

LECTURE: Introduction to qualitative research - Positivist, Interpretive, Critical

Agenda:

- Qualitative research
- Assignment from last week
- Groups (presentation)
- Assignment for next week

Qualitative

Observation
Interview
Focus groups
Texts
Audio / video
Small number
More?

-

Quantitative

Social Surveys
- Questionnaires
- Cards
- Logs
Statistics
Large number
More?

What is best?

- No method of research, quantitative/qualitative is better than any other
- In choosing a method, everything depends upon what we are trying to find out
- Thus, it depends on your research question

Does method matter?

- What do you want to find out:
 - e.g. user study of redesign of web page
- Research problems are not neutral
 - framing of problem reflects a commitment to how the world works

THERE ARE NO INNOCENT POSITIONS

Committed to qualitative methods we need to figure out:

- What approach(s):
 - Interviews
 - Observation
 - Documents
 - focus groups
 - Audio / visual

Consider:

- What am I trying to figure out? Different questions, different methods?
- What is the focus of my study? Actors, networks, both?
- Have other researchers dealt with this topic, how? Lit.review - what exists already, alignment with lit.
- Longitudinal study, short study - what is doable? time, resources, access.
- What will I learn from using qualitative or quantitative methods?
- What works best for me?

(Silverman 2005:7, table 2.1)

Figuring out similarities / differences....

Silverman:

Positivist

(social facts, variables, objectivism)

Emotionalism

(meaning, emotion, authentic insights, open-ended interviews)

Constructionism

(behaviour, how phenomena are constructed, observation, texts, tapes)

Meyers & Avison:

Positivist

(evidence, formal, measures of variables, hypothesis testing)

Interpretive

(reality is socially constructed, focus on meaning and assigned meaning, context)

Critical (focus on oppositions, conflicts,) contradictions, seeks towards emancipation)

Reading Markus – homework:

- What is she actually saying here?
- *How* is she articulating herself? I.e. the way the article is structured in order to get that message across to the readers.
- How are the various theories being positioned as similar or different?
- How is she using the empirical material (case)?
- What kind of empirical material is she drawing upon?
- How does she use “the evidence”?
- On what basis is she making her claims?
- What are her basic assumptions about how knowledge is generated?
- Would you group this work as a positivist, interpretive or critical study? Justify your choice.

NEXT WEEK

Readings for Wednesday September 12th:

Silverman chapter 3+4 (course book)

Suchman, L. A. and Trigg, R. H. (1991): Understanding Practice: video as a medium for reflection and design. In J. Greenbaum and M. Kyng (eds.) *Design at work: cooperative design of computer systems*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum. Pp. 65-89. (Why ethnography?) (Handout).

Hughes, J., King, V., Rodden, T. and Anderson, H. (1994): Moving out from the control room: Ethnography in systems design. In *Proceedings from CSCW'94*, Chapel Hill, North Carolina. (Why ethnography + ethnography in practice). (Available online).

Bardram, J. and Bossen, C. (2005): Mobility Work: The Spatial Dimension of Collaboration at a Hospital. In *CSCW Journal*, 14 (131-160). (An example of an ethnographic study). (Available online).

Group work for Wednesday September 12th:

Passive Observation - Observation in a Public Place

Go to a public setting and carry out a one-hour observation. Choose a place you think will be fun and interesting. Observe and record movements, interactions, sights, sounds, spatial arrangements, and anything else that strikes you. Be an observer only -- it should be the sort of place where you can sit and take notes without bothering anyone. Examples of this sort of place are:

- train station or major T-bane station
- public park
- outdoor gathering place, e.g. Aker Brygge
- waiting room
- post office
- airport
- market, farmer's market or other
- gym, e.g. Domus Atletika
- museum
- courtroom
- café, cantina, fast food restaurant
- bar, nightclub
- computer center

Describe as much as you can about the setting. Write (put) down your observations on the spot, then write up longer versions immediately afterward. Do not interview anyone. If someone asks you what you are doing, tell them that it's an assignment in a course about field research.

You should spend at least twice as long writing up fieldnotes as you did observing, perhaps longer. You will be surprised at the amount of detail you can record in one hour!

Your field notes should be at least 3 typed pages and should include your name; the type of setting and the date and time of your observations; why you chose this setting; a rough map and detailed description of the setting (a verbal "snapshot"); a description of what you saw; and finally, your interpretations of what you saw. The description should be who, what, when, where -- and perhaps why, although be careful about too detailed explanations of motivations. Conclude with a brief interpretation about at least one organizing principle of the setting. What patterns do you see? What deviations from the general order do you see? Are some people acting differently or being treated differently than others?

The purpose of the exercise is to get you started in observing and notetaking, and to give you the experience of being a "passive" (non-participant) observer. You will also have initial experience in being a participant observer (next).

e-mail your fieldnotes by September 12th to finken@ifi.uio.no

NB!! Remember, first, to read and consider the DEPARTMENTAL GUIDELINES for written assignments:

<http://www.ifi.uio.no/studinf/skjemaer/declaration.pdf>