Qualitative Assessment

IHEC

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OUR PURPOSE
Why are we here?

• How to collect assessment data using qualitative methods

• Share ways in which we have used Qualitative data to strengthen our work

• Share considerations to keep in mind when collecting and analyzing qualitative data
The Assessment Loop
Assessment Loop

Gather Data → Interpret Data → Implement Change → Identify Outcomes

What Are Data?
What are Data?

• Data do **NOT** make decisions

• Data must be restructured into information

• Provide a balanced view of the situation.

• Identify issues and establish progress.

• Sufficient and relevant to key issues.
Collecting Data

- Driven by the outcome (Purpose)

- Selection of method should align with your question and the type of information that you need.
  - May need more than one option to fully understand an issue

- Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods
Qualitative Methods
Why Qualitative Methods?

- Qualitative inquiry allows us to ask different types of questions that surveys alone might not be appropriate for.
- Important to remember that this data is just as good as quantitative data, it is just another kind of information.
- An accessible introduction to this type of research might allow for your offices to expand their thinking to more deeply explore student needs.
For example…

- A survey question might present a statement such as: “Attending [event] enhanced my understanding of diversity.” Then the respondent would fill in their answer on a scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree).

However, a qualitative question might ask:

- “How was your understanding of diversity affected by attending [event]?”
Purpose (continued)

Expanding thinking:

• The purpose of exploring questions in a qualitative manner is to give us data that we might not be able to get from quantitative methods alone.

This presentation...

• Is designed to get past the initial hesitations with this type of research by providing a simple introduction to the way qualitative research questions could help your office.
What is it then?

• Characterized by involvement of the analyst in the process

• By utilizing multiple sources of data

• Gives credence to participants’ perspectives

• Usually has an emergent design (but this does NOT mean there isn’t a plan and a method)
Foundations

**Definition of qualitative assessment:**

- “A situated activity that locates the observer in the world...consists of a set of interpretive material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, pg. 3).

**So what does this mean?**

- Methods such as case studies, personal experiences, introspection, life stories, interviews (such as focus groups), artifacts, cultural texts and productions, observations, historical accounts, and visual texts are just some of the ways in which qualitative methods are explored (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).
Types of Qualitative Analysis

• Typology – A classification system

• Grounded Theory - Widely used

• Matrix analysis – An outline of generalized causation, logical reasoning

• Discourse Analysis – linguistic analysis of ongoing flow of communication
Types of Qualitative Analysis

• Semiotics – Science of signs and symbols, such as body language

• Content Analysis – Might be a form of typology analysis

• Phenomenology - How individuals experience the world

• Narrative Analysis – study the individual’s speech
Is it better than only numbers?

• Truth is, it’s only different. It all comes back to your questions, your intent

• As a practitioner, you will find some things guided where opinion, perspective, doesn’t matter (and that’s ok,)

• A warning is that being involved should not mean skewing the results and some are drawn to qualitative assessment initially because of feeling “more involved.”
The Lens One Uses...

**Personal History is an Important Factor:**

- The professional brings a set of values to the analysis of qualitative data, specifically, the perspective shaped by their “class, gender, race, culture, and ethnic community” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, pg. 21).

- The analysis, then, is affected by the lens that the researcher uses to analyze the data.
Validity?

What about validity?

• In qualitative assessment the use of multiple methods is called triangulation, which is an alternative to validation (Flick, 2002).

• Elements such as the “methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers”, when combined, form a strategy that can add greater understanding to any inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).
What about Generalizability?

• In qualitative assessment, **generalizability** is not the same as in quantitative assessment.

• Instead, **transferability** is the degree to which the results of a qualitative design can be transferred to other contexts.

• The staff member, through explicit description of the assumptions and context, can insure good transferability of the research findings.
Interpreting the meaning of themes / descriptions

Inter-relating Themes / descriptions

THEMES

DESCRIPTIONS

Coding the Data

Reading through all data

Organizing and preparing data for analysis

Raw Data – transcripts, field notes, images, narratives
Student Affairs and Qualitative Assessment

**Examples:**

• Ball, Simpson, Ardovino, & Skep-Arlt (2008): Using qualitative methods to determine leadership competencies that directors thought were essential to promoting a successful collegiate recreational setting. Used qual-quan design.

• Ross & Schurger (2007): Used open-ended question to ask subjects to identify the top challenges they faced in becoming a director of recreational sports.
Examples at Ohio State:

- Experiences of Undergraduate African-American males at Ohio State, Focus Group Project
  - Ability to make specific recommendations derived from the contributions from the participants.
  - Student Life staff can use these recommendations to improve upon current programs or create new ones.
Review

**When Should One Use Qualitative Assessment?**

- When surveys or other types of collection methods may not paint the “whole picture.”
- When seeking to understand various student populations from their viewpoint, in order to find out more about their:
  - Specific needs
  - How Student Life staff can best support them
  - Higher Education experience
End Notes: Beginning Qual Assessment

- Qualitative assessment is about the whole picture – feelings, history, facts, relationships

- Remember that it’s an investigation of something

- Researchers are, in this case, an vital part of the project (but be careful!)
References/Contact Info

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References
• Ball, Simpson, Ardovino, & Skep-Arlt 2008 - Leadership competencies of University Recreational Directors in Wisconsin
• Denzin & Lincoln, 2005 - The Sage handbook of qualitative research (there is a 2011 edition)
• Flick, 2002 – Design and Process in Qualitative Research