Visual Insights INFORMATION SHEET

QUALITATIVE EVALUATION METHOD: DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

WHAT is qualitative data analysis?

Qualitative data analysis (QDA) is the process of turning written, audio and visual data (such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations and documents) into evaluation findings. There are no formulas, recipes or absolute rules for this process. There are many different approaches to QDA and all require the use of a person or team's full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveals given the purpose of the evaluation. Like all aspects of qualitative evaluation, QDA depends on the skills, training, insights and capability of the people doing the analysis. Regardless of the specific method of analysis, the aim is to produce good quality rigorous evaluation findings. For outcomes evaluation, quality can be judged by the extent to which the findings contribute to decisions about the value and effectiveness of programs and services for continuation, replication and expansion.

WHY manage and analyse qualitative evidence?

The collection of qualitative evaluation data, including interview and discussion transcripts and observation notes, is not 'an ends' in itself. This information is only useful if it is analysed, interpreted and presented as findings.

The collective qualitative evaluation evidence is usually quite "messy" and unstructured. To start with, it is important that as data is being collected, the data is structured and ordered using a data management process that is systematic and secure. Good qualitative data management is critical for both ensuring maximum use of evidence and protection of people's information; and minimising harm.

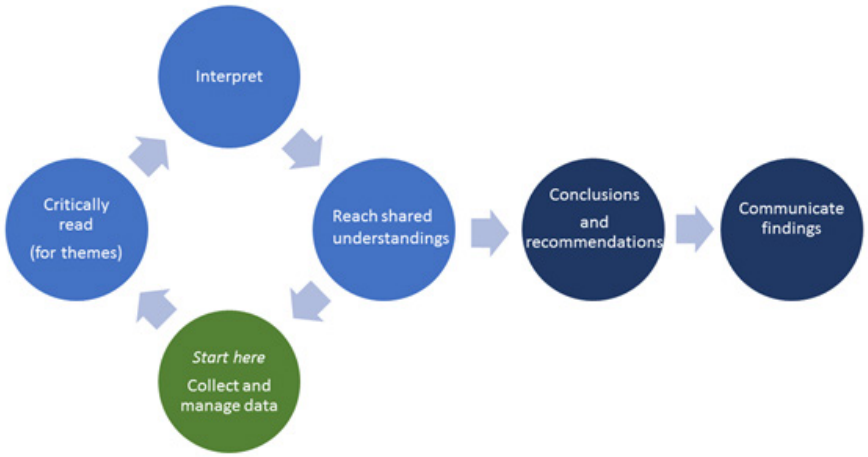
Qualitative data (such as interview transcripts) are not able to provide an evidence base for overall program benefits and informing program improvement until they are combined with other data. Combining data can provide a representation of the collective experience of program participants and can then be collectively analysed and interpreted by the evaluation team.

Analysing and interpreting qualitative evaluation evidence is important for outcomes monitoring and evaluation as it enables:

- **Evidence of expected changes:** changes in, and benefits for, people and communities anticipated through organisation and program objectives can be evidenced and communicated to stakeholders.
- **Identification of unexpected benefits:** evidence that programs contributed either directly or indirectly to unintended positive changes for people and communities.
- **Recognition of negative impacts:** timely information that program activities may be resulting in unintended adverse consequences for people or communities.
- **Identification of program improvements:** knowledge of ways programs can be changed to better meet program objectives and the needs of people and communities.
- **Understanding of how programs work in context:** insight into how programs work in the specific contexts of people's lives and communities.

PRINCIPLES OF QDA A CONTINUAL PROCESS

It is useful to remember that QDA is a continual process that takes place while data is being collected (not at the end) and informs continued sampling and data collection.



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HOW to manage and analyse qualitative data

Although there are number of different ways to do QDA, the basic steps are the same. Here we provide some basic step-by-step guidelines for managing qualitative M&E (monitoring and evaluation) data and doing **thematic** analysis.

1 **Record the data -** documentation is integral to qualitative data collection. A clear and detailed record of all data collected needs to be kept (e.g. interview transcripts, observation notes).

2 **Label, organise and file the data -** data needs to be organised for facilitating use for analysis. Data needs to be labelled and stored so you know where it came from, how it was collected and so that any personal participant information is secure.

3 **Review the purpose of the data -** clarify the evaluation questions you are using the data to provide answers and evidence for. For example, evidence of organisational outcomes of focus (e.g. social participation or wellbeing).

4 **Summarise demographic data of participants -** this will contextualise 'who' the information represents and is an important consideration in analysis and interpretation.

5 **Get familiar with the data -** read and re-read the complete data and note down initial ideas relevant to your evaluation focus and questions.

6 **Identify patterns and general initial codes -** carefully read through all the data and identify patterns and themes. For a child mentoring program, a pattern identified might be "many mentors provided social, emotional, and practical support to the parents of the child as well as mentoring the child". A theme is a broad category or topic such as "relationship between the mentor and parents of the child".

7 **Construct a list of codes** - these will include major themes like "relationship between parents and mentors" and sub-themes like "social, emotional and practical support", "changed family identity" and "parental skill development".

8 **Discuss the initial themes and sub-themes with the analysis team -** ideally at least three people are involved in this initial stage of thematic analysis. A meeting to compare and contrast identified themes, to discuss and resolve discrepancies in initial analysis will result in an adjusted list of major and minor themes.

9 **Create major and minor codes for each identified theme and sub-theme** - codes are abbreviations of the major and minor themes agreed on by the team. They are usually only a few letters/ numbers long so that they can be used to quickly identify portions of text relevant to the code. For example "Parental skill development" might be coded as 'P-skills'.

10 **Code all the data using the major and minor themes** - this can be done using a hardcopy of the complete data by highlighting and coding the text corresponding to each theme and subtheme. This can also be done using qualitative data management software such as NVIVO.

11 **Separate the data into themes and subthemes** - by either "copy and paste" or using qualitative data software.

12 **Read the data within each theme and subtheme to identify the specifics** of each theme and the overall story that the analysis of the themes and sub-themes tell.

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13 **Interpret the findings in the context of the evaluation questions,** as findings provide evidence base to answering initial evaluation questions.

14 **Make conclusions and recommendations -** conclusions are drawn from the overall outcome of the evaluation. Future recommendations from the findings are also to be provided, which can be used for change in practice, and further exploration.

15 **Communicate findings** - sharing results from data collected can be communicated through written, oral or visual reporting. The information provided is to include the results as well as how the results will shape future work**.**

THE ROLE OF COMPUTER SOFTWARE IN QDA

Qualitative analysis software can be very useful when you need to manage large amounts of data or when you are working within a team. It is important to remember that the most important aspect of thematic analysis is identifying themes from a close relationship with the data. Only the human mind is capable of this complex task. The role of computer software is to assist the coding process and arrangement of the data into themes and subthemes once the data has been interpreted and coded by a human.

In addition, qualitative analysis software can provide additional "content" analysis. For example, the software can provide counts of most frequently used words. In the child mentoring example, you might be interested in knowing how many times parents said "support" or similar words in relation to mentors.

WHAT IS THEMATIC ANALYSIS FOR EVALUATION?

The purpose of thematic analysis is to identify **patterns of meaning** across a set of qualitative data that provide an answer to the evaluation question being addressed. For example, if the question is 'what changes do people experience as a direct result of participating in the program?' we would approach the data with a focus on identifying what it tells us about changes participants experience because of the program.

WHAT IS DATA 'SATURATION'?

As shown in the figure on page 1, qualitative data collection and analysis is a circular and continual process. Analysis of the data in stages or themes informs the subsequent stages of data collection. When the next stage of data collection and analysis adds no new themes to what have already been identified, the data or sampling is said to be 'saturated'. Data saturation supports the rigour of your evaluation evidence and findings.

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