

Qualitative Research Methods: Coding Exercise

Initial descriptive coding

This is what initial coding may look like. Here I have described the contents of the answers in red pen, then added some notes in a different colour, often these notes are referred to as memos. I think it is important to keep these distinct

Interview transcript 1

Male 35

Q: Can you tell me how you became interested in sport?

A: Well I don't think there was any one reason – it was always there, my parents encouraged me to be active and then we did sport and PE and stuff like that at school, so no one reason, like many young lads I dreamed of being a footballer.

many reasons
Parents / School
football

Q: What sport or sports do you take part in?

A: I still play football but not much, I can't keep up with the younger lads any more! Sounds daft as I don't think of myself as being old but the eighteen, nineteen year olds just run faster than me, even though I go jogging every day.

football . jogging .
age
Check other transcripts to see if age is a factor + how.

Q: Do you think you need to do that to keep fit?

A: Oh yeah, I hurt my knee a while back, got a knock in a match and couldn't do much for a couple of months, I started putting on weight just sitting around, all the blokes in our family are a bit big and working in an office means I don't get any exercise at work so yeah, I need to do it.

Injuries
weight gain - type of work
feels he has to do exercise to control body - do others also feel like this?

Q: Football and jogging are very different, one's a team game and the other you do on your own, or do you go jogging with anyone else?

A: When I was playing regularly I was jogging anyway, you need to do that to keep your stamina up but yeah, playing football is all about the team, it's like no one's bigger than the team - well in theory (laughs) – so it's a lot about having mates and you're all in it together as much as actually kicking the ball around. Sometimes we would train together – well that sounds a bit serious but it was like that, so we would go jogging together once a week or sometimes more. But then people move on, they change jobs or whatever and stop coming along. Sorry, what was the question again?

Jogging - need for fitness
The team + social aspects are important here
Compare this to interview 5 when it is also mentioned.

Codes are often developed in terms of main categories and subsidiary ones. So in the example above we would have:

Types of sport:

Football

Jogging

If we were to read through more transcripts of the interviews, we would probably add to those so we could end up with something that looked like this:

Types of sport

Football

Jogging

Rugby

Badminton

Cricket

Now one way of assigning codes could be this:

A Types of sport

A1 Football

A2 Jogging

A3 Rugby

A4 Badminton

A5 Cricket

Then you would go through your data and tag or label it accordingly. While some people like this approach I prefer to use words or abbreviations that give some reminder of the content.

However you must remember to use and develop a system that works for you, so experiment with different forms and types but remember that the process of coding is simply a way of sorting your data for analysis, it is not the analysis itself.

Coding is not always a continuous process in which you go from document 1 to 2 to 3 until you reach the end. It is not uncommon to be reading a transcript and then remember one you had read a while ago, so quite often you will find yourself dipping in and out of your transcripts, adding new ideas and new codes, the important point is that you subject all your material to a close reading

Some people argue that you need to approach the data without preconceptions and allow the themes to emerge from the data. This is not possible if the data you are using has been gathered by you. If you have been interviewing people then you cannot help but begin thinking about it from the moment you hear it. This is not a problem but you need to be aware of it,

Themes do not emerge by themselves, you have to pull them out! The term 'emerge' is perhaps used a bit loosely here, after all even by asking the question you have in part determined what the themes are likely to be. Again, this is not a problem as long as you are aware of it.

How much is enough? The term that is usually used to describe the end of coding is 'saturation' that is, when you can't squeeze any more 'meaning' out of it. Another way to gauge this is when you can predict what you will find in your data, alternatively it is when you think you have analysed the material sufficiently, but in practical terms it is often a combination of both and of course, time.

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