PART 1

PREPARING THE WAY: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR ANALYSIS

Preparation for analysis begins when your research project begins. From the time of its conception you will take steps that will facilitate or hinder your interpretation and explanation of the phenomena you observe. In Part 1 of this book, therefore, I lay out those things that you need to consider in planning your project, and in managing and preparing data for analysis.

Analysis is laid on the foundation of our understanding about how the world works, what makes it what it is (ontology); and of how we, as human beings, can understand and learn about that world and especially about the world of people (epistemology). For example, our understanding of the nature of reality and truth and whether we discover, interpret, or construct realities and truths influence our choices of topic, methods, and conclusions. Although these foundations may remain implicit rather than explicit, thinking about them sharpens and enriches our analysis, and our understanding of these things impacts on how we assess the trustworthiness of our conclusions.

A variety of traditions about how to learn about the social world has grown up over the past century of scholarship and research as people have developed a method that works, considered its foundations, and gradually codified it to the point where it has become known as a particular 'methodology'. Each of these traditions started out as a solution to a problem of how to observe and understand some particular aspect of the social world. As you face your own research problem, you can learn from others' experiences and the methodologies they have developed, but ultimately, you will make your own decisions about how

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best to solve your research problem. Essentially, this is a book about strategies, informed by but not tied to those who have gone before, to help you to do that. We begin the analytic journey from the beginning, building on foundations, thinking about purposes, framing questions, and determining methods for answering them – all from the perspective of how these activities will influence our capacity to analyse and interpret the data we gather.

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Foundations for thinking and working qualitatively

Qualitative analysis is like the qualitative data with which one works: intense, engaging, challenging, non-linear, contextualised, and highly variable. It is potentially productive of fresh insights and deep understanding. Yet when people think about reports from qualitative analysis, (too often) they visualise description heavily laden with participant quotes. All of us carry ideas (right or wrong) about what it means to do qualitative research and analysis. Some will be aware of the many different approaches that come under that rubric, and some will have considered the more complex issues of how philosophical and methodological perspectives intersect with qualitative data and analysis. This chapter is designed to lay a foundation for the analysis strategies that follow. Read it now to catch a vision of the analysis path laid out in this book, but return to it again later when, especially for those new to qualitative methods, the foundational material in it will have acquired more meaning.

In this introductory chapter:

- catch a glimpse of my hands-on, down-to-earth approach to qualitative analysis;
- understand the central role of 'the case' in qualitative analysis;
- examine your purpose in undertaking a qualitative project;
- learn to appreciate methodological traditions, but also to recognise there will be variations from those in the methods people use;
- consider the contribution and impact on analysis of explicit and implicit world views;
- think about using software for analysis.

Thinking qualitatively

Qualitative research[1] is a covering term for a variety of approaches to research that tend to focus on the *qualities* of things more than their *quantity*.

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[1]I use this term because it is an accepted convention for parsimoniously describing a large class of data and approaches used in research. Your research might deal with quantities or qualities of phenomena. Qualitative research focuses on the latter.

Describing qualitative data as 'sexy', Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman suggested:

> They are a source of well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanation of processes in identifiable local contexts. With qualitative data one can preserve chronological flow, see precisely which events led to which consequences, and derive fruitful explanations. Then, too, good qualitative data are more likely to lead to serendipitous findings and to new integrations; they help researchers to get beyond initial conceptions and to generate or revise conceptual frameworks. (1994: 1)

Researchers engaging in a qualitative study focus on observing, describing, interpreting, and analysing the way that people experience, act on, or think about themselves and the world around them. *Analysis* has been described as involving 'a close engagement with one's [data], and the illumination of their meaning and significance through insightful and technically sophisticated work' (Antaki, Billig, Edwards, & Potter, 2003: 30). In this book, you will find both simple and sophisticated strategies for analysis that will deepen your understanding and enrich interpretation.

The activity of analysing qualitative data is an extension of the kind of analysis we do in everyday life (Schatzman, 1991; Stake, 2010). We bring to data our inherent skills of critical thinking. Our interpretation is coloured by our previous and current personal, social, and cultural experience. The sharpening of our interpretive skills in everyday life is important because, as human beings, we act, and influence others, on the basis of our interpretations of who they are and what they say. Similarly, as researchers, we act, and influence others, on the basis of our interpretations of what we observe, hear, and read. Development of our analytic skills prepares us for a struggle with meanings as we attempt to understand the complexities of human experience.

Understanding the complexities of the human condition will take the qualitative researcher through and beyond description to concept development and theory building (Harper, 1992). Juliet Corbin (in conversation with Cisneros-Puebla, 2004) lamented the shifting emphasis in qualitative methods to more rapid analyses, dramatisation of findings, and consequent superficiality and lack of theory development – just as Anselm Strauss (1995), her mentor, had lamented a decade earlier the lack of discussion about the development and testing of theory from data in his discipline of sociology. Theory building, involving conceptualisation, linking, and explanation based on careful analysis and interpretation of data, was something he saw as central to the discipline.

While analysis is locally focused initially, the capacity to generalise in some form or another is usually wanted from a qualitative study, so that it has significance beyond the novel value of simply telling a story or representing points of view. Such generalisation can take multiple forms, but derives more often from understanding and application of the *processes* analysed, rather than from descriptive reports of various experiences or characteristics from across a limited sample.

Focus on cases

Qualitative analysis is fundamentally case oriented. Data are contributed by and analysis is centred around cases – the single entity or multiple instances of a phenomenon that become the focus of study. This case-oriented approach of qualitative analysis emphasises the situated interrelatedness of different features and causes within each example of that phenomenon. It gives agency to cases, rather than to variables (Abbott, 1992). Note the difference, for example, between the statements: 'With their lack of education, Bill and Stephen struggled to find meaningful work'; and 'Low education predicts poor employment options.' The case focus of qualitative research enables you to explore Bill's and Stephen's struggles, the difficulties they face in an increasingly technological society, and the impact on their sense of personhood. We begin to see them as 'real people' – people who become lost in a variable-based 'statement of fact' about the relationship between education and employment options.[2]

Your study might be based on one case, a few cases, or many cases. Cases of the same type will be similar enough to be seen as examples of the same phenomenon, yet with distinctions that enable comparison across them, such as pupils in a class, or a series of letters from a soldier at war. Cases have a degree of fluidity in qualitative research: 'What is a case?' and 'What is this a case of?' might be redefined through the course of your project, as your analysis and interpretation of those data impact, refine, or change your understanding of what it is you are studying.

Cases can take multiple forms. You might interview a series of unconnected individuals, each one being a case, say, of someone who has experienced divorce, or who has been to Machu Picchu. A primary case might be studied through illustrative subunits embedded within it; thus a corporation could be the case, with one or more specific departments or products studied as illustrative cases within that corporation (Yin, 2003). Cases might be layered, for example where schools, classes, and the pupils in them are each treated as cases at different levels. Robert Yin emphasised the bounded nature of the case, and warned to 'beware' of cases which are not easily defined in terms of their boundaries – their beginning and end points. David Byrne (2009a: 2), in contrast, described cases as complex systems interacting and intersecting with other surrounding complex systems. Hence the difficulty of defining 'What is a case?'

While Yin equates *cases* with *units of analysis*, Ragin (1992) distinguishes between *theoretical* cases and *empirical* cases, where (a) theoretical cases are the entities or phenomena about which you want to draw conclusions and potentially make generalisations, and (b) empirical cases equate to the units of analysis for which you gather data and by which you manipulate those data. In most studies

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[2]It is for these reasons that I introduce the notion of cases here, rather than waiting to introduce cases as an aspect of sampling.

your theoretical and empirical cases will be the same, but there are situations in which the qualitative researcher might study a number of units of analysis that together comprise or inform a single case. An example would be where a carer and the doctor are interviewed as well as the person who is ill (with the latter being the focus of the case).

To the extent that 'a case ... is one among others' (Stake, 2000: 436), it can inform our understanding of the wider group. 'Cases are generally characterized on the one hand by their concreteness and circumstantial specificity and on the other by their theoretical interest or generalizability' (Schwandt, 2007: 27). 'The "point of view" of the individual informant is the basis for understanding the shared points of view of the group ... to which the subject belongs' (Harper, 1992: 141). The point of view of individuals is also the basis for comprehending and understanding diversity of views (Maxwell, 2012). Multiple case studies based on systematic comparison (structured qualitative interpretation) extend the value of the single case study through developing explanatory theory in the context of complex, multiple causality (Byrne, 2009a).

- Because a case is embedded in a broader context, investigation of the case will inevitably lead you into that broader context. Douglas Harper (1992), for example, learned about the culture and relationships of a whole community through his case study of Willie, the rural mechanic.
- The basic structural dimensions of social order will be reflected in any case drawn from that society (Silverman, 2010). Norman Denzin, drawing on Jean-Paul Sartre and focusing on people as cases for study, described every person as being a universal singular – 'a singular instance of the universal themes that structure his or her moment in history' (2001: 162):

  No person is ever just an individual. He or she must be studied as a single instance of more universal social experiences and social processes. The person, Sartre (1981) states, is 'summed up and for this reason universalized by his epoch, he in turn resumes it by reproducing himself in it as a singularity' (p. ix). Every person is like every other person but like no other person. Interpretive studies … attempt to uncover this complex interrelationship between the universal and the singular, between private troubles and public issues in a person's life. In this way, all interpretive studies are biographical and historical. They are always fitted to the historical moment that surrounds the subject's life experiences. (2001: 39)

- Understanding local causality qualitatively, through identifying the complex network of mechanisms linking events and processes in a single case, is an essential basis for understanding regularity and divergence in a pattern of causation (Maxwell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Seeing social research as being focused around cases has significance with respect to the issue of generalisation. In particular, understanding what can be learned from a single case has important implications for the ability of qualitative researchers to generalise from their data – an issue that is taken up in Chapter 13.

More immediately, clarifying what (you think) are the cases that will provide the basis for your empirical data gathering will:

- intersect with clarifying what your study is about;
- provide a basis for sampling strategies;
- be useful in thinking about how to organise your data; and
- focus your analysis, reminding you of the contextual embeddedness, narrative sequencing, and complexity of each case.

Research purposes: what do you want to achieve?

Think through the personal, practical, and/or intellectual elements of your purpose in engaging in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013).[3]

Personal goals usually motivate you to embark on a particular study. Research topics often come out of personal experience. We seek through the research to better understand our own experience; we wish to authenticate and share something new we have learned; or we want to instigate change so that others can benefit from our experience. Sometimes we are driven by personal curiosity. Personally, I'm fascinated with solving puzzles: how can I make this work, how can I find this out?[4] Too often, in the increasingly competitive and commercial world of universities, we are pushed into engaging in a study or selecting a particular topic for research because of the dictates of career advancement, funding imperatives, or restricted opportunities for choice. Individual curiosity and personal experience are not *sufficient* reasons for choosing a topic to investigate (Thorne, 2008), but they are needed for you to stay motivated enough to work through the often overwhelmingly messy, complex, and voluminous data generated through a qualitative investigation. Your personal goals and preferences in doing research can become a source of bias, however, as they influence not only your choices of topic and method, but the very way in which you interact with your participants (or data) and conduct your analysis.

Practical goals 'are focused on *accomplishing* something – meeting some need, changing some situation, or achieving some objective' (Maxwell, 2013: 28). These are often value driven. They provide a justification for your research; they are outcome focused.

Intellectual goals 'are focused on *understanding* something – gaining insight into what is going on and why this is happening, or answering some question that previous research has not adequately addressed' (2013: 28). These contribute

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[3]These purposes would apply equally well to other kinds of research.

[4]Hence my later career choices of working in developmental roles where I primarily work with others on solving these issues, but leave them to complete the 'hard yards' of working through to reach an answer to their questions!

to the stock of academic knowledge. Maxwell suggested five intellectual goals particularly suited to qualitative research (your project will not necessarily be guided by all of these):

1 Understanding the *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engage in. …

2 Understanding the particular *contexts* within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions. …

3 Understanding the *process* by which events and actions take place. …

4 Identifying *unanticipated* phenomena and influences, and generating new, 'grounded' theories about the latter. …

5 Developing *causal explanations*. (2013: 30–1, emphasis added)

Establishing a clear purpose is a first step to shaping a project, and is critical to all further steps continuing through to the eventual presentation of your analysis. Throughout this book, therefore, you will find references to the need to have established the focus and goals of your research, if not the exact questions you wish to answer with your research. Exercise 1, at the end of this chapter, provides some questions to help you clarify why you are undertaking this study. Even if it changes, it is important for you to attempt to complete the sentence:

> *The purpose of this study is …*

▶ Do it now; check it often; revise if necessary!

Thinking methods (and methodology)

When you have decided upon your goal, the question becomes: how are you going to get there? And once you have data, what are you going to do with them? There is no one way, nor a right way, to approach data. No formula exists to transform data into findings (Patton, 2002: 432). In this context, qualitative research has become 'a complex, changing and contested field – a site of multiple methodologies and research practices' (Punch, 1998: 139).

Methodology is 'a theory of how inquiry should proceed' (Schwandt, 2007: 193), embracing philosophy, assumptions about validity, and sometimes preferred methods. Methodologies that most researchers have heard of (but might have trouble defining) include ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, case study, narrative analysis, and discourse analysis. *Methods* are the tools employed by a researcher to investigate a problem, to find out what is going on there. Whereas methodologies are often (but not exclusively) associated with particular philosophical traditions, methods are guided but not prescribed by a particular philosophical or methodological perspective. There are multiple strategies for making and analysing data. Some methodological traditions, such as ethnography, have a long

history, while others burgeoned in the latter half of the twentieth century.[5] Within these established methodological approaches there has been constant evolution of ideas and variety in schools of thought,[6] while new approaches continue to emerge from within and across disciplines to become codified as new methodologies.[7]

There is a great deal of 'posturing' about methodology. 'When such everyday behaviors as watching and asking become the basis for a role definition as "qualitative researchers", small wonder that we look for impressive-sounding labels that help to validate us as the self-appointed observers of our fellow humans' (Wolcott, 1992: 23–4). Students are expected to name the methodology they have used for their dissertation research, and in so doing risk condemnation by an examiner for lack of purity in the way they have practised it. Valerie Janesick coined the term *methodolatry* to describe 'a preoccupation with selecting and finding methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told. Methodolatry is the idolatry of method, or a slavish attachment and devotion to method, that so often overtakes the discourse in the education and human services fields' (2000: 390).

Each of the different qualitatively oriented methodological traditions has developed in response to a need for a way of tackling a particular type of research problem. Each is designed to guide researchers regarding how best to satisfy particular interpretive goals and the associated questions they then ask.

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[5]Phenomenology first emerged as a methodology for research in the early part of the twentieth century. Grounded theory 'went public' in the 1960s with the publication of Glaser and Strauss' now classic text (where, incidentally, the *methodology* was referred to as constant comparative analysis rather than grounded theory). Discourse analysis and its offshoots developed with the rise of poststructural (deconstructivist) challenges to traditional approaches.

[6]For example: Glaser and Strauss' (1967) original approach to developing grounded theory moved in different directions as each of these authors reasserted (Glaser, 1978; 1992) or developed (Strauss, 1987) their approach from different paradigmatic bases, contributing to a (rather acrimonious, partly personality based) rift between them. Grounded theory methods were taken by their students in new directions, such as dimensional analysis, situational analysis, constructivism, that emphasised one or other particular element while still retaining an essential core of practices around the use of constant comparative techniques, openness to evolving data, and theoretical sampling (Morse, Stern, Corbin, Bowers, Charmaz, & Clarke, 2009). Husserlian phenomenology sought to ascertain the nature of one's own immediate pre-conceptual experience, with the researcher's past history and ideas put aside during the descriptive process, but newer understandings of phenomenology, influenced by pragmatism and constructivism, give more recognition to the subjectivity of reported experiences (e.g., Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). Performance ethnography (Alexander, 2005; Denzin, 2003) and autoethnography (Ellis, 2004), connected only loosely to their ethnography namesake, are promoted as the new, significant methods for the twenty-first century.

[7]For example, Thorne has proposed interpretive description as a methodology for the practice-oriented disciplines, seeing it as 'a more appropriate and viable option than watering down or modifying phenomenology, ethnography or grounded theory and hoping no one notices the methodological violations' (2008: 35).

Each has contributed richly to our heritage as qualitative researchers, between them providing rationale and approaches for a variety of data gathering methods and analysis procedures. In the context of extensively reviewing a wide range of different approaches to qualitative research, however, Michael Quinn Patton recommended adopting 'a stance of methodological enlightenment and tolerance, namely, that methodological orthodoxy, superiority, and purity should yield to methodological appropriateness, pragmatism, and mutual respect' (2002: 68). Methodological writing largely arises out of 'moments of scholarly reflection in a research career that, for the writer, encapsulate some research skills that the writer has learned' so that, as you apply your judgement to assess the usefulness of these ideas and skills, 'the reading of methodology (and going on methods courses) becomes a "time-out" in a brain gymnasium for social researchers' (Seale, 2004: 413). Approach classical or established methodologies, therefore, as a guide to inform rather than a set of rules to follow (Dey, 2004). Over the years, my personal mantra has become: *Be informed by methodology, but not a slave to it.*[8] Reading methodological literature always sends me diving for a notebook and pen (or keyboard); it prompts so many trains of thought. In this book I draw on the 'scholarly reflections' of writers across a broad methodological spectrum, combing them for practical strategies and wise counsel to inform the task of analysing qualitative data. References to specific methodologies are intended not to make you expert in those approaches, but rather to encourage you to use the ideas contained within them to prompt fresh ideas and questions about your own project.

'Methods in use'

Several authors, in describing approaches taken to mixed methods research, have observed that there is little correspondence between methods as described in texts, and 'methods in use' (Bryman, 2006; Harden & Thomas, 2005; Maxwell & Loomis, 2003). In qualitative projects, too, there are marked discrepancies between theory and practice when it comes to methods, and even more when researchers claim to be following a particular methodological tradition:

> If you want to understand what a science is, you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings, and certainly not what its apologists say about it; you should look at what the practitioners of it do. (Geertz, 1973: 9)

> I begin to see that the whole idea of a method for discovering things is *ex post facto*. You succeed in doing something, or you do something so well that you yourself want to know how you did it. So you go back, trying to re-create the steps that led you, not quite by accident, not quite by design, to where you wanted to be. You call that re-creation your 'method'. (Koller, 1983: 88, quoted by Sandelowski, 2008: 11)

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[8]By 'methodology' here I mean defined and recognised methodological traditions, such as grounded theory, phenomenology, case study, ethnography.

> To us it seems clear that research is actually more a craft than a slavish adherence to methodological rules. No study conforms exactly to a standard methodology; each one calls for the researcher to bend the methodology to the peculiarities of the setting. (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 5)

I wonder if Margarete Sandelowski (2000) wrote her article on qualitative description out of frustration – the kind I have experienced when students come to me with a good question, useful data, and some meaningful insights, but are struggling because someone has told them that they have to name the methodology that they are working in and then they are trapped into trying to show how what they have done fits that methodology. Sandelowski (2000) and Thorne (2008) differ with respect to the relevance of a disciplinary base to methodology, but nevertheless agree on the need for intellectual honesty and methodological integrity in research products. Rather than 'forcing on an ill-fitting shoe', it is better to ensure (and show) that the conclusions being drawn have coherence and validity in terms of purpose, questions, sampling, data gathered, and methods of analysis (Maxwell, 2013). 'For me, the importance of method is not whose approach one chooses but the "quality" of the research findings produced by any approach' (Corbin, 2009: 52; see also Box 1.1).

Box 1.1

The processes of research – in practice

In their book *Doing Exemplary Research*, Peter Frost and Ralph Stablein (1992) asked the authors of seven award-winning or otherwise exemplary articles in organisation studies to describe the process of developing their research, carrying it out, and producing the publication. Each account is illustrated with excerpts from the original articles, and each is followed by commentaries from experienced researcher-editors. These authors talk about the mishaps, dead ends, chance events, frustrations, and pleasures occurring along their research journeys – journeys that sometimes involved radical shifts in direction, scrapping detailed analyses, disputes among team members, and long pathways to publication with multiple rejections on the way. In producing their exemplary papers, these authors demonstrated the benefits of persistence, immersion, emotional involvement, collaboration with a team and/or with colleagues and journal editors, participation in conferences, and working toward getting published. These various authors write with great candour and, in particular, show that the research process does not necessarily follow a classical linear pathway.

A significant concern with modifying, mixing, or being pragmatically pluralistic or eclectic in designing a methodological approach is that firm disciplinary foundations will be lost, with a consequent loss of standards for research practice also (Thorne, 2008). The term 'blitzkrieg ethnography', for example, has been applied to 'hit and run' work conducted in a number of evaluation studies claiming an ethnographic component, where there has not been lengthy immersion in the site (Rist, 1980: 9).

Valid application of a methodology assumes you have adopted *all* its core values and its techniques, but 'no abstract processes of analysis, no matter how eloquently named and finely described, can substitute for the skill, knowledge, experience, creativity, diligence, and work of the qualitative analyst' (Patton, 2002: 432). If you are guided by but do not fully adopt a traditional methodology, then recognise and declare the ways in which the elements which make it both coherent and distinctive have been modified, and the implications of doing so, particularly for the quality and generalisability of the results. A pragmatic approach to methods choices does *not* mean being careless, disrespectful of tradition, or sloppy! Different approaches emphasise different aspects, but across these, 'it is possible to develop practical standards – workable across different perspectives – for judging the goodness of conclusions' (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 5). What readers most need to know is what actual steps you took in obtaining the results you present, so they can make their own judgements about the 'goodness' of your conclusions. A label will not tell them that.

Working qualitatively

Miles and Huberman (1994: 10) observed that qualitative analysis comprises 'three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification'. Their 'interactive' model showing the cyclical nature of qualitative work is reproduced in Figure 1.1. Critically, they emphasised that:

- each of these three components continues during and after data collection;
- data reduction involves analytic choices and therefore is part of data analysis;
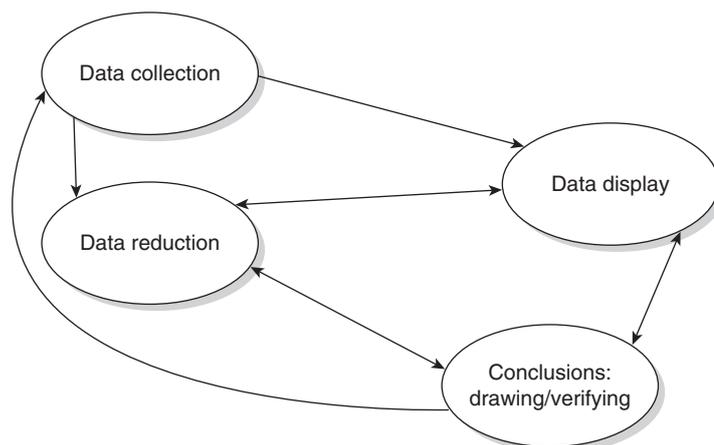

Figure 1.1   Components of data analysis: Miles and Huberman's interactive model
Source: Miles & Huberman, 1994: 12, Figure 1.4

- data display serves to organise and compress information, making it amenable to further analysis and interpretation;
- meanings drawn from the data have to be tested against the data, with more being sought as necessary.

Like Miles and Huberman, I see analysis as a recursive process, one that progresses eventually through a number of interactive stages. It involves a two-steps-forward, one-step-backward path traversing three main sectors, reaching always toward the goal of insightful understanding of your cases and topic of investigation. To help you find your way, I offer the simple mnemonics outlined in the Preface and illustrated in Figure 1.2 as an aid to recalling the steps that will take you forward. They don't fit all situations and they are not fail-safe, but perhaps they will remind you of steps to take and help you make progress when you're stuck.

Planning the route: setting up for analysis

Philosophical and methodological foundations for research are considered as a contextualising perspective for my approach to qualitative analysis. The focus then shifts to practical issues to consider when you are setting up a project because they impact on analysis – designing for analysis, and managing the data that you are going to be working with. Like swimmers who dive into the dazzling Australian surf without first checking for rocks, rips, and dumpers, being beguiled by the excitement of data gathering and launching in without any plan for design or management is courting danger – and is sometimes fatal.[9]

- *Foundations* for analysis are ultimately laid in the philosophical, methodological, and theoretical perspectives that you adopt. These will be gradually articulated as you continue to reflect on your research experience.
- *Design* for analysis before you start to gather data. In a sense, you begin to analyse from the moment you begin to break your problem down into researchable questions. Consider how others have approached this topic and the questions arising from their work. Also consider how theory might inform what you want to do: building a framework that will help to refine your questions and approach. Then, as you plan your methods for generating data, develop a strategy for analysing them, and for checking the trustworthiness of the ideas and conclusions you might come up with, all the while keeping your goals and questions in focus.
- *Manage* data generated through fieldwork or deskwork effectively and efficiently, so that data and emerging ideas are not lost, so that you will be able to build an analysis and track the progress of your analysis, and so that you will be able to locate the evidence required to test and support the results you are putting forward.

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[9]Like others who have worked as project consultants, there have been many occasions on which I have been called in *after* data have been collected. 'Resuscitation' can be effective, but you are always left wishing you had been called in at design stage.
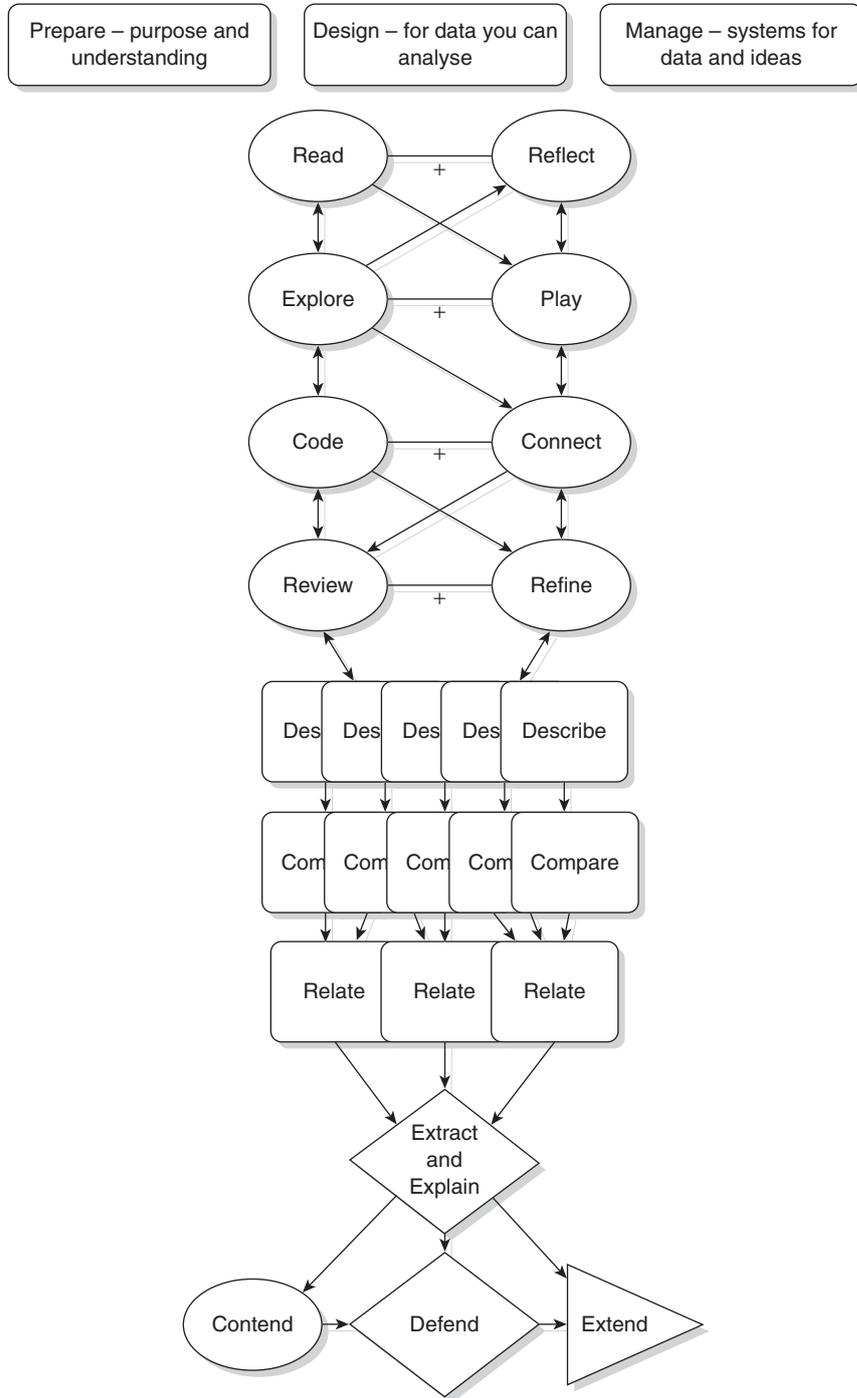
Figure 1.2   Stepping through analysis

Working with data: a pathway into analysis

Analysis takes another step forward when you start gathering data and begin to reflect on them. Develop a sense of the whole and see connections across parts before breaking it into components – and reflect again on the whole as you review your work. Coding data is the steady work component of the analytic process, necessary to gain meaningful results supported by data. It involves seeing and interpreting what has been said, written, or done; reflecting on evolving categories; deciding what is important to follow up. You will take quite a few steps to complete this section of the pathway, and this often requires moving back to go forward. Sequence, therefore, is not a strong feature of this second part of the journey; feel free to dip in and out as you *Read* and *Reflect*, *Explore* and *Play*, *Code* and *Connect*, *Review* and *Refine* your way through your data (Figure 1.2).

- *Read* and *Reflect* to gain holistic perspective on each individual data source and on the project as a whole. Record initial impressions, identify and note key points raised within each data source, and consider how each reinforces, extends, or challenges previous sources.
- *Explore*: investigate the terrain, not just what is covered by your data, but also what surrounds them. Take on the constant adventure of looking with fresh eyes and finding something new.
- … and *Play* games with your data. Explore and play with possibilities. Doing so will spur your imagination and help you to see and test connections.
- *Code*: careful, thoughtful coding ensures familiarity with the detail of data, prompts reflective questioning around developing categories, and builds a comprehensive picture of what the data are dealing with. A well-structured coding system provides a solid base of concepts and categories to work with, and serves as an effective management tool to facilitate further analysis. It enables interrogation of the data and expedites retrieval of evidence to support emerging ideas and conclusions.
- … and *Connect*: coding on its own is insufficient to build understanding. That requires making connections across and through the narratives, accounts, and other data that you have, to build a storyline, or to more deeply understand how your participants have made meaning of their experience.
- *Review* and *Refine* throughout the process of coding, connecting, and visualising your data. Stop to review and reflect on what it is you are extracting and seeing. Maybe split, merge, or rearrange concepts, group them or link them to reflect growing understanding. Record the process of your research, the decisions you make, in journals or memos to prompt deeper reflection. This will provide an audit trail to aid transparency when you later seek to show how you arrived at your conclusions.

Work back and forth through the various data sources, giving each the benefit of its individual perspective, but also placing each in the context of the growing whole. Later work in this stage may necessitate your reviewing and perhaps recoding previous work with a different set of eyes. The constant challenge is to keep a sense of both case and project narratives while also working with detail in segments of text. After a period of being immersed in the data, take time out for a 'scholarly walk'; even a brief stroll can be a productive distraction.

Beyond codes and themes: analytic writing

Let's assume you have observed closely and thought critically as you coded, connected, and refined your data, but you are still experiencing a block in moving forward from observations, codes, concepts, and rough notes to analysis and writing. To facilitate this exciting but often overwhelming task of working through analysis that goes beyond simple descriptive reporting of 'themes' to building an interpretive model, I suggest taking three steps at a time, moving through a *Describe*, *Compare*, *Relate* sequence for each of your categories or themes (Figure 1.2).[10] Repeat these three sequential steps for each concept or theme, recording preliminary results as you go. The writing process itself is an added stimulus to deeper analysis, hence my description of this stage as analytic writing.

- *Describe* as a starting point. Review the context for the study to provide a background against which further analyses will be read. Then, move to the first major category or theme. Describe and record its characteristics and boundaries. *How* did people talk about this aspect, and *how many* talked about it? What's *not* included? As an extension of this process, build metacodes or pattern codes, or perhaps detour to develop a significant theoretical concept.
- *Compare* differences across contrasting cases, demographic groups, or variations in context for the category or theme you have just described. Ask questions of your data about who, why, what, when? Is this theme more or less frequently occurring in different cases or for different groups? Is it expressed differently by different groups? How does it differ in different contexts? Record meaningful associations: doing so will prompt further questions in your mind. Record, also, non-meaningful associations: not only is it important to know if certain groups or contexts are similar, but recording these means you won't have to waste time later rechecking.
- *Relate* this category or theme to others already written about. Ask more questions to prompt and guide this process. What was it that made one group different from another with respect to this category or theme; was it because …? Does it make a difference if …? Look for patterns of association in codes or themes across cases, and between sets of codes in your data. Under what conditions does this category or theme arise? Does it have the same form of expression in all circumstances? What else is involved in relation to it? What precedes or follows? Record the questions you ask, and the results you find (or don't find). As you relate categories and identify patterns of interaction you will be helped to structure your writing because relating is best done to categories already discussed; you will be forced to think about what the reader already needs to know before they can understand what you are now writing about.

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[10]I first presented these three steps as a means of moving beyond identification of themes in qualitative analysis at the 4th International Qualitative Research Convention, organised by the Qualitative Research Association of Malaysia, at Selangor, Malaysia, 3–5 September 2007. That keynote paper has since been published in the *Malaysian Qualitative Research Journal* (Bazeley, 2009); its contents provided the germ of many of the ideas found in this book.

Refining analysis: making sense of it all

By now, you will have become very familiar with your data, and you will be developing clear ideas about how they might all fit together. It's time to *Extract* relevant data and *Explain* how phenomena have come about (Figure 1.2), to place your work in a broader context, and to present new information and a point of view on your subject matter that is supported by your data, in a way that will convince your various audiences. In doing so, you will find yourself repeatedly stepping back to step forward. You're well into the writing process, but in that process, each time you describe an experience or a phenomenon, write about a connection, argue a theory, or test a conclusion, you will find yourself returning to the evidence you have been working with and refining your analyses to check how things work and to make sure you've got it right. Here's where the audit trail you've been keeping becomes critical. How did you arrive at that idea or conclusion? What evidence do you have with which to *Contend*, *Defend*, and *Extend* what you have learned, so that you can present a convincing argument for a reader, and knowledge to build on for others?

- *Extract* and *Explain* through description, theory development, and visual modelling in a way that builds focus and demonstrates coherence, firm evidence, and sound argument. How do all the patterns and associations and explanations you have developed along the way come together? Then use that to:
- *Contend*: what is it that you want to convey to your audience? Out of all the data and ideas you have, can you focus them to arrive at conclusions that answer the questions and meet the purposes you set for your work (in their original or modified versions)? Create rich, interpretive description, develop and argue a thesis, build a model that encapsulates it all, and support it from your data and analyses.
- *Defend* by attending to the basis for your arguments, showing how your conclusions follow from your data, dealing with rival explanations and negative cases along the way. The ease with which you can defend your work will depend on the thoroughness of your analyses on the way through, along with your reflexive records of how you proceeded.
- *Extend* the value of what you have done beyond the immediate setting. Have you provided sufficient contextualisation to allow appropriation to parallel settings? Are your concepts sufficiently developed through abstraction and elaboration to render them useful in a broader context? Will your theoretical propositions 'stand up' so as to allow prediction? Will your work contribute to a wider body of literature to allow for synthesis and extension of knowledge and practice in and beyond your discipline?

Working qualitatively – using software

The availability of software and advances in technology have impacted on how research is done. The internet has become a major vehicle for generating data; the availability of and changes in recording equipment have changed the level and kind of detail available for analysis; advances in computing have led to the development and use of data mining procedures for both numbers and texts.

Software designed for analysis of qualitative data has increased our capacity to retrieve, sort, and interrogate unstructured data in ways that were unimaginable with pencil and paper. As its use has become more widespread, so also has its functionality extended well beyond the original tools for coding and retrieving text that characterised its early development. The ability to support multiple data types, multimedia and web-based sources, complex data arrangements and querying requirements, multi-site teamwork, and extensive memoing, linking, and visualisation of data are all now standard features of qualitative analysis software.

Historically, the use of software facilitated some activities, such as coding, and limited others, such as seeing a document as a whole or scribbling memos alongside text. Residual concerns relate to four issues:

- that computers distance researchers from their data;
- that computers foster the dominance of code and retrieve as a strategy for analysis;
- that computers lead to the mechanisation of analysis; and
- a misperception that computers provide a method of analysis or dictate use of a particular approach (Bazeley, 2007).

It is important that software is seen as providing tools to support rather than drive analysis. Most programs have sufficient flexibility in design that they can be adapted to a researcher's chosen methodological approach. Software *will not* do an analysis for you, nor can it think for you. Rather, its data management and querying capacity supports you to carry out *your* analysis by removing the limitations imposed by paper processing and human memory.

The process of coding using software encourages an attention to detail and constant review, to create an unusual degree of 'closeness' to data. At the same time, coded segments can always be viewed within a larger context; thinking and reviewing are supported by memo writing and visualisation as well as coding; links between and across data segments, sources, codes and coded passages, and even external files are readily established and mapped; and analysis tools to track and assess associations between codes are more flexible, are more easily accessed, and provide more visually accessible reporting than do manual methods.

Electronic tools, such as those provided by the internet and software, extend and change what researchers can achieve using data in ways that depend on both the design of the tool and the ability of the user to apply it to their own purposes. On the negative side, novices, in particular, can 'mess up' without realising they have done so (Gilbert, 2002), affecting the reliability or trustworthiness of results. There is a learning curve involved for those using new software for the first time, so it is a good idea to start using it with a small project, or at a very early stage with a few notes or articles. Most of the strategies I suggest in the pages that follow can be done with or without computer software, but those who use software will be well rewarded by having greater flexibility and power in working with their data, and in saving time in the longer term.

Foundations for working qualitatively

There have been long-standing debates about the nature of reality and knowledge, and how that impacts on choices made in a research programme. When a research participant describes an event or tells a story about their life, do we read that as a description of what really happened, or as an account that reveals how that person made sense of that event or experience – their situated reality? How can we discover why people act the way they do? Indeed, is it possible to know this at all; what does it mean to *know* anything? Such considerations have impacted on research as arguments over what are best, or right, or simply appropriate ways of understanding the world we live in. In the 1970s, arguments about approaches to social research stemmed from what was seen as an overreliance on measurement of observable aspects of social phenomena, to the neglect of understanding the meaning of events and experiences for people. This shift in emphasis laid the foundation for the acceptance and development of qualitative approaches to social research within the broader academic setting. This simple dichotomy in perspectives has since broadened to include a whole array of enquiry paradigms and methodological approaches.

The word 'paradigm' is most commonly used in a metaphysical sense to describe a coherent worldview. It provides a basis for understanding the nature of reality (the world we live in), and provides guidance on how that reality can be known and understood (*ontology* and *epistemology*, respectively). These mental models (Greene, 2007) or knowledge claims (Creswell, 2003) guide us as to what is considered important, legitimate, and reasonable in research, and colour our assumptions about whether we can discover reality, or truth. By extension, a paradigm also describes shared beliefs deriving from a common disciplinary tradition and literature among a community of scholars that provide a basis for determining what are seen as appropriate questions and strategies within that community (Morgan, 2007).

When I first started academic study in the 1960s, the unquestioned goal of social science and behavioural research, especially in my primary discipline of psychology, was to emulate scientific research by engaging in objective empiricism. Deductive logic, hypothesis testing, experimental method, and direct observation of outcomes were givens on the path to knowledge. During my graduate studies and then as a community-based research practitioner I necessarily developed a far more pragmatic and eclectic approach, drawing on whatever data and whatever methods would assist in answering the questions I needed to address. Paradigmatic debates, as such, were never raised, but this had changed by the time I returned to academia in the 1990s, at the latter end of the period known as the paradigm wars. In a sense, my experience is an endorsement of Clive Seale's view:

> I do not think social researchers wanting to produce good-quality work need to be over-concerned with the problem of philosophical foundations, or the lack of them,

since the practical task of doing a research project does not require these things to be resolved at the philosophical level. Neither should they be too worried about political correctness, since this can get in the way of creativity just as much as the blind methodological rule-following of the (mythical) positivist. (2004: 411)

At some stage, however, probably not too far down the research track, you *will* find yourself engaging with issues of ontology and epistemology and the debates surrounding these in order to inform your own research. As you do, you will begin to realise that your view of the world has been implicitly impacting on how you approach the tasks of research, even if you were not especially aware of it (Mertens, 2010). Reflectively struggling with these various debates *does* sharpen thinking, to prompt a more challenging analysis.

Some of the issues to think through include:

- Do social phenomena have an existence or a meaning apart from our conception of them? To what extent are concepts (including the concepts of various stakeholders) shared?
- Whose reality is being considered in research? Especially with reference to issues of power, whose reality will be privileged in an investigation?
- Should one observe from a distance or closely? Does distance provide objectivity with neutrality or does closeness provide objectivity through detailed understanding?
- Is objectivity even possible? Or desirable?
- What might be considered as evidence? What might validity, or 'truth', mean in the context of different understandings of reality?
- How do these issues impact on your choices about what might be worthy of investigation, the focus of your research, and the role of mental and emotional phenomena in research?
- Whose interest is being served by your research? Is it benefiting the 'common (wo)man', the marginalised, or the already rich and powerful?
- What defines ethical practice in research?

Paradigmatic issues such as these often take on more meaning and can be better recognised and understood once one has had some research experience (Patton, 2002), so you may want to return for refreshment to these questions, or other philosophical reading, at a later time.

Ontological and epistemological perspectives

It is not the purpose of this book to delve into the full range of enquiry paradigms and perspectives in detail. Rather, I will give a few brief pointers to just some of those that have influenced several qualitative research traditions, including strategies described in chapters to follow.[11]

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[11]If forced to identify my paradigmatic position, I would describe myself as a pragmatic, critical realist with a transformative perspective.

Critical realism

Critical realism[12] accords broadly with a 'common-sense', natural way to view the world: 'The defining feature of realism is the belief that there is a world existing independently of our knowledge of it' (Sayer, 2000: 2). Realists distinguish between empirical (experienced) reality and actual reality (what is there or what happens whether we experience it or not). Theories about a real phenomenon might change, but that does not change actual reality.[13] Mental properties and processes (including our own and others' emotions, goals, attitudes, and intentions) are equally part of the real world, acting in interaction with physical properties and processes, with consequences for both (Maxwell, 2012).

Reality can be known only through our senses. Epistemologically, we construct reality (Sayer preferred the term 'construe') as we interact with both the physical and mental aspects of it. Our perspective on reality, therefore, is partial, fallible, and subject to revision. Our construction of reality influences our actions, and thereby, recursively, has consequences for reality in both its physical and mental aspects (Box 1.2).

Realist philosophy has much to say about social processes, and takes a strong position in its approach to understanding and investigating causation. Realists argue that it is necessary to explain events, not just to document regularities in them – to identify the physical or mental mechanisms, processes, structures, and other contextual forces that account for events or observed regularities (House, 1991; Maxwell, 2012; Sayer, 2000). (Critical realist contributions to understanding causation are discussed further in Chapter 11.)

Box 1.2

Research from a critical realist perspective

John Eastwood (2011) worked within a critical realist framework to construct an explanatory theory of maternal depression and neighbourhood context using statistical, geospatial, and qualitative data and analyses. Having identified the contextual conditions associated with incidence of maternal depression, he then explored the mechanisms through which these conditions might

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[12]Realism is written about with a range of adjectives attached to it including, for example, scientific (or empirical) realism, naive realism, experiential realism, natural realism. The terms 'realism' and 'critical realism' are often used synonymously in social science writing (e.g., by Maxwell, 2012).

[13]Sayer (2000) and others use the example of man's belief that the world was flat to illustrate this point.

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contribute to depression in new mothers. He found that economic and social marginalisation could create difficulty in accessing support in areas with otherwise strong bonding networks, creating a sense of isolation and loss of control. When these latter conditions were further combined with a culturally generated incongruity between expectations and the reality of motherhood, manifested as a sense of pervasive loss and loneliness, stress resulted and the mother-to-be became depressed during the antenatal stage. Antenatal stress and depression contributed to difficult infant temperament which, when the baby was born, added to the already existing stressful mix, with the consequence of a high risk of maternal depression, and poorer health and social outcomes for the baby.

Pragmatism and symbolic interactionism

Pragmatists also believe all knowledge is tentative, and needs to be tested against experience. Reality for any person is derived directly from their experience. Knowledge results from discovering the conditions and consequences of experience, and we learn through reflection on our experience (Box 1.3). Seeing knowledge as a human construction does not mean that anything is possible; rather, it is a reconstruction of something that exists, and the 'truth' of that knowledge is tested through action, by whether it is matched by experience (Biesta, 2010).

Objects we perceive (including both physical and social objects) acquire meaning through our transactions with those objects over time. To me, a length of board suspended across two short posts is a seat where I can rest when my feet are tired; to my grandson, it is something to walk along (a balance beam). Meaning is thus culturally (contextually and temporally) determined. Once an experience becomes defined and labelled, we tend to interpret it in the terms ascribed to that label and to neglect features from a wider perspective that don't fit. Our consciousness and self-consciousness are similarly dependent on our interaction with society (intersubjectivity), as we view ourselves (and other things) from the standpoint of others (Mead, 1934).

Pragmatism and its derivative, symbolic interactionism, have influenced the development of many approaches to qualitative analysis, and grounded theory in particular, by emphasising:

- a focus on the transactional – action-based – nature of experience as this is affected by different conditions, and the consequences of action under those different conditions;
- a notion that one's ideas about self are built through interaction with others and hence are a reflection of the society of which one is part;
- a need to observe and interpret data from the point of view of the person providing them, as that is the basis for that person's thinking and consequent action.

Box 1.3

Symbolic interactionism at work in research

The classic study 'How to become a marihuana user' was undertaken by Howard Becker ([1953] 2006) as a consequence of observations during his graduate-student experiences of playing jazz piano in a Chicago nightclub.

Becker interviewed 50 people from a variety of social positions with different levels of experience in using marihuana. He found that the novice user of marihuana has to learn how to use the drug in order to gain any effect; has to overcome negative, often frightening, physiological reactions; has to learn from others to recognise the symptoms of being high on the drug; and then has to learn through association with more experienced users to interpret the effects as pleasurable. He concluded that persisting and feeling pleasure, for a person who uses the drug, is behaviour that is learned through others' naming of the experience as pleasurable and the new user's consequent renaming of ambiguous experiences as enjoyable. Continued use depends on the user continuing to conceive of marihuana as something that gives pleasure; it may cease for a time, therefore, after an incident in which particularly negative effects are experienced (with restarting again being through the influence of friends), or if alcohol use dulls the effects of marihuana use. Use was not associated with particular personality types or physiological characteristics, as was held by conventional wisdom at the time.

Constructivism

Constructivists acknowledge multiple realities, working from the premise that knowledge is constructed through discourse in the context of individual histories and social interaction (Schwandt, 2000). Some constructivists accept that there is a pre-existing real world that provides a basis for our perceptions, although it has no meaning until conscious minds engage with it. Others argue that reality is purely created or constructed by minds, through discourse – that even 'self-evident' things like man and woman are produced through complicated discursive practices. For all constructivists, knowledge is constructed rather than received or discovered, and our concepts, beliefs, and theories about the objects and experiences with which we engage will be continually modified in the light of new experience (Schwandt, 2007). Epistemologically, constructivists' ideas reflect those also found in critical realist and pragmatist epistemologies, but they differ ontologically (Box 1.4).

Box 1.4

A constructivist's view of chronic illness

'Constructivists study *how* – and sometimes *why* – participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations' (Charmaz, 2006: 130); thus any analysis will be contextually situated. In researching how chronically ill people constructed time, Kathy Charmaz found they dealt with

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their illness by living each day, one day at a time, not planning for future days. This construction of time allowed them to focus on their illness and its treatment in the present moment, and thus to control their days and manage their emotions. She quotes one of her participants:

> I try to live one day at a time because it is just less frightening … I could just get really tied up in what might happen [death or further deterioration] since so much has happened in the last six months [multiple complications and iatrogenic diseases]. But what good does it do? I can only handle today? (2006: 147)

In constructing her analysis, Charmaz interpreted the range of tacit meanings in people's statements of experience that she has gathered together under each category, rather than simply describing those experiences. Others coming from a similar perspective and with similar experience of the data might arrive at the same interpretation, but without that similar perspective, they might see and emphasise different aspects of their participants' experiences.

Theoretical and ideological perspectives

Emerging theoretical and ideological perspectives – sometimes also referred to as paradigms – are becoming increasingly influential in the fields of qualitative and mixed methods research. Typically these are designed to alert you to important biases which implicitly or explicitly influence the way you approach your questions, your participants, and your methods. Essentially, however, they reflect value orientations rather than epistemologies.

Transformative perspective

Qualitative researchers became concerned that the research agenda has been too much under the direction of powerful researchers or the interests of funders they represent, to the neglect of those who are marginalised in society and less articulate. In response, some have adopted a 'transformative' or 'emancipatory' perspective as a basis for the work they do. A transformative approach is broadly compatible with critical realism (House, 1991; Maxwell & Mittapalli, 2010).

Coming from a background of work with people with a low-incidence disability, Donna Mertens (2007; 2009) articulated a widely applicable 'transformative paradigm' for qualitative and mixed methods research as 'a framework for examining assumptions that explicitly address power issues, social justice, and cultural complexity throughout the research process' (2007: 212–13; see Box 1.5). Researchers and community members may have different understandings of reality as a consequence of unearned privilege; thus to promote social transformation with increased social justice, 'it is necessary to be explicit about the social, political, cultural, economic, ethic, racial, gender, age and disability values that define realities' (2007: 216). In a transformative approach, community members are involved in determining the research focus, with involvement continuing throughout the project.

Results from the research must be meaningful and accessible to community members, as a further demonstration of respect for those who contributed and as a prompt, where appropriate, to local action.

Box 1.5

A transformative study

Donna Mertens was asked by a consulting firm, on contract to a US state department of education, to gather evaluation data relating to problems being experienced at a residential school for deaf pupils. She reported:

> The consulting firm did not mention sexual abuse in our initial communications, but I asked for copies of the request for proposal and the proposal. The first line in the request for proposal stated, 'Because of serious allegations of sexual abuse at the residential school for the deaf, an external evaluator should be brought into the school to systematically study the context of the school.' When I mentioned this to the contact person at the consulting firm, it was acknowledged as a problem, but it was suggested that we could address it by using a survey to ask if the curriculum included sex education and if the students could lock their doors at night. I indicated that I thought the problem was more complex than that, but I was willing to go to the school and discuss the evaluation project with the school officials.

> On my arrival, I met with the four men who constituted the upper management of the school. For about 30 minutes, they talked about the need to look at the curriculum and the administrative structure. They did not mention the topic of sexual abuse. So I raised the topic by saying, 'I am a bit confused. I have been here for about a half hour, and no one has yet mentioned the issue of sexual abuse which is the basis for the State Department of Education requirement of an external evaluation.'

> After some chair scraping and coughing, one school administrator said, 'That happened last year and I am sure if you ask people they will say that they just want to move on.' The administrators were correct that the incidents that resulted in the termination of the superintendent's contract and the jailing of two staff members had happened in the spring of the year, and I was there in the fall. I assured them that it was indeed quite possible that some people would say that they would prefer to move on, but it was important for me to ask a wide range of people two questions: What were the factors that allowed the sexual abuse to happen? And what would need to be changed in order to reduce the probability that it would recur? I found that there were many answers to these questions, one of which was a desire to not talk about it and move on. However, *allowing those with power to frame the questions and methods would have resulted in a continuation of an overall context that had permitted many young deaf people to be seriously psychologically and physically hurt.* (Mertens, 2007: 214–15, emphasis added; see also Mertens, 1996)

Feminism and other standpoint theories

Other theorists have observed that knowledge is situated by the experiences and orientation of the person. As Ezzy has stated, 'all knowledge is knowledge from

where a person stands' (2002: 20). Standpoint theories, which include feminist theory, queer theory, and race theory, typically focus on the identity and concerns of particular sectors of society, but with broader implications for the way in which research is done. Feminist researchers have, for example, responded to the implicit treatment of women as 'other' (i.e., defined only with reference to men), the stereotyping of women and women's roles (Box 1.6), and the unequal treatment of women in research by asking questions such as: 'Are there "women's ways of knowing" and is there a body of "women's knowledge"?' These lead to the further question: 'How does the knowledge women produce about themselves differ from that produced by men?'

In approaching any research topic, standpoint theorists attend to ensuring that the voices of marginalised, misrepresented, or subjugated groups are heard through the ways in which research is designed, conducted, and reported. 'Subjugated knowledges can be key to social change, not because they are the whole truth, but because they include information and ways of thinking which dominant groups have a vested interest in suppressing' (New, 1998: 360). Postmodern writing, particularly the work of Michel Foucault on gender and power, has had a significant influence on the development of these theories, with the analysis (and deconstruction) of historical discourses being an influential research strategy. As with the transformative perspective, power is a central issue to be understood, demystified, and addressed throughout the research process.

Box 1.6

Competing discourses in Indian media representations of female entrepreneurs

The media play an important role in shaping representations of masculinity and femininity and, in doing so, exercise subtle control over women's bodies and behaviour. In a critical discourse analysis of 46 'human interest' feature articles from Indian newspapers and magazines over a period of change in the Indian economy, Radha Iyer (2009) identified contradictory discourses of femininity, patriarchy, and becoming.

In these articles, the discourse of femininity focused on women's physical attributes as women, or, through metaphor, to their roles as homemakers (e.g., 'making kitchen soup for the skin') and as mothers. These 'girls' are described as powerless followers, rather than creative, risk-taking, owners of their ventures. Similarly, the discourse of patriarchy foregrounds the traditional roles of the women, and their dependence on their families for support in their business.

Discourses that illustrated resistance and difference focused on women's being and becoming entrepreneurs in ways that transgressed their socially provided roles, and showed female entrepreneurs as subject rather than as 'other'. They recorded these women as speaking of having adjusted their identities, of making deliberate and sometimes arduous choices, of taking control, and of doing so with confidence. At the same time these women continued to recognise their traditional societal roles, reflecting the complexity of competing subjectivities.

Working qualitatively: implications for analysis

Any attempt to definitively set criteria for what qualifies exclusively as qualitative research is doomed to failure. Qualitative research and analysis are expected to demonstrate features that include, for example, seeking an insider view of the social world, using an inductive (emergent) approach, and working intensively with small samples. These features are, nevertheless, neither essential for, nor exclusive to, thinking and working qualitatively, but rather are just some of a broad class of strategies that may be part of working qualitatively. Within this context of indefinite and infinite variability, and without being exclusive or prescriptive, Table 1.1 points ahead by outlining characteristics seen as common to many qualitative approaches to research, with their implications for undertaking analysis.

Table 1.1   Common features of qualitative research and implications for analysis

Characteristic	Implications for analysis
Intense or prolonged contact with an everyday life situation	Data management system is essential Analysis starts as data are gathered Openness to new directions as new information comes to hand Seek new or further data on the basis of emerging ideas
Looking for 'insider' viewpoint; seeing things from the participant's perspective	Deep attentiveness to participants' viewpoints 'Bracketing' and/or recognising one's own preconceptions
Data usually in the form of words rather than numbers	Use of hermeneutic rather than statistical techniques Less clearly defined strategies for analysis Emphasis on interpretation rather than manipulation of data
Labour-intensive	Allow a period at least two to five times as long for analysis as for generating data The bulk of the work for the project as a whole (and time needed) comes *after* data are gathered, rather than before
Emphasis on context – 'holistic' and 'naturalistic'	Always consider the impact of the setting for the data Analysis is a messy process involving consideration of multiple elements and factors at the same time
Methods are non-reductive	All methods have to be reductive to some degree in order to organise and make sense of data, but with qualitative analysis access to data in its original form is usually retained

(Continued)

Table 1.1   (Continued)

Characteristic	Implications for analysis
Theory emergent; inductive or abductive	More often starts with an idea or a general question than with the goal of testing details of an existing theory Immersion in data as a primary source of understanding
Enormous variety in forms of data used and approaches to using them	Multiple options available for analysing an issue Choices made in the context of research purpose Benefit of flexibility and breadth of researcher skill
Openness and flexibility	Adapt methods in response to unanticipated findings Avoid drawing conclusions early, and hold them lightly
Focus on process rather than variance	Linkages between elements in data are as much or more of a focus than the elements themselves Seeking explanation rather than correlation
Focus on interpretation	Meanings are constructed within subjective and inter-subjective experience
Possibility of multiple interpretations	Focus on those that: • serve the research purpose • are internally consistent • are theoretically sound
Researcher as instrument	The instrument is non-standardised! Need for skills training Need for a sharp, analytic, but empathic mind
Lacking clear criteria for rigour and quality	Importance of 'audit trail' to track generation of and document the basis for interpretive ideas and conclusions Maintain a strong evidentiary database to support results
Limited capacity to generalise	Focus on local rather than universal meanings Be specific about the context of these results Focus on understanding process rather than describing range or coverage

Writing about foundations

Each chapter will conclude with some brief suggestions for researchers for writing about the issues covered as they prepare their work for presentation (especially for those writing a dissertation).

In the introduction

▶ Describe the purpose for your study:
  ○ what 'problem' prompted it;
  ○ what your study is intended to achieve; and
  ○ why it matters.

▶ Explain how or why a qualitative approach will help you achieve your purpose.

▶ If you have a particular agenda or bias in your approach to this topic, indicate that here – and justify it.

At the start of the methodology chapter (usually)

▶ Outline your understanding of the nature of reality and of how people gain knowledge of the world around them. Include also any value perspectives you have that will influence your approach to gaining knowledge through research.

▶ If you are adopting an established methodology, review the essential characteristics of this methodology, and your rationale for choosing it (this has to accord with your purpose).

Given you are not writing a textbook on the subject, you do *not* need to review every available approach to either the philosophical or the methodological foundations for a study. Rather, simply identify and explain your chosen approach, and provide your rationale for making that choice.

Exercises

Exercise 1: Thinking qualitatively

▶ Take an article from a newspaper or a magazine, and with a group of friends identify the author's purpose and how they achieve that. Note the language used, the way in which the article has been constructed, the selection of 'evidence', and the degree of confidence you might have in the conclusions.

▶ Take an article that is based on a statistically analysed survey, and consider how you might look at the same issues utilising a qualitative perspective.

Exercise 2: Research purposes

▶ Identify your *personal* goal(s) in doing this research:
  ○ How might these impact on your motivation?
  ○ And on the validity of your conclusions?

▶ Whose interest does this research serve (who are the *stakeholders*)?
  ○ Who has or needs the knowledge?
  ○ Who has the power?

▶ What *practical* (problem, policy) goals does your project serve? What will it accomplish? (These *do not* lead directly to research questions; they are too open ended or value laden.)

▶ What *intellectual* goals does your project serve? What will it help you *understand*? (These generally *do* lead directly to research questions.)

Exercise 3: Paradigmatic foundations

▶ Have members of your small group each read a research article or two that rely on analysis of qualitative data, and attempt to discern the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions the author(s) of the study have made (these are rarely spelt out). Then have the group meet and discuss what they each have found. The purpose is not to name the approach so much as to identify the assumptions that feature in it.

▶ In a group, identify a research problem, and then design how the questions might look if that problem is viewed from different philosophical, methodological, or stakeholder perspectives.

Further reading

Stake (2010) is a recent, readable introduction to and overview of qualitative approaches to research.

Brinkmann (2012) draws on a solid foundation of philosophy, theory, and literary writing to show how you can build an achievable qualitative project from the experiences and materials available to you in your everyday life.

Patton (2002: Chapter 3) provides an extensive overview of qualitative approaches and methodologies.

Becker (1998): when I first read this book, I thought it was chaotic, as Becker has a tendency to wander all around his point in the process of making it. I came back to it later and loved it. I keep on coming back to it for ideas and stimulation.

Ragin and Becker (1992): *What is a case?* contains the contributions of eight social scientists to a conference designed to explore this question. This is not introductory material, but interesting reading for those who want to think more deeply.

Frost and Stablein (1992) review the ups and downs of seven research journeys in their field of organisation studies, in their quest to identify what makes for exemplary research. Learn from their experiences, especially things that will encourage you when your research doesn't go according to plan.

Mertens (2009) presents research methods within a strong social justice (transformative) framework.

Morse (1999) describes a pluralistic approach to methodology in the context of exploring the complex concept and process of providing comfort in a trauma (emergency) room.

Greene (2007: Chapter 3), having lived through it and been part of it, offers a very balanced and readable historical account of the whole period of ferment in paradigms and methods from the 1970s through to the turn of the century.

Crotty (1998) is a widely read text that gives a detailed review of major ontological and epistemological positions.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994; 2000; 2005; 2011): each edition of the *Handbook of qualitative research* has offered a section on paradigms and perspectives, with multiple contributions covering a range of perspectives, and with a trend over the various editions toward including more that might loosely be categorised as 'postmodernist'.

Maxwell (2012) argues cogently for the value of a critical realist perspective for qualitative research, which he then illustrates with examples from his own research.

O'Brien (2006) provides an extensive selection of classic and more recent readings from a pragmatist, constructivist, or symbolic interactionist perspective, with a commentary. This is a book to relax with and enjoy.

Shin, Kim, and Chung (2009) tabulate a brief summary of the steps taken in analysis for several major approaches to each of phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and general qualitative analysis, as used by authors of 464 articles in *Qualitative Health Research* and 89 in the Korean journal *Qualitative Research*.

Schwandt's (2007) *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry* is a useful resource to keep handy for a digest of information on all those terms you're meeting that you don't understand.

Davidson and di Gregorio (2011) review where software has come from in relation to qualitative analysis and where it is going to with increasing use of Web 2.0 tools for research. It provides a positive change from most reviews of software in qualitative methods texts that are clearly written by non-users who draw on out-of-date texts for their commentary.