



Dipartimento di Scienze Economiche ed Aziendali

Direttore: Prof. Patrizio Monfardini

Dottorato in Scienze Economiche e Aziendali

Doctoral Program in Economics and Business

Coordinatrice: Prof.ssa Francesca Cabiddu

Qualitative Research Methods

Course leader: Francesca Cabiddu

Instructors: Francesca Cabiddu, Manuel Castriotta, Cinzia Dessì, Michela Floris, Michela Loi, Elona Marku, Ludovica Moi, Maryia Zaitsava

Aims of the course

The course provides training in core methods expected to be required by students intending to undertake qualitative research, together with an understanding of broader qualitative approaches/methodologies within which they may be utilized. The course objectives can be summarized as:

1. introducing students to qualitative research methods and discussing the appropriateness of these methods for different areas of research and types of research questions;
2. exposing students to insights in the practice of qualitative research, and encouraging them to experiment in the use of the fundamental methods for qualitative data collection and analysis;
3. sharing experience in collecting, analyzing, and reporting from qualitative research, and discussing the challenges and opportunities of publishing qualitative research.

At the end of the course, the students will be able to select and use properly the main approaches characterizing qualitative research in different situations. Moreover, they will be able to assess the rigour and trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry.

Learning outcomes and competences

Knowledge and understanding:

- Articulate the key features and benefits of qualitative research and when and how it can be utilized.
- Assess the applicability of a range of core qualitative approaches to their own research topics and understand how these approaches can be applied to conduct effective research.

Applying knowledge and understanding:

- Implement a range of qualitative data collection techniques including interviews, observations, and documents.



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- Effectively analyze and write up qualitative data in order to answer your research questions and disseminate your findings.
- Making judgments on the appropriate approaches to qualitative inquiry.

Learning skills:

- Conducting qualitative research, effectively address issues relating to validity, reliability and ethics.

Communication skills:

- Present the findings from a qualitative study.

Pre-requisites

None

Course contents and syllabus

The course lasts 24 hours and is organized into two modules, each having specific aims and sub-modules, which are detailed below.

Module A: Qualitative Methods in Business and Management: “Qualitative research design”

This module provides an overview of the most important qualitative research approaches, with the goal of training students in the basic requirements for conducting each. After a brief introduction to the course, this module is organized into 4 submodules focusing on: case studies, focus groups, taxonomy of literature reviews, and ethnography. A brief description of the objectives and content of each sub-module is provided below.

1. **Case studies:** Case study as a qualitative research method, is a comprehensive and in-depth investigation of a single phenomenon, individual, group, event or community. It is distinguished by its ability to provide detailed insights and nuanced understanding of complex issues within real-life context. The method draws on a variety of data sources, including interviews, observations and documents, providing a rich and holistic view of the object of study. Case studies contribute significantly to the development of theory and practical understanding in fields ranging from the social sciences to economics and education. [Yin, R. K. (2009). Case study research: Design and methods (Vol. 5). Sage].



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2. **Focus-group:** A focus group is a particular type of group interview in which the moderator (or researcher/evaluator) asks a series of targeted questions designed to elicit collective opinions on a specific topic (Fontana & Frey, 2005; Merton & Kendall, 1946). Focus groups generate evidence commonly used to evaluate various programs and policies (Balch & Mertens, 1999; Krueger & Casey, 2009; Poitras Duffy, 1993). They are used in different types of evaluation: needs assessment, program theory development, implementation, and outcome evaluation (Ryan et al., 2014). This sub-module aims to develop an understanding of how to use focus groups to elicit collective conversations and use the results to achieve research objectives.
3. **Towards a Taxonomy of Literature Reviews:** A literature review may be defined as a methodical process of gathering and integrating prior knowledge in a comprehensive manner (Callahan, 2014; Snyder, 2019). A well-executed and thorough review, when used as a research technique, establishes a strong basis for expanding knowledge and promoting the development of theories (Webster & Watson, 2002; Paul and Criado, 2020). A literature review may effectively answer inquiries by incorporating empirical facts and views from several sources, beyond the capacity of any one study (Post et al., 2020).
4. **Ethnography:** After a brief overview of the most common sampling techniques, the class will **immerse itself** in ethnographic research. Ethnography, as a qualitative research method **originating** in cultural anthropology, provides an **in-depth** exploration of the complexities of human behavior and social interactions within specific cultural contexts. We will examine ethnography, its evolution from traditional to contemporary practices, and its application across various disciplines. In particular, we will **investigate** participant observation and participatory methods.

Module B: Qualitative Methods in Business and Management: “Qualitative data analysis”

This module provides an overview of the most frequently adopted procedures and tools to analyse qualitative data. It is organized into 2 sub-modules focusing on: Gioia methodology and Computer assisted analysis with NVivo software.

1. **Gioia Methodology:** This methodology serves as a qualitative methodological approach for data analysis that adheres to the rigorous standards of trustworthy research, by offering a strong foundation for concept development, striking a balance between the often conflicting goals of inductively generating new concepts and meeting the high standards for rigor expected by top-tier journals (Corley and Gioia, 2011; Gioia et al., 2013; Gioia, 2021).
2. **Computer assisted analysis with NVivo software:** Nvivo is widely recognized as the most appropriate tool to conduct qualitative data analysis. It enables to efficiently handle different types of data, spanning transcribed interviews, videos, images, and bibliometric information imported from reference manager software (Sinkovics,



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2016). Its flexible coding schemes empower users to explore qualitative relationships among concepts, categorize meanings or phrases by affinity, and assign them to appropriate themes (Backlund & Backlund, 2017). NVivo’s advantages include data and idea management, querying, visual modeling, and reporting (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). It is also deemed as the best tool for facilitating team research within the same project (AlYahmady and Alabri, 2013). This module aims to equip students with some introductory concepts and guidelines to conduct their own research project using Nvivo software.

Organization of the course

<i>Module A: Qualitative Methods in Business and Management: “Qualitative research design”</i>		
Timetable and Rooms	Contents - Training methods and materials	Instructors
31 March 2025 12.00 am – 13:00 am	<p>Introduction to qualitative method</p> <p><i>Contents</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is qualitative research? • The foundation of qualitative research • Research Design 	Francesca Cabiddu
1 April 2025 10:00 am – 13:00 pm	<p>Case studies</p> <p><i>Contents</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to the case study method • Empirical enquiry through the case study method. Introduction. • Single and multiple case study. • How to select the case. • Case study research design. • Multiple source of evidence. • How to conduct a case study. <p><i>Suggested reading:</i></p> <p>Yin, R. K. (2009). Case study research: Design and methods (Vol. 5). Sage</p>	Cinzia Dessi
16 April 2025 9:00 am – 1:00 pm	<p>Focus-group</p> <p><i>Contents</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction: definition and when using it • Methodological features 	Michela Loi



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion of relevant papers <p>Training method and materials After a brief introduction by the instructor, students are invited each to present and discuss one on the paper reported in the list below. For further information on how to prepare the critical comment on the articles, please contact the professor at the following email address: michela.loi@unica.it.</p> <p>Mandatory Readings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Barbour, R. S. (2005). Making sense of focus groups. <i>Medical Education</i>, 39(7), 742-750. - Cyr, J. (2016). The pitfalls and promise of focus groups as a data collection method. <i>Sociological Methods & Research</i>, 45(2), 231-259. - Flynn, R., Albrecht, L., & Scott, S. D. (2018). Two approaches to focus group data collection for qualitative health research: maximizing resources and data quality. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Methods</i>, 17(1), 1609406917750781. - Hermann, V., Osman, F., Durbeej, N., Karlsson, A. C., & Sarkadi, A. (2024). How to Analyze Focus Group Interactions–Development of a Coding Scheme. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Methods</i>, 23, 16094069241286848. - Merton, R., & Kendall, P. (1946). The focused interview. <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>, 51, 541–557. - Morgan, D. L. (1996). Focus groups. <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>, 22(1), 129-152. - Poitras Duffy, B. (1993). Focus groups: An important technique for internal evaluation units. <i>American Journal of Evaluation</i>, 14, 133–139. - Ryan, K. E., Gandha, T., Culbertson, M. J., & Carlson, C. (2014). Focus group evidence: Implications for design and analysis. <i>American Journal of Evaluation</i>, 35(3), 328-345. 	
<p>16 May 2025 9:00 am – 1:00 pm</p>	<p><i>Towards a Taxonomy of Literature Reviews: Addressing the Challenges of Aligning Aims, Methods, and Theorizing Processes</i></p> <p>Contents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is a literature review? • What are the available methodologies and how do they differ? • Can theoretical insights be gained from a literature review? <p>Mandatory Readings</p>	<p>Manuel Castriotta</p>



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	<p>- Callahan, J. L. (2014). Writing literature reviews: A reprise and update. <i>Human resource development review</i>, 13(3), 271-275.</p> <p>- Snyder, H. (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. <i>Journal of business research</i>, 104, 333-339.</p> <p>- Paul, J., & Criado, A. R. (2020). The art of writing literature review: What do we know and what do we need to know?. <i>International business review</i>, 29(4), 1017-17.</p> <p>- Torraco, R. J. (2005). Writing integrative literature reviews: Guidelines and examples. <i>Human resource development review</i>, 4(3), 356-367.</p> <p>- Post, C., Sarala, R., Gatrell, C., & Prescott, J. E. (2020). Advancing theory with review articles. <i>Journal of Management Studies</i>, 57(2), 351-376.</p>	
<p>16 May 2025 15:00 am – 19:00 pm</p>	<p><i>Ethnography</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sampling techniques – choosing your subjects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Probability sampling methods ◦ non-probability (purposive) sampling • Categorization of ethnographic research <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Participatory observation ◦ Participant observation <p><i>Mandatory Readings</i></p> <p>- Grodal, S. (2018). Field expansion and contraction: How communities shape social and symbolic boundaries. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>, 63(4), 783-818.</p> <p>- Pratt, M. G. (2000). The good, the bad, and the ambivalent: Managing identification among Amway distributors. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>, 45(3), 456-493.</p> <p>- Lourenco, S. V., & Glidewell, J. C. (1975). A dialectical analysis of organizational conflict. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>, 489-508.</p> <p>- Cressey, D. R. (1959). Contradictory directives in complex organizations: The case of the prison. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>, 1-19.</p> <p>- Zaitsava, M., Marku, E., & Di Guardo, M. C. (2022). Is data-driven decision-making driven only by data? When cognition meets data. <i>European Management Journal</i>, 40(5), 656-670.</p>	<p>Elona Marku Maryia Zaitsava</p>



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Module B: Qualitative Methods in Business and Management: “Qualitative data analysis”		
Timetable and Rooms	Contents - Training methods and materials	Instructors
23 May 2025 9:00 am – 1:00 pm	<p>Gioia Methodology</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A general overview • Understanding Gioia methodology • The pillars • The data structure • The interpretive model • Analysis of relevant articles 	Michela Floris
30 May 2025 9:00 am – 1:00 pm	<p>Computer assisted analysis: Nvivo software</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Create a project and importing sources • Approaches to coding in Nvivo • Running queries • Diagrams • Reports <p>Mandatory Readings</p> <p>Moi, L., Frau, M., & Cabiddu, F. (2018). Exploring the role of NVivo software in marketing research. Exploring the Role of NVivo Software in Marketing Research, 65-86.</p>	Ludovica Moi

Assessment method

This course assessment has two components:

1. Essay (70%).

- **Details for writing the essay:** during the course, you will be asked to write up a short essay (working paper). The goal is to analyze a research question suitable to be investigated through qualitative research methods. The research question should be linked to the topic of your doctoral dissertation. The essay should include the following sessions: (1) Introduction; (2) Theoretical Background – brief introduction to the topic of research and key references; (3) Methodology: research question, suitable method(s), research design, data collection procedure, hypothetical data analysis procedure; (4) Conclusions.
- **Evaluation criteria of the essay:** appropriateness of the selected method for the research question, the soundness and feasibility of the research design, and the



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overall quality of the manuscript. An excellent essay is characterized by an accurate and comprehensive data collection procedure, rigorous data analysis procedure, and insightful observations.

2. In-class participation and other potential assignments (30%).

- Students are expected to be highly committed and involved in the course. This implies reading carefully and critically the assigned articles, being able to discuss these readings, and engaging with in-class discussions of qualitative work. Therefore, a simple attendance will not earn students participation points.

Reading list

- Creswell, J. 2012. Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Denzin, N. and Lincoln, Y. 2011. The SAGE handbook of qualitative research (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. 1985. Naturalistic Inquiry. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Lee, T. W. 1999. Using Qualitative Methods in Organization Research. London: Sage.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. B. 2006. Designing qualitative research (4th ed.) Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M. & Saldana, J. 2014. Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook – Third edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Patton M. Q. 2002. Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods, Newbury Park: Sage.
- Silverman, D. 2013. Doing Qualitative Research, London: Sage