



Chapter XI

Choosing Qualitative Methods in IS Research: Lessons Learned

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INTRODUCTION

This book is about the use of qualitative methods in the conduct of information systems research. As the title suggests, it is concerned both with *trends in the choice* of qualitative methods and with *issues with the use* of these methods. The issues have been addressed on two levels. The section on individual issues considers specific issues encountered by individual researchers in the conduct of particular research projects. The section on issues for the profession considers issues that the IS profession is currently confronting and those it will have to address in the future.

The subject matter of this book has considered the use of qualitative methods in information systems research in the following way. This book began by considering trends in the choice of qualitative methods: why and how people have chosen qualitative methods for the conduct of information systems research (Trauth, Wynn). It then moved on to consider individual issues. These issues are “individual”

in two ways. They relate to an individual research project. They also relate to an individual qualitative research method. As the book moved through consideration of individual issues, the reader could note how qualitative methods have been used with a range of epistemologies. Beginning with qualitative methods employed in multi-method, action research (Mumford), the chapters moved into interpretive (Schultze, Urquhart) and critical (Cecez-Kecmanovic) research before coming full circle to consider another use of qualitative methods in multi-method research (Sawyer). The consideration of issues for the profession includes both philosophical and practical issues that the IS profession needs to address in order for qualitative methods to flourish. These include the risks involved in choosing qualitative methods (Baskerville), the need for a cumulative tradition of qualitative IS research (Klein and Myers), and finally, a range of future challenges for qualitative researchers in the IS field (Lee).

Building on the framework developed by Klein and Myers, this chapter presents lessons about the choice of qualitative methods for IS research that are found in this book. These lessons are presented according to their philosophical, social, methodological and political dimensions. Using this framework I provide both a summary of the key themes presented in this book and a taxonomy of lessons for those who would like to choose qualitative methods for their information systems research.

LESSONS LEARNED

Philosophical Dimension

Lesson 1: Separating Epistemology from Method

As these chapters have illustrated, it is important to distinguish the philosophical underpinnings from the methods that are employed to enact them. A given epistemology may employ a variety of methods just as a particular method may be employed in research that reflects different epistemologies. It is also necessary to distinguish the quantitative-qualitative dichotomy from the positivist-non-positivist debate. The use of qualitative methods does not necessarily imply interpretive research. For example, a qualitative method such as interviewing may be used for positivist, interpretive or critical research. Similarly, one

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