Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research Methods

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Five Points

1. A case for qualitative research
2. What do we mean by ethical issues and why are these important?
3. When to think about ethical responsibility
4. Responsibility during data collection and data analysis
5. Responsibility while writing the report
1. A Case for Qualitative Research

- The difference between qualitative and quantitative research is not that of ‘quality’
- What is “scientific”?
- Old tradition*
- Triangulation
- “Thick description”
Famous Qualitative Studies

- Why firms exist & transaction cost theory (Coase & Williamson)
- Thompson (How to organize)
- Mintzberg (Strategy & structure)
- Cyert & March (Theory of the firm)
- Johanson & Vahlne (Establishment chain)
- Dunning (OLI)
- Porter (Competitive strategy)
- Barney (Resource base view)
- Scott (Institutional theory)
2. Why Ethical Issues are Important?

• Ethics are moral principles and values that influence the way a researcher conducts his/her research activities. Ethics apply to all situations and activities in which there can be actual or potential harm of any kind to anybody or society in general.

• It is our moral responsibility to explain and find answers to our questions honestly and accurately.
Why ethical approval…

- We have to point out strengths and weaknesses of our methods, results and their implications
- To safeguard the researcher
- Demand from the funding organisation
- To convince the firm / organisation we want to research about
3. When to think about Ethical Responsibility

- It starts at research problem stage
- Ethics in research goes beyond legal or moral issues
- Ethical mindfulness is needed throughout the research process*
Ethical issues and research process

(1) CHOICE OF RESEARCH TOPIC

(2) RESEARCH PROBLEM

(2A) PROBLEM PRESENTATION

(3) RESEARCH DESIGN

(4) MEASUREMENT / INTERPRETATIONS

(5) DATA

(6) SAMPLE/ RESPONDENTS

(7) ANALYSES

(8) WRITING (COMPLETING THE REPORT/THESIS)

(9) ACTIONS
4. Responsibility During Data Collection and Data Analysis

- Researcher and the respondent – most sensitive relationship
- Explicit consent to participate in research
- Purpose of the research – disclose fully
- Competition analysis – e.g. in case of internship
- Disguised observation e.g. courtesy visit vs data collection
- Deception e.g. not disclosing that the interview is being recorded – Must ask for permission
Data Collection…

- Disclosure of the company - confirm
- Assure anonymity and confidentiality to the respondent
- Respondent should be allowed to opt out at any time – clear from the start
- In case any cost is involved – it is researcher’s responsibility to bear that cost
- Avoid academic terminology – make sure they understand the question
- Assure the participant that they will be able to comment on the report – before it is finalized.
Data Analysis Stage

- Establish a trustworthy and credible relationship with the respondent
- Honest and accurate interpretation of data
- Evaluate if the results would embarrass or disadvantage a respondent
- Misinterpretations are ethically wrong
- Appropriate and honest use of techniques and measurements - convincing
Data Analysis…

• Judgement about the proper research procedure
• Care while making judgement e.g. how strong is strong
• Explanation of measurement / judgement procedure used
• Explain constraints and limitations
• In case of doubt / contradiction - consult the respondents again
5. Responsibility while Writing Report

• Assure that the participants have seen and approved parts of the report concerning them.

• In case they had some comments – deal with these comments and let them see it again.

• Reporting results honestly and accurately is the most important aspect of ethics.

• Consider customs, beliefs and religion before finalizing the report.

• What to report and what not to report – Confirmation bias*
Reporting…

- Revisit viability and reliability issue – can readers believe in your results*
- Researcher’s own interests and biases
- Timing of the report e.g. elections, policy decisions, labour / management negotiations
- Report limitations and suggestions how these can be avoided in future research
Validity

How well the instrument that is used measures the particular concept it is supposed to measure

Reliability

How consistently the measuring instrument measures whatever concept it is measuring
Thank you

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University Ethical Approval

University rules particularly ask for:

• Consent of participants
• Storage, access and disposal of data
• Outline any potential risk to anybody
• Participants anonymity
• Declaration of the researcher and supervisor