualitative data during team-based analysis of large data sets. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 42(1), 139-156.
- Bernard, H. R. (2018). *Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Useful Resource Texts, continued

- Braun V., & Clarke V. *Thematic Analysis: A Practical Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., & Báez, J. C. (2020). *30 Essential Skills for the Qualitative Researcher*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
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- Corbin, J. & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of Qualitative Research (3rd ed.): Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Flick, U. (Ed.). (2013). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Glaser, B. G. & Strauss, A. L. (1999). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Hamilton, A. B., & Finley, E. P. (2019). Qualitative methods in implementation research: An introduction. *Psychiatry Research*, 280, 112516.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña J. (2020). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*, 4th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Johnson, R. B. (Eds.). (2021). *The Routledge Reviewer's Guide to Mixed Methods Analysis*. New York, NY: Routledge.
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- Thorne, S. (2016). *Interpretive Description: Qualitative Research for Applied Practice*. New York, NY: Routledge
- Watkins, D. C. (2017). Rapid and rigorous qualitative data analysis: The "RADaR" technique for applied research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1609406917712131