



Aalto University  
School of Science

# Qualitative Research Methods

Session 1. Introduction to qualitative research  
16.5.2022

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# Agenda

- Introduction to the course
- The qualitative researcher
- Qualitative research methods
- The research question
- Formulating research questions

# Learning goals of the course



- Develop your skills in designing and conducting research using qualitative research methods
- Develop your experience in analyzing and interpreting data using various qualitative research techniques
- Develop your skills to critically evaluate published papers which utilize different qualitative methods and analyses to understand their strengths and limitations

# Some principles for the six days



- Be present
- All thoughts and opinions are valuable
- Concise points
- Mobile phones away
- Let's have fun!

# Short presentation



**Pick on card that expresses  
you as a researcher /  
your research topic /  
your research approach**

Online participants: Choose one picture from pixabay, [https://pixabay.com/editors\\_choice/](https://pixabay.com/editors_choice/) and put it as your background picture in Zoom

# Course communication

The screenshot shows the MyCourses interface for the course TU-L0031 - Qualitative Research Methods D, Lecture, 16.5.2022-30.5.2022. The page is viewed by Robin Gustafsson. The sidebar on the left includes options like Participants, Grades, Sections, Dashboard, Site home, Calendar, H5P Content bank, and Learner Metrics. The main content area is divided into several sections: General, Completion Progress, Latest announcements, and Teacher-in-charge. The General section provides course details, including 3 ECTS offered in Spring 2022 and contact information for the teacher-in-charge, Associate Professor Robin Gustafsson. The Completion Progress section indicates that no activities or resources have been selected. The Latest announcements section features a welcome message for the course starting Monday 16.5 at 9:00!.

- Check the course webpage
- Check the Course Forum (news)
- If non of the above answers your question please email me.
- Do we need Telegram?

# Admin (clarifications)

- Participation and submitting assignments within deadlines are assumed by participants
- If you need to be away (one session), a separate assignment should be done if you want a grade for the course.
  - *The assignment is to read two additional articles of the session module and write a 2 page reflection on the two, discussing it from your own research perspective.*
  - *If half a session, 1 article and 1 page.*
  - *These are due preferably before the next class, and latest by 3.6.*
- A late presentation nor assignment can not be compensated. There will be a reduction of points from the final grading (0,25 grade points/presentation/assignment not done).





Let us take a short break



# The End of Social Science as We Know it by Brian Epstein



# Group discussion about social science, 15 min

- Use the first 2-3 minutes to write down one insight you had
- Each one then tells about *"One personal insight you had (what came in your mind) when listening to Brian Epstein"*



# The Qualitative Researcher



# THE SHERLOCKS

16.5.2022

12



# NEO AND THE MATRIX



# THE HIDDEN FIGURES



BASED ON THE UNTOLD TRUE STORY  
MEET THE WOMEN YOU DON'T KNOW, BEHIND THE MISSION YOU DO.



# Jumppakissan taukojumppa



# Qualitative Research Methods

- Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand **phenomena in context-specific settings**, such as "real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2001, p. 39).
- Qualitative research can **generate comprehensive description of processes, mechanisms or settings**
- **Multimethod research** that uses an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994)
- Often **studies phenomena in the environments** in which they naturally occur and uses **social actors' meanings to understand the phenomena** (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 2)
- An emphasis on **situational details unfolding over time** allows qualitative research to describe processes

# Qualitative vs Quantitative

## QUALITATIVE

**Approach:** Inductive

**Goal:** Depth, generate hypotheses

**Setting:** Natural

**Sampling:** Purposful

**Data collection:** i.e. interview guides, observation tools

**Data analysis:** Iterative

## MIXED

## QUANTATIVE

**Approach:** Deductive

**Goal:** Breadth, test hypotheses

**Setting:** Experimental, quasi

**Sampling:** Random

**Data collection:** i.e. surveys, data collection from repositories

**Data analysis:** Statistical tests, modelling

(Denzin & Lincoln, 2000)

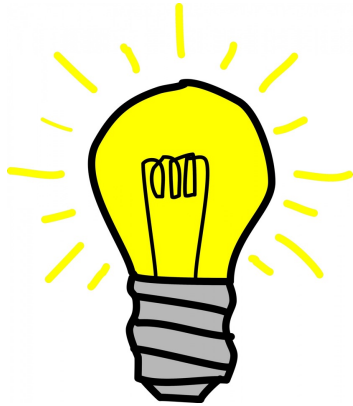
# Research Questions

*“The art and science of asking questions is the source of all knowledge.”*

Thomas Berger



# Research Questions



Novel



Relevance



Rigor, feasible

# How to Structure a Contribution

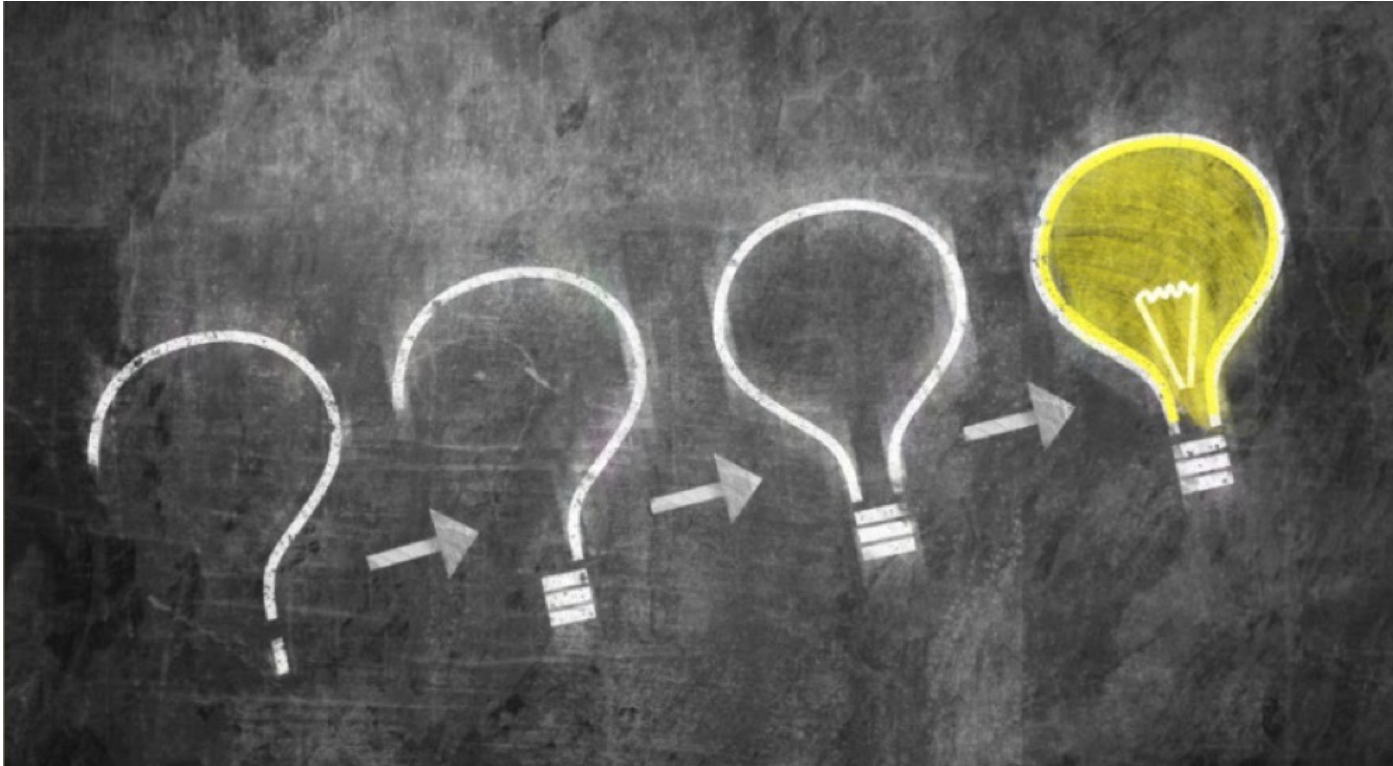
1.  $X=T1$ ;  $X=T2$  .... And in addition  $X=T3$  (What type of question)
2.  $X \rightarrow Y$ , but  $X$  is not only  $a$  and  $b$ , it is  $a, b, c...$  (Fill the gap)
3.  $X \rightarrow Y$ , but I argue that that  $Y \rightarrow X$  (overturn)
4.  $X \rightarrow Y$ , but it is not  $X$  it is  $Z \rightarrow Y$
5. They have been looking on a certain field (small circle) to explain a phenomena but we instead include a wider perspective and also include another area (two larger circles overlapping) (Changing (enlarging) unit of analysis) in explaining a phenomena



*Source: Lecture by Stephen Barley, 2005*



# Steps in Designing Reserach Question



# Research Question: Where to start?

- Begin with a self-question: 'What do I want to know in this study?' (Janesick, 2000:382)
- Broad questions such as 'What's going on here?'; 'What are the basic social processes?'; and 'What are the basic social psychological processes?' can serve to help a researcher find some initial focus (Charmaz, 2006: 20)
- Three questions to ask in developing research questions: 'What are you asking? How are you asking it? What data will you need to provide a good answer?' (Richards, 2005: 15)



# Good Reserach Questions?

- If a question is focused and clearly establishes what data is needed to answer the question, the research process will likely be smooth and achievable within a reasonable time frame
- Good qualitative questions should invite a process of exploration and discovery (Creswell, 2007)
- Starting with questions that are too focused can lead to 'tunnel vision' and can inhibit a researcher's understanding and analysis (Maxwell, 2005: 67)



# Research Questions Do Change

- Initial provisional questions can become more focused
- The process of focusing questions is an iterative, reflective process that leads, not just to data, but to specific data that can add knowledge to a larger field of study.
- Flick (2006, 106) summed this up quite well: ‘The result of formulating questions helps you to circumscribe a specific area of a more or less complex field which you regard as essential.



# The Accid Test: So What?

- When beginning to write questions, a researcher might use the old, but useful question, 'So what?'
- What difference will this inquiry make in the field of study in which a researcher is working?
- The importance of the questions to the field should help to shape the writing of research questions

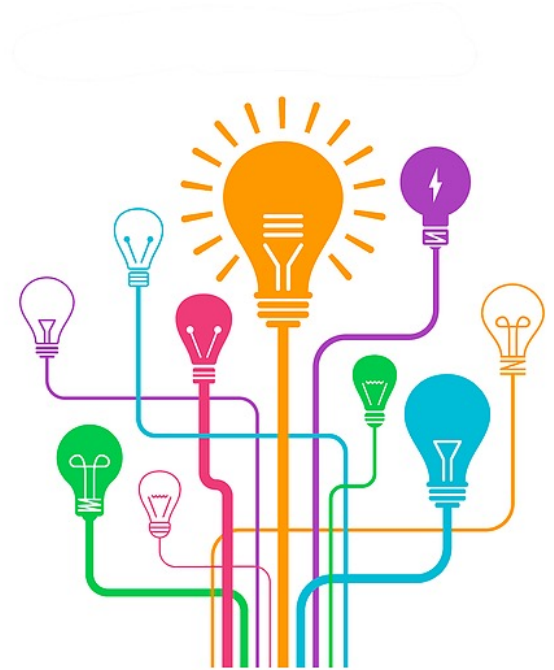
SO WHAT?



WHO CARES?

# Process for Designing a RQ

1. Brainstorming
2. Break down the broad theme into focused topics
3. Raise questions
  - Who is affected?
  - What is the problem?
  - Phenomenon?
4. Clarify questions (break down the meaning of key words)





# The Research Question Assignment

**Focus of research: Doctoral Students / Studies, time 20 min**

1. Use 5 minutes to formulate your novel, relevant, and rigorous research question to study doctoral students / studies
2. Each in the group then presents their research question. Then choose one of the question that you jointly further develop.  
Time: 15 min.