A guide to quality in interpretive research

(J. Walther & N. Sochacka)

Making Data   **Handling Data**

Validation: Do the findings appropriately capture & represent relevant aspects of the social reality observed?

Do we get to see what we think we see?

Are our interpretations grounded in participants' social realities?

Are our findings relevant & meaningful beyond the study setting?

Theoretical Validation concerns the fit between the social reality under investigation and the theory generated

- What is, in terms of scope and nature, the specific social reality we want to investigate?
- How will we be able to see / what could prevent us from seeing the full extent of this social reality?
- How can we ensure that our interpretations do justice to the complexity of, but capture patterns of, coherence within the social reality?
- How do I know that the findings make a meaningful contribution to the relevant body of theory?

Procedural Validation concerns features of the research design that inherently improve the fit between the reality studied and the theory generated

- What are appropriate means by which we can 'see' the social reality under investigation?
- What features can we build into the inquiry to mitigate threats to an authentic view of the social reality?
- What features can we design into our process of interpretation to mitigate the risk of mis-constructing the social reality of our participants?

Communicative Validation concerns the integrity of the interlocking processes of social construction with the relevant communication communities

- How can we authentically co-construct meanings of participants' social realities on their own terms?
- How can we maintain the meaning constructed in the communication community throughout our analysis?
- What are robust ways of co-constructing interpretive meaning in a communication community with other researchers?
- How can we construct our findings within the meaning conventions of the relevant research community?

Pragmatic Validation concerns the compatibility of theoretical constructs with empirical reality

- What theoretical constructs do we bring to the study?
- What theoretical assumptions do we make about the nature of the reality under investigation?
- How do we know whether these assumptions 'survive' the exposure to the social reality in the field?
- What assumptions about the structure of the social reality does our research approach make?
- How meaningful are our interpretations for the social reality under investigation? (Insight, resonance, change...)
- How meaningful are the theoretical constructs we generate for social realities similar to the one under investigation? (Insight, affect, attention, utility, change...)

Ethical validation concerns aspects of integrity and responsibility throughout the research process

- What are our motivations and intentions for investigating this social reality?
- What are the impacts of our interests, biases, preconceptions or intentions on this investigation?
- How can we ensure legitimate and responsible decisions to inform our interpretations?
- How can we meaningfully and equitably engage all members of the research team?
- Do our findings do justice to the lived realities of our participants?
- What are impacts of our research for the social reality investigated and for similar social realities?

Process Reliability concerns the mitigation of random influences on the research process

- How can we mitigate, as far as possible, random influences on our process of seeing the social reality under investigation?
- How can we capture & record the constructions of participants' social realities in a dependable way?
- How can we foster consistency of our process of interpretation?
- How can we document and authentically demonstrate the dependability of our entire process of investigation?

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