

### **B32. More or Less Special Characteristics of Qualitative Study**

1. It is holistic. It is case oriented. A case is seen to be a bounded system, a wholeness. It is not highly analytic. It is not elementalistic. It is not highly comparative. It seeks to understand its object for itself rather than in how it differs from others. Its contexts are carefully described.
2. It is empirical
  - It is field-oriented.
  - Its emphasis is on observables, including the observations of informants. It strives to be naturalistic. It strives to be non-interventionistic. There is preference for natural language description, sometimes disdaining grand constructs.
3. It is interpretive. Its researchers rely on intuition, failing to be explicit about many variables. Its on-site observers work to keep some attention free to recognize problem relevant events. It is attuned to the fact that research is a researcher-subject interaction. It is in tune with a view of reality as a human construction.
4. It is empathic.
  - It attends to actor intentionality.
  - It seeks actor perceptions, frames of reference, value commitments. Though planned, its design is emergent, responsive, progressively focussed. Its issues are often emic more than etic. Its reporting provides the reader with a vicarious experience.

#### **Exemplary practice. When well done, qualitative study is likely also to be:**

5. Its observations and immediate interpretations are validated.
  - Triangulation of data is routine.
  - Researchers try deliberately to disconfirm their own interpretations.
  - The reports assist readers in making their own interpretations.
  - The reports assist readers in recognizing the researchers' subjectivity.
6. It is not hortatory. Researchers resist the exploitation of the specialist's platform. It avoids recommendations.
7. It is sensitive to the risks of human subjects research.
  - Anonymity is offered.
  - Draft copies and invitations to correct are made available to those described.
8. Its researchers are not just methodologically competent but versed also in the relevant substantive disciplines.

**Options. Qualitative studies will vary depending further on these options:**

9. Aim at knowledge production versus assistance to policy development and practice.
10. Aim to represent typical cases versus aim to maximize understanding of problem complexity.
11. Honors multiple realities (relativism) versus the most logically defensible view.
12. Reporting provides formal generalizations versus vicarious experience for the reader.
13. Aims to provide value conclusions versus facilitating value debate.