

Qualitative Data Analysis for Government Research

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What is qualitative research?

Usually in-depth analysis of one or a few cases over an extended period of time

What are qualitative research methods?

- Interviews
- Questionnaires
- Historical studies
- Focus groups
- Participant observation (ethnography)
- Content analysis of documents

What are qualitative data?

- Words, sentences, text fragments, and paragraphs rather than numbers

Analyzing qualitative data

The problem is how to analyze massive amounts qualitative data (text) that is highly unstructured and using methods of analysis that are not well formulated or systematic (problem of validity and reliability)

Software- technology to the rescue

- Coding of text (events) through powerful search (deductive) or discovery methods (inductive)
- Ability to summarize coded text and display in useful ways
- Ability to link and order coded text in complex ways
- Assessment of inter-coder reliability
- Proprietary: NVivo (NUD*IST), Atlas-ti, MAXQDA, QDAMiner
- Open-source: WP-QDA, RQDA, Coding Analysis Toolkit

INTERVIEW CODES

CODING OF THEMES		
Fiscal Stress	Practices and policies	Governance
Assessment of	Planning and budgeting	Authority and responsibility
Causes	Accountability	Expertise and membership
How manage	Monitor and assess	Conflict and turnover
	Financial stability and health (overall)	Structure
	Economic development (future)	
CODING OF CONTENT		
Budgeting	Capital finance and spending	Development & growth
Advanced methods	Capital investing	Aggressive ED
Bottom-up process	Capital needs	ED not important
Top-down process	Debt	Annexation
Follow budget act	Fund balance	Building & impact fees
Follow approp. Ordinance	Grants	Developer contributions
CIP	Property tax	Incentives
Financial planning	Other taxes	Risky venture
Strategic planning	Pay as you go	Downtown
Comprehensive & prioritize	Abate property tax debt	TIF
Minimal process & document	Financial practices	Residential
Fiscal stress (or not)	Advanced practices	Commercial
Yes	Assess costs	Manage growth
No	Billing	Built out
Affect	Cash	Image
Cash flow	Deposit	Information & reporting
Deficit	Earmarking	Deficiencies with
Sources	Forecasting	Difficulty with
Growth	Fund balance level	Goals and objectives
Income tax down	GASB 34	Monitoring
Increasing costs	Internal controls	Outcomes and outputs
Insurance up	Liability insurance	Policies about practices

INTERVIEW CODES, CON'T

Low spending flexibility	Payroll	LT Fiscal strategies
Mandates	Purchasing	Balance services & revenues
P-tax appeal board	Reporting	Casino
Pension funding	Risk Management	Diversify revenue
Revenues down	Self insured	Export taxes
Sales tax down	Revenues	Fiscal conservative
State or county actions	Property tax	Pursue grants
Tax caps	Sales tax	Low or no property tax
Tax delinquents	Utility tax	Low or no other tax
ST Strategies	Other tax	Maximize property tax
Charge backs	Fees & charges	One-time revenue
Cuts	Vehicle sticker	Privatize or contract out
Delay hiring	Revenue diversify	Raise taxes or charges
Defer capital & maintenance	Miscellaneous	Rely on sales tax
Fund balance	Auditors	Save during good times
Increase or add revenue	Conflict	Spend during good times
Reduce taxes, charges, or fees	Dealerships	Spending priorities
Short-term borrow or subsidize	Educate and options to board	Special census
Interaction with neighbors	Flooding & drainage	Special assessment district
Cooperative agreements	Home rule	Value businesses
Compare to others	Illegal activities	Value high service levels
Competition	Lawsuit	Enterprises
Disputes with others	Referendum	Water & sewer
Fire district	Role of staff and elected officials	Housing
Park district	Turnover of staff and elected	Parking
School district	Unions	Other

Benefits of qualitative data?

- Well-grounded and rich descriptions of processes and events in specific contexts over time
- Are more useful in situations where there is little prior knowledge of what is being observed
- Are more likely to identify unexpected findings
- Are often available when there is no quantitative data.
- Provide vivid and meaningful interpretation that is convincing to the reader (policy maker)

Uses of qualitative data?

- Performance audits and evaluations
- Incident reporting and analysis (e.g. disasters)
- Monitoring government reporting in documents
- Assessing service delivery