

Qualitative Research in Information Systems

By: Michael D. Myers
Department of Management Science
and Information Systems
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland
NEW ZEALAND

Abstract

Qualitative research involves the use of qualitative data, such as interviews, documents, and participant observation, to understand and explain social phenomena. As the focus of information systems research shifts from technological to managerial and organizational issues, qualitative research methods become increasingly useful. This example of "living scholarship" within MISQ Discovery's worldwide web archive provides an overview of qualitative research for the newcomer and a set of resources for those more experienced. The work discusses philosophical perspectives that can inform qualitative research, qualitative research methods, techniques, and modes of analysis. Links to citation lists, Internet resources, software tools, and calls for papers are also included.

Keywords: Research methodology, action research, case study, ethnography, discourse analysis, hermeneutics, positivist perspective, interpretivist perspective, critical perspective

ISRL Categories: AI01, AI08

Living Scholarship to Support Qualitative Research

The goal was to create a single entry point on the Internet to support novice and experienced qualitative researchers in information systems. Qualitative research is still relatively new within the IS field, so such a "living scholarly" resource provides a focal point for the emerging qualitative research community. The contribution aims to provide qualitative researchers in IS—and those wanting to know how to do qualitative research—with useful information on the conduct, evaluation, and publication of qualitative research.

Advantages of "Living Scholarship"

Works such as this that will exist both as an historical archive and a dynamic repository provide several advantages as described below.

First, the web format allows us to establish links to the activities of qualitative researchers in IS from throughout the world. While my work serves as the entry point, it is the linkages among these distributed works that create a new intellectual (and social) infrastructure. These links extend to online resources both within and beyond the IS community.

Second, the web's dynamic nature allows us to immediately include links to activities or events that are of interest to the qualitative research community (e.g., calls for papers, conferences). Similarly, mistakes can be quickly corrected and special attention drawn to important contributions.

Third, the web's hypertext capabilities allow the same resource to be used by a diverse audience. Since readers can control their navigation through the materials, they can select those items that are of interest to them. This work is intended to become an essential

resource both in teaching (particularly at the doctoral level) and research. The work provides an overall conceptual structure for qualitative research, and detailed information on specific topics (e.g., software tools for qualitative data analysis).

Finally, the maintenance of both an archival and a dynamic version allows us to maintain an historical record of the evolution of the resource, ascertain improvements in the resource over time, and fit this new electronic media to the constraints of the more familiar and traditional "point-in-time" academic publishing paradigm.

In summary, I wanted to create a living work of scholarship that could help tie together qualitative researchers in information systems—an

extremely diverse group of people, working in many different parts of the world. The Research and Scholarship Division of *ISWorld Net* provided me with the motivation to start, professional publications standards, and a first hurdle of editorial oversight. The members of my editorial board, Allen Lee and Lynn Markus, along with the many comments from the users of the resource helped ensure that the initiative reflected the needs of the broader community of qualitative researchers. Over the past year the *MISQ Discovery* reviewers have helped me to develop a richer conceptual foundation for the work and assisted me over a second, more challenging, editorial hurdle. Formal publication in *MISQ Discovery* adds scholarly credibility to this and similar initiatives while setting a precedent that others may choose to follow.