

BOOK REVIEWS

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Designing Qualitative Research

Fourth edition by Catherine Marshall and Gretchen B. Rossman. Sage Publications (2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, California), 2006, ix+262 pp. soft cover, \$46.95, ISBN 1-4129-2489-8.

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The purpose of this book is 3-fold: (1) to guide undergraduate and graduate student researchers through a qualitative research process, (2) to help those working in the field who demand practical answers to complex questions, and (3) to assist those who intend to submit qualitative research proposals to potential funding agencies. The authors have clearly achieved their purpose. Marshall and Rossman present a contemporary approach to qualitative research. They recognize (and demonstrate) that a qualitative research design may be potentially valuable for studies in a wide range of disciplines including applied fields such as health behavior research, education, urban planning, public relations and communications, sociology, psychology, management, social work, nursing and others.

The text presents a well-organized approach to qualitative research. The authors begin with an overview of qualitative research and show the reader how to build a conceptual framework and a solid research design. They discuss primary and secondary data collection methods,

including the strengths and weaknesses of different alternatives. Additionally, the authors show us how to deal with data, from recording to managing, analyzing, and interpreting the data that are collected. Finally, Marshall and Rossman help the reader understand the commitment of time and resources (money) that research requires and provide some guidance in planning for this commitment.

In chapter 1 the authors take the reader through the sections of a qualitative research proposal. The idea is to meet the challenges of developing a conceptual framework for the study, planning a sound study design, and developing a document that convinces the proposal readers (a funding agency or a dissertation committee) that the study should be done, can be done, and will be done.

In chapter 2 the authors do an excellent job of showing the reader how to connect the proposed research project to the formal research proposal. Chapter 3 describes the "How of the Study" by showing how systematic inquiry yields data in response to research questions. The authors encourage the reader to discuss the logic and assumptions of the design and methodology justifying the qualitative research approach.

Chapter 4 deals with data collection methods, including (1) participating in the setting, (2) observing directly, (3) interviewing in depth, and (4) analyzing documents and material culture. The purpose of the chapter is to guide the reader/proposal writer in designating the methods of choice for the study. The authors do an excellent job of presenting details of each of these methods.

Chapter 5 explains procedures for managing, recording, and analyzing qualitative data. This chapter provides the reader with many suggestions for recording data in a systematic manner that is appropriate for the setting and/or the participants and that will facilitate analysis.

In chapter 6 the authors discuss resources necessary for a study; ie, time, personnel, and financial sources. They do an excellent job of presenting problems and situations. One of the goals that

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Marshall and Rossman are trying to achieve in this text is help researchers develop fundable qualitative research proposals. They include this discussion of the resources needed for qualitative research so that researchers will have a better understanding of what is needed to do the project. They rightly indicate a clear presentation of the resources needed strengthens the overall project proposal and makes its positive evaluation more likely. The final chapter revisits the image of the proposal as an academic argument; this includes criteria for evaluating the soundness and competence of a qualitative proposal with special attention to building logical rationale and answering challenges from critics.

An important feature of the text is its series of 28 different vignettes. These vignettes illustrate various methodological challenges and how they might impact qualitative research design. For example, in the first chapter the authors provide an excellent example of a dissertation defense. The student justifies a qualitative approach to the research problem and convinces dissertation committee members to support this particular design. The second vignette is concerned with convincing policy makers of the utility of qualitative research to study issues related to policy. This vignette shows that one can use qualitative research to define the ques-

tions, describe patterns of implementation, and identify policy outcomes.

At the end of each chapter the authors present a "dialogue among learners." This is a series of e-mail communications that illustrates personal reflections and critical thinking among learners about the topics covered in the chapter. These dialogue boxes are intended to illustrate a higher level of learning, and they give a good example/illustration of frustrations often experienced by beginning researchers.

Marshall and Rossman also discuss what they see as the recent shift in the United States, particularly at the federal level, regarding qualitative research; that is, the seeming nonacceptance of inquiry that is other than the randomized controlled experiment. The authors indicate, however, that qualitative research continues to mature despite this less receptive federal climate.

Marshall and Rossman present a blueprint highlighting the many elements of a qualitative study and help readers understand the richness and depth of qualitative research. This book would be ideal for undergraduate or graduate students taking an introductory qualitative research course, but would also be of value to experienced researchers; especially those seeking funding for qualitative research projects.