

INTRODUCTION



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

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Objectives

After reading this chapter you will:

- know who this book is for;
- know what our approach to qualitative research is;
- become familiar with the features of this book;
- know the structure of this book.

Who is this book for?

This book is useful for researchers and students from different scientific disciplines who want to learn the process of conducting qualitative research. The book is suitable for both novice and more advanced qualitative researchers. For those new to qualitative research we recommend starting with Chapter 2, which describes the nature of qualitative research and the underlying concepts for data collection that are described in Chapters 6–8. Other researchers may already be familiar with methods of qualitative data collection and may be

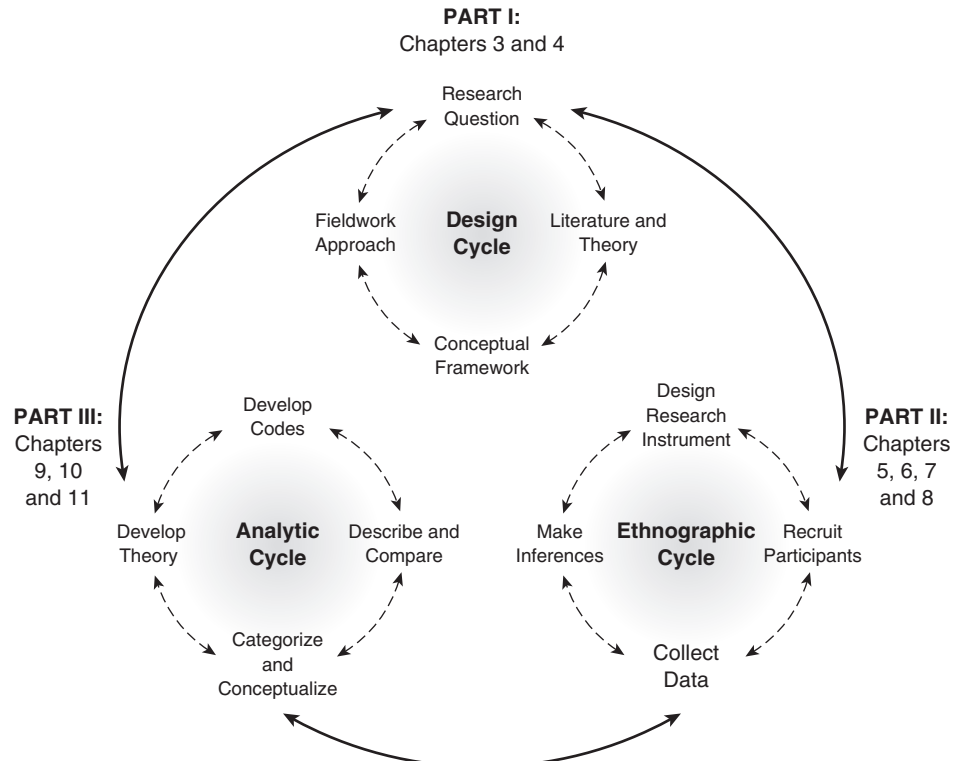


Figure 1.1 Hutter-Hennink qualitative research cycle

interested in qualitative data analysis, developing inductive theories or writing qualitative research (Chapters 9–11). This book is also relevant for those who evaluate the quality of qualitative research projects.

The qualitative research cycle

In this book we present a framework for conducting qualitative research that acknowledges the cyclical nature of the qualitative research process. We call it the *qualitative research cycle*, and it is shown in Figure 1.1. Our qualitative research cycle consists of three interlinked cycles: the *design cycle*, the *ethnographic cycle* and the *analytic cycle*, each of which is briefly described below. The inductive nature of qualitative research is well recognized, however; in the qualitative research cycle the process of induction continuously alternates with deductive reasoning, and we describe how to use these different strategies throughout the book.

The design cycle

The design cycle is the first component of the overall qualitative research cycle. It consists of four interlinked tasks: the formulation of a research question; reviewing research literature and incorporating theory; developing a conceptual framework for the study; and selecting an appropriate fieldwork approach. These four tasks form the conceptual phase of a research project.

The ethnographic cycle

The ethnographic cycle¹ is the second component of the overall qualitative research cycle. It describes the core tasks in qualitative data collection, including: designing the research instrument, recruiting participants, collecting data and making inductive inferences. The ethnographic cycle is closely linked to the design cycle, as there needs to be a logical follow-on from the conceptual design of the study and its field application.

The analytic cycle

The analytic cycle is the third component of the overall qualitative research cycle. It comprises the core tasks of qualitative data analysis, including: developing codes, description and comparison, categorizing and conceptualizing data and theory development. These analytic tasks are closely interlinked: not only are they conducted in a circular manner whereby tasks are repeated throughout the analytic process, but tasks are also conducted simultaneously and at different points in the analysis. The analytic cycle then links back to the original design cycle, as theory development is informed by concepts and scientific theory from the design cycle. Inductive findings from the analytic cycle are also compared with the original conceptual framework of the study (developed in the design cycle) to contribute new concepts or explanations to existing theory.

Structure of the book

The qualitative research cycle provides the structure of this book. We begin by describing the nature of qualitative research and the underlying concepts of

¹We use the term 'ethnographic cycle', which we derived from Spradley's (1980) work referring to an 'ethnographic research cycle'. However, the ethnographic cycle that we present in this book differs significantly from that discussed by Spradley in the components that we include and its inclusion within our broader qualitative research cycle.

the interpretive approach (Chapter 2). The book is then divided into three parts corresponding to the three cycles within the qualitative research cycle.

In Part I we describe the components of the design cycle. In Chapter 3 we outline the design of qualitative research questions and describe how to summarize theory, literature and the research question in a conceptual framework. We then discuss various fieldwork approaches for qualitative research. Chapter 4 discusses ethical issues in qualitative research.

In Part II we describe the components of the ethnographic cycle. We describe participant recruitment in qualitative research in Chapter 5. We then focus on three methods of data collection: in-depth interviews (Chapter 6), focus group discussions (Chapter 7) and observation (Chapter 8). Each of these methods chapters describes the process from instrument design to data collection and making inductive inferences.

In Part III we describe the components of the analytic cycle. Chapter 9 describes data preparation and development of codes. Chapter 10 discusses the core analytic tasks: description, comparison, categorization, conceptualization and theory development. Chapter 11 discusses approaches to writing and presenting the research findings of qualitative research.

Features of the book

The following features of the book are included to help you learn the different aspects of qualitative research.

Theory and practice. We include a discussion of the theoretical principles as well as practical application of qualitative research, through case studies, field examples, and exercises.

International field examples. We provide many examples from our own research in the health and population sciences. Our research reflects the international context of our work and highlights the application of qualitative research in different cultural contexts.

Interdisciplinary case studies. We include case study examples from other researchers from a range of disciplines, such as geography, spatial planning, nursing, public health, medical sciences, population studies, cultural anthropology and communication sciences.

Research tools. We include many research tools from our own research projects (e.g. interview guides, recruitment scripts, coded data segments, theoretical frameworks).

Visual aids. The chapters on research methods (in-depth interviews, focus group discussion and observation) include photographs of the method in practice to

demonstrate specific elements of research practice (e.g. seating of interviewers, interview context, body language).

Exercises. Exercises are included at the end of each chapter to help you practise specific skills – for example, writing a qualitative research question; conducting a mock focus group discussion, an interview or an observation; transcribing an interview; developing codes from data; presenting qualitative research.

Methodological and empirical further reading. Annotated further readings are included in each chapter. We include one list of readings related to methodological concepts, and a second list of readings for examples of empirical research.

Evaluating quality. Each chapter includes a series of questions to assist you in evaluating the quality of your qualitative research – to check that your qualitative research is appropriate, valid, coherent, transparent, interpretive, grounded, saturated, reflexive, culturally sensitive, ethical, and provides new information.

Key points. Each chapter concludes with a textbox summarizing the key points.