



Qualitative Research Module

This module will help the user understand what qualitative research is, how it can best be done, and provide practice activities on conducting qualitative research.



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THIS MODULE INCLUDES:

Contents (Direct links clickable below)	Interactive Pages (i.e. Worksheets) will help you...
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TOOLS IN THIS MODULE

(You can click on the underlined tool to go directly to the location of the tool in this module.)

TOOL 1: Questions to ask before deciding what type of research to use

TOOL 2: Sample questions for interview and focus group discussions



What is Qualitative Research?

Qualitative research does not analyse or use statistical data. It is interpretive research that accommodates the idea that human behaviour is subjective and influenced by environment and circumstances. Qualitative research focuses more on the how and why of human actions and situations rather than what and when.

What is the use of Qualitative Research?

Qualitative research methods are designed to obtain people's perspectives and views. They help us understand why people do certain actions and how they have reached that stage.

Qualitative research is used for studying and understanding human opinions and actions. It is used to understand the reasons as to why a conflict developed and how a possible consensus can be achieved. It is useful in accommodating the human element and recognizing that social data concerning man is subjective.

Tip: Ask "Why?"

Just adding an open ended why as a follow up to an objective and/or subjective question can reveal extremely rich and useful data. For example "on a scale of 1 for poor to 5 for excellent, how would you rate the general organization of the conference? Why?"



Advantages	Disadvantages
Versatility	Researcher may only know roughly in advance what he/she is looking for
Gives the interviewer the opportunity to probe further and to ask more questions	The design emerges as the study unfolds
It gives depth to an interview and makes the data "rich" i.e. Qualitative research generates rich and detailed data	The data analysis and data collection is labour intensive and time consuming
Intangible	Qualitative data is vulnerable to the researchers bias/subjectivity

Why do we conduct Qualitative Research?

Qualitative data allows us to dig deeply into the meaning of changes that may occur during implementation of a program. While quantitative data tells us what changed and how many times it changed (people or things), qualitative data tells us why and how things or people changed. “Qualitative methods have greater flexibility and pose questions in a more open-ended manner. They give an in-depth understanding of why people hold particular views. They also explore how people make judgments, in a way that structured quantitative research cannot. Qualitative methods are not intended to be statistically reliable, but findings can — if participants (those who provide data to the study) are broadly representative — be strongly indicative of the population as a whole. Standard qualitative methods include interviews and focus groups. Qualitative data is typically words or text, though it can include photographs, video, or sound recordings.” (Church & Rogers, 2006, p. 203)

When should Qualitative Research be conducted?

Qualitative research should be used under the following circumstances:

- When there is no existing data on the topic
- The most appropriate unit of measurement is unclear (individuals? Households? Organizations?)
- When studying why people do what they do, or why they believe in what they believe
- When trying to understand how a situation came about
- When a more in-depth understanding of an issue is needed

Who should be involved?

(Extracted from “Research” module)

Keep in mind that the following varies by project, context, and personnel:

The **project manager and staff** usually conduct most of the research, while relevant **stakeholders** can offer insightful information as well.

The **DME Specialist** can be used as a resource or facilitator for all phases of a project’s life and how to best make use of research in each phase.

Tip: Qualitative Research and the Researcher

In qualitative research the information revealed is very much dependent on the type and quality of the researcher. Asking the right kind of follow up probing questions with a certain kind of listening style can reveal very different data from someone asking only a set group of questions.



How do we conduct

Qualitative Research?

Qualitative research can be conducted by using a variety and combination of different methods of data collection.

Methods of Qualitative research

- **Case Studies** are intended to provide a focused assessment of causal relationships, contributory or otherwise, between the intervention and specific outcomes or impacts. In order to conduct a case study it is necessary to have 1) specific needs or issues of certain individuals or groups; 2) allocation of several activities to address these issues; 3) response to the need or issue.
- **Focus Group Discussions** consist of expertly moderated small-group discussion (7-11 people) that centre on the perceptions and experiences of knowledgeable beneficiaries concerning issues of interest to the project/programme undertaking the study. Their perceptions and experiences are elicited via carefully structured but open-ended questions.
- **Key Informant Interviews** are qualitative, in-depth interviews of people selected for their first-hand knowledge about a topic. The interviews are loosely structured, relying on a list of issues to be discussed, or a simple interview guide, and resemble a conversation, allowing a free flow of ideas and information.
- **Observation** is a process in which an evaluator collects information about events as they occur in their natural setting. It can be used to set the basis for both quantitative and qualitative data collection.
- **Open-ended mini surveys** are surveys that contain a few very specific questions that require the participant to provide a detailed response based on what they believe or have experienced rather than a response that is quantifiable.
- **Story Telling** is the telling of a happening or connected series of happenings in the form of a story or account. The storytelling method allows SFCG to receive

Tip: Selecting participants

Carefully consider the following when selecting participants

- **Gender:** Will both men and women feel comfortable discussing the topic in a mixed gender group?
- **Identity:** Will people of different religious/ ethnic/ other identity backgrounds talk freely together?
- **Age:** How intimidating would it be for a young person to be included in a group of older adults or vice versa?
- **Power:** Would a soldier be likely to make candid remarks in a group where his/ her supervisor is also a participant



first hand information on an event that has happened from the perspective of a person that took part in it. It provides the perspective and interpretations of the interviewee, and therefore it is most useful when SFCG needs that kind of personal insight.

Tip: Mixed Method Approach

A research model does not need to use a single methodology. In most cases the most relevant methodology in the field of conflict transformation is a mixed methods approach where quantitative methods like surveys are combined with interviews and storytelling. This accommodates the need for both “objective data” (breadth of an issue) and the “human element” (depth of an issue). (See also [Mixed Methods Module](#))

Example: Mixed Methods within a Single Instrument

In Morocco, a mixed method approach was used when interviewing participants from the ADR outreach conference in Rabat.

Some of the questions asked were quantitative and included: “What do you think are the general issues affecting the development of ADR in Morocco?” “What types of support to the ADR process in Morocco do you think are required?” “On a scale of 1 for no understanding to 5 for complete understanding, how would you rate your comprehension of mediation theory? (circle number)

- 1 – no understanding
- 2 – poor understanding
- 3 – average understanding
- 4 – good understanding
- 5 – excellent understanding”

TOOL 1: Questions to ask before deciding on what type of research to use



- 1) What is the information that is required?
- 2) How will you use this information in decision-making?
- 3) From which stakeholders will you get this information?

- 4) What are the most appropriate tools for collecting the information?
- 5) What are the specific questions?

Exercise 1: Deciding on Best Approach

Using a project you are familiar with, answer the following questions:

1. Briefly describe the purpose of the project.	
2. What is the goal of the project?	
3. State the first objective to be evaluated.	
4. Can this objective be broken down further? Break it down to the smallest unit. It must be clear what specifically you hope to see documented or changed.	
5. Is this objective measurable (can indicators and standards be developed for it)? If not, restate it.	
6. Formulate one or more questions that will yield information about the extent to which the objective was met.	
7. Why is a qualitative approach better for answering this question, then a quantitative approach?	
8. Do this for each objective.	

Adapted and modified from the *User Friendly Handbook for Mixed Method Evaluations*, National Science Foundation, 1997.

TOOL 2: Sample questions for interview and focus group discussions



- How has the children's program Nashe Maalo impacted your child's choice of friends?
- What are some of the challenges facing the Liberian society after the elections? Why do you think this is so?
- What in your opinion are the three biggest issues facing your society today? Why is this? What do you think can be done to help resolve these issues?

- What are the 3 key recommendations that you feel are most needed to help resolve this issue? Why do you believe that?

Example: Focus Groups during the Baseline in Nepal:

- One aim of a focus group discussion would be to identify perceptions and the range of opinion about participating in national elections.
- The indicator could be: “Perceptions about voting responsibilities” and the focus group discussion could aim to understand what people think about this responsibility, whether they think it exists, what the parameters are and why they think what they do.
- One question for the group could be ‘How is voting in a national election relevant to people in this village?’
- The facilitator would aim to keep the discussion focused on this question and to encourage and document what people responses are, on what do they all agree, where are there differences, why are national elections considered to be important/unimportant? Etc.

Additional Resources



Audience Dialogue. *Qualitative or Quantitative Research?*
<http://www.audiencedialogue.org/qualiquant.html>

Cheyenne Church and Mark Rogers. Designing for results. SFCG. Chapter 12.
http://www.sfcg.org/programmes/ilr/ilt_manualpage.html

USAID Office of Transition Initiatives. Conflict Evaluation Toolkit. Part III