

Introduction to Qualitative Research:

Amirul Shah Md Shahbudin, PhD
School of Management
Universiti Sains Malaysia
11800 Pulau Pinang
amirulshah@usm.my

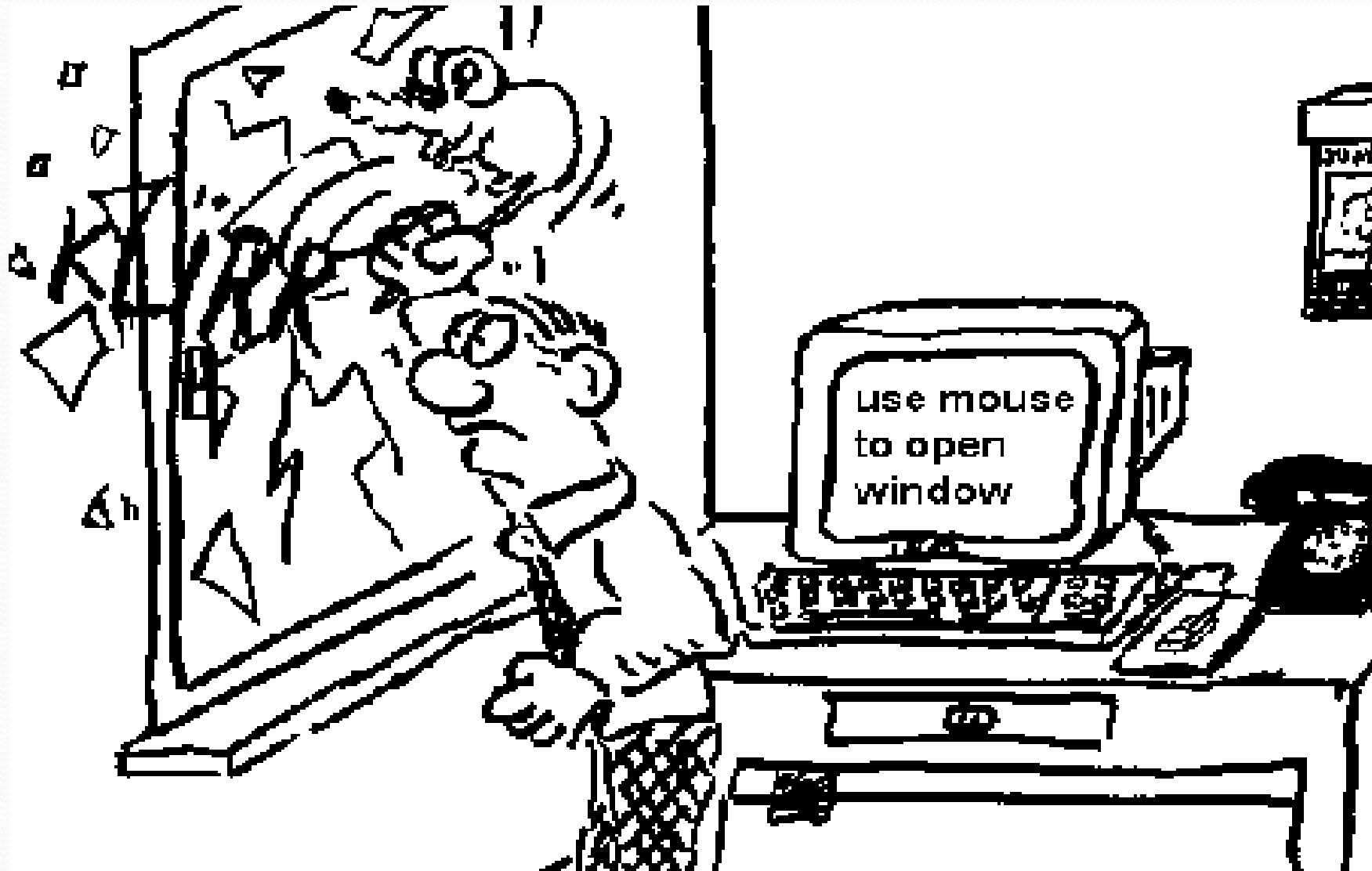
Qualitative Research

“You can learn a lot
just by watching”

Origins of Qualitative Approaches

- Developed as a reaction to positivist philosophy which had overrun all sciences, even philosophy itself
- Recognition that the lived world of humanity requires a different research approach to the natural world

MAKING SENSE OF OTHERS' REALITY



scientific paradigms

- Quantitative and qualitative research may largely be seen as existing within two separate *scientific paradigms*.
- Quantitative Research is rooted in the *Positivist* paradigm.
- Qualitative Research is rooted in the *Interpretive* paradigm.

BASIC CONCEPTS

- A ***scientific paradigm*** connects and categorises a variety of research techniques through underlying philosophical assumptions surrounding appropriate research practice.
- Within each paradigm the nature of knowledge is assumed to be different.
- ***Epistemology*** is the philosophical debate about the nature of knowledge.
- ***Methodology*** – specifies how the researcher may go about practically studying whatever he or she believes can be known (the theory informing the practice of research).

THE POSITIVIST PARADIGM

- Positivism argues that research should act “... as an organised method ...” surrounding precise **empirical observations** of individual behaviour in order to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic **causal laws** that can be used to **predict** general patterns of human activity” (Neuman, 1997: 63)
- **Empiricism** argues that only that which can be experienced through the senses may be known to be real.
- Positivist research gained dominance in the natural sciences and was later adopted in social sciences.

THE INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM

- The **interpretive** approach argues that research should explore “...socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at **understandings** and **interpretations** of how people create and maintain their social worlds” (Neuman, 1997:68).
- We use “... methods that try to **describe** and **interpret** people’s **feelings** and **experiences** in human terms rather than through quantification and measurement” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999: 123).

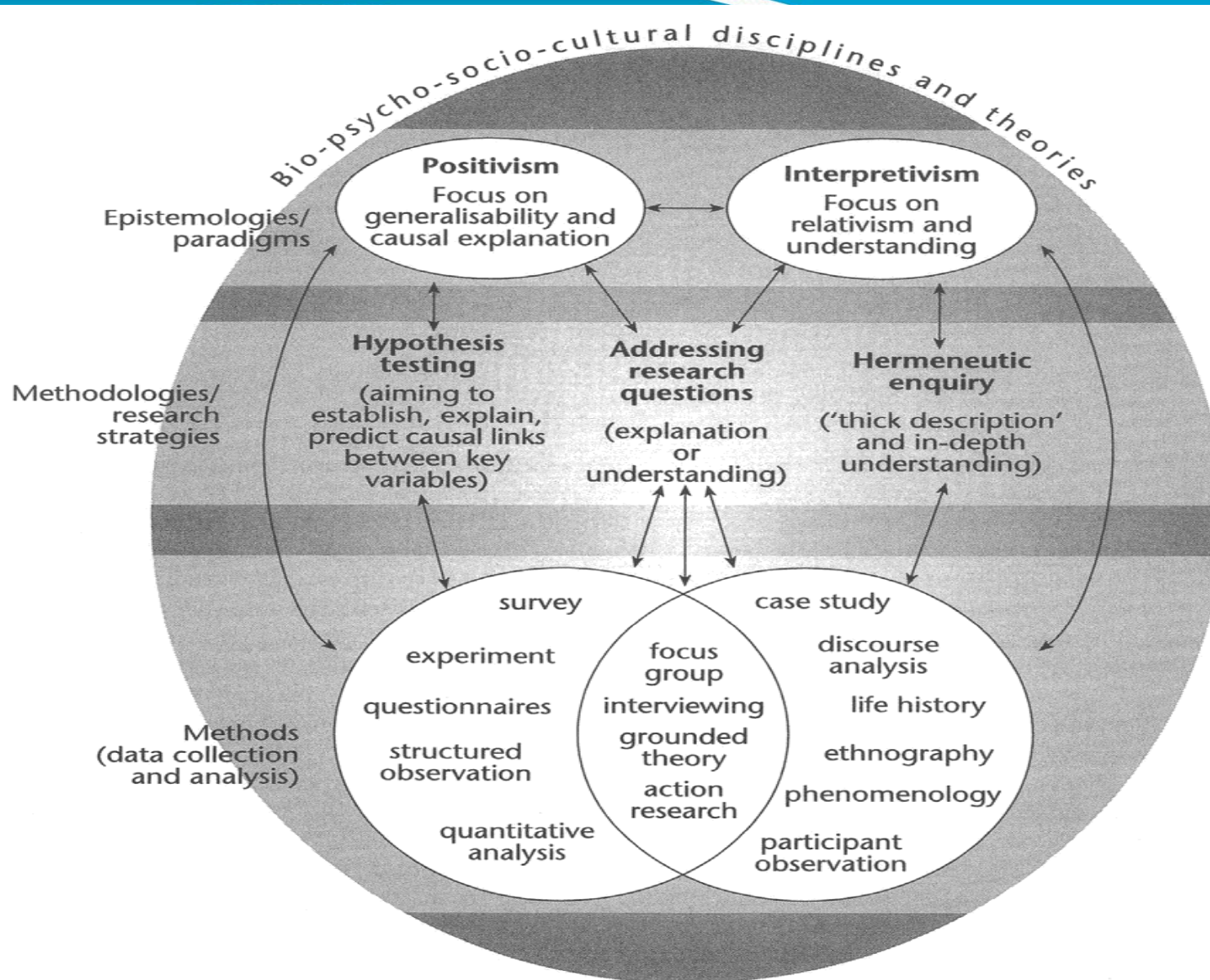


Figure 4 The methodological field

POSITIVIST

INTERPRETIVE

Discovery of universal laws governing social world.	Discovery of how people make sense of their social worlds.
A fixed social reality exists that may be measured and described.	Many social realities exist due to varying human experience.
Human behaviour is both rational and predictable.	Human behaviour is context bound and variable.
Positivist science is capable of uncovering 'truth'.	Common sense provides insight into social realities.

POSITIVIST

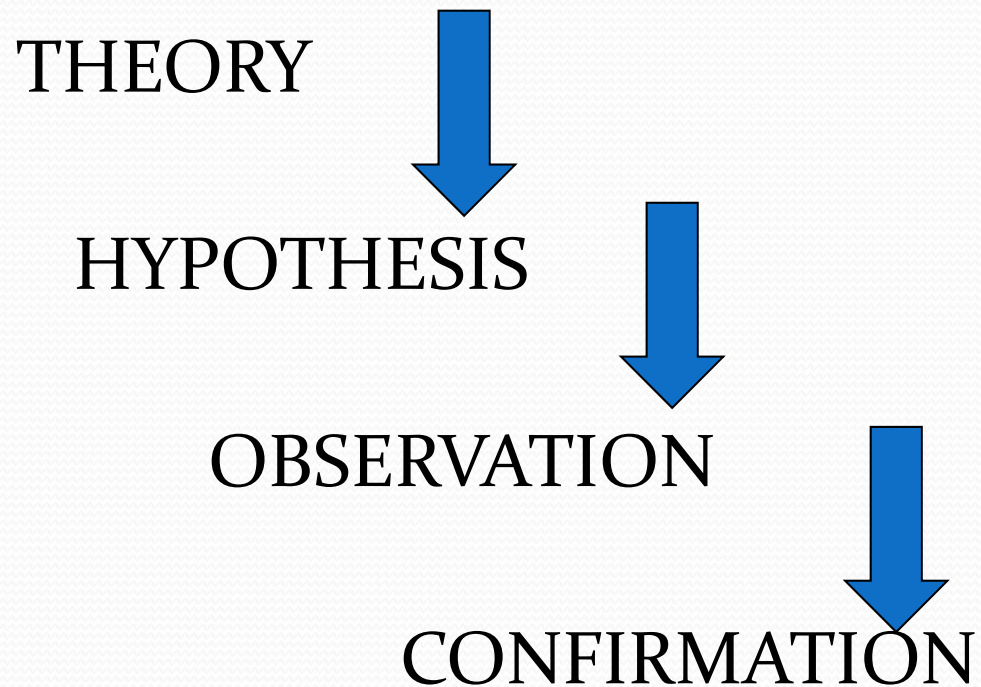
INTERPRETIVE

Discovery of social fact is achieved through reason.	Understanding of social reality is achieved through rich contextual description.
Empirical observation serve to illuminate social facts.	Contextual understanding exposes a social reality.
Objective, value-free study is crucial in social research.	Recognition of subjectivity in social research is important.

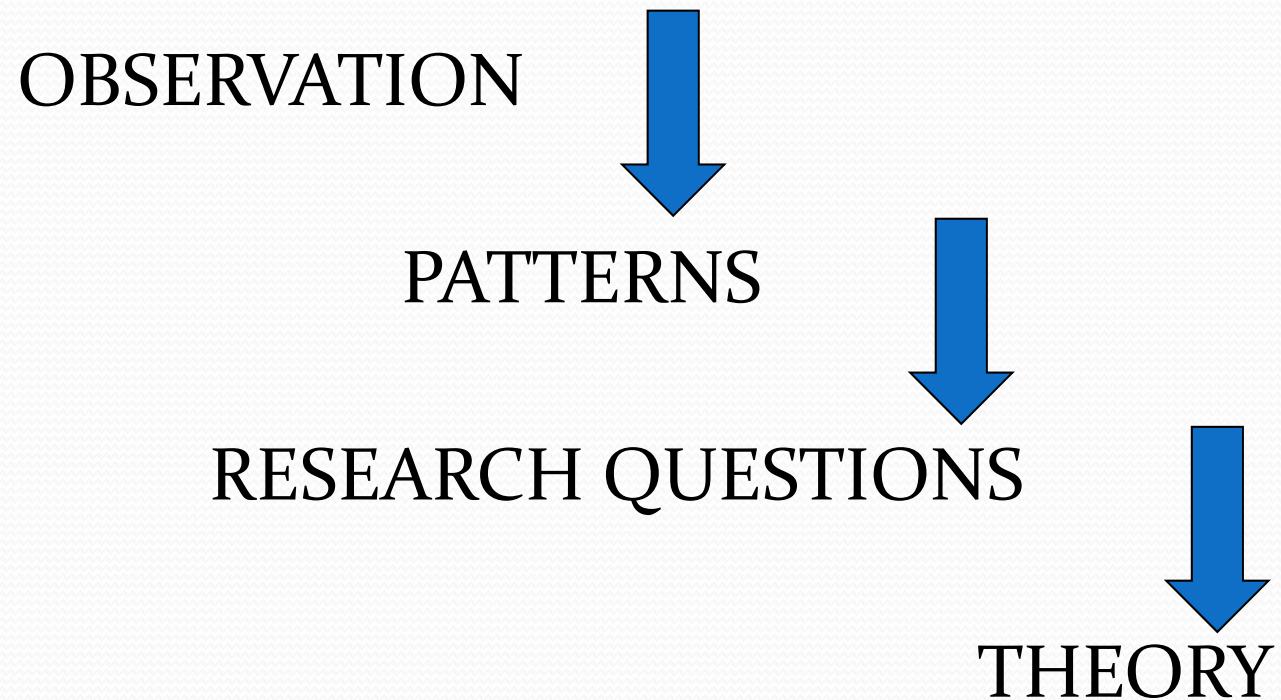
Elements of the Research Process

DEDUCTIVE & INDUCTIVE REASONING

Deductive thinking (Quantitative)



Inductive thinking (Qualitative)



QUANTITATIVE

QUALITATIVE

Research process is deductive.	Research process is inductive.
Measure objective facts.	Social reality, meaning is constructed.
Focus on variables.	Focus on in-depth meaning.
Value-free research.	Values are present & explicit (empathy).
Independent of context.	Contextual importance.
Many cases, subjects.	Few cases, participants.

QUANTITATIVE


QUALITATIVE

Statistical analysis	Thematic analysis
Objective instruments of data collection.	Researcher as the central tool for data collection.
Highly structured research process.	Loosely structured research process.
Researcher is detached (outsider). (Adapted from Neuman, 1997: 14)	Researcher is immersed (insider).

QUANTITATIVE

QUALITATIVE

result oriented	process oriented
particularistic and analytical	holistic perspective
objective “outsider view” distant from data	subjective “insider view” and closeness to data
generalized by population membership	generalization by comparison of properties and contexts of individual organism

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- Although **positivist approach** attempts to understand social phenomena through largely quantitative means, and the **interpretive approach** mainly through qualitative techniques,
 - it is important not to over-emphasize the difference between these methods.

Qualitative research...

- Commonly called “interpretive research”

...its methods rely heavily on “thick” verbal descriptions of a particular social context being studied

- It is useful for describing or answering questions about particular, localized occurrences or contexts and the perspectives of a participant group toward events, beliefs, or practices

...a helpful process for exploring a complex research area about which little is known

Qualitative research...

- Interpretation, as the core of qualitative research focuses on the meaning of human experience.
- The focus is on understanding human experience rather than explaining and predicting behaviour.
- It is acknowledged that meaning and behaviour occurs within particular social, cultural and historical contexts.

“Qualitative Research”

a definition by Van Maanen (1979)

“An umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain naturally occurring phenomena in the social world” (p. 520)

“Qualitative Research”

a definition by (Banister et al., 1994)

Qualitative research is “...the interpretive study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made”

“Qualitative Research”

a definition by (Pope and Mays, 1995)

“The goal of qualitative research is the development of concepts which help us to understand social phenomena in natural (rather than experimental) settings, giving due emphasis to the meanings, experiences, and views of all the participants.”

*Pope & Mays.
BMJ 1995; 311: 42-45.*

Essential Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- concerned with understanding a phenomenon
- assumes multiple realities
- data is in the form of rich verbal descriptions
- researcher is immersed and in direct contact during the data collection
- the data collection is highly interactive
- data collection methodology evolves and is flexible; a “tentative” approach to the methodology

Essential Characteristics of Qualitative Research

- emphasizes the holistic perspective
- research is context sensitive
- illuminate the invisibility of everyday life; “make the familiar strange”
- construct meaning from the participant’s point of view (“informants” rather than “subjects”)
- explores open questions rather than testing hypothesis
- employs purposive sampling and “gate keepers”

Appropriateness of Qualitative Research

- When variables cannot be quantified
- When variables are best understood in their natural settings
- When variables are studied over time
- When studying roles, processes, and groups
- When the paramount objective is “understanding”

What to Observe or Study

- Behaviors or practices
- Episodes, common events (death, birth, etc.)
- Encounters –when groups or people interact
- Roles
- Relationship roles – mother/daughter; wife/husband, Therapist/disabled,... etc.

Qualifications of Investigators

(Kuh & Andreas, 1991)

- Must have requisite knowledge and skills about methodology, setting and nature of the issue.
- Must be familiar with own biases, assumptions, expectations, and values.
- Must be empathic, intelligent, energetic, and interested in listening
- Must be open to embracing multiple realities.
- Must be prepared to produce detailed, comprehensive, and sometimes lengthy reports.

The Qualitative Research Design

“a rough working frame” --(Whitt, 1991)

- An initial focus (problem, phenomenon, question)
- Phases of the study (background, entry, exploration, closure)
- Plan for identifying setting and data sources
- Plan and logistics for data collection and analysis
- Plan for ensuring trustworthiness

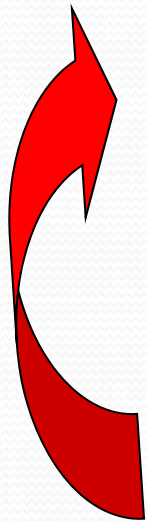
Phases in Qualitative Research

Conceptualize and plan study
Use literature, formulate study purpose or question, identify study site, settings where/how data collection will occur, participants and entrée to setting



Start study with **concurrent data collection and analysis**. Analysis focused on identifying themes and categories-- similarities in data. Question or purpose may emerge and be refined. Data collection strategies may change

**Goal: Access the participants world & meanings.
Researcher is the instrument**



Sampling and data collection determined by theoretical saturation. Analysis based on narrative description

