Exercises

# Chapter 9: Choosing a methodology

## Exercise 1: Use and assess fieldnotes effectively

Maria is interested in the challenges faced by people recovering from traumatic brain injury. She is collecting narratives from patients and their chosen supporters and gathering fieldnotes. She asked me:

1. What is the best way to write fieldnotes in order to facilitate later analysis?
2. How best to incorporate fieldnotes and narratives?
3. What to consider in assessing the impact of my own background (as a medical doctor).

How would you answer Maria’s questions?

## Exercise 2: Evaluate your methods and data source options

Mason notes that your choice of a methodology is likely to reflect your own biography and the knowledge and training your education has given you. As she comments: ‘Whilst practical issues to do with training and skill are … relevant in your choice of method … they should not govern your choice’ (1996: 19). She suggests instead making a list of possible research methods and data source options and thinking through why you are accepting or rejecting each one.

1. Follow Mason’s suggestion about making a list of possible research methods and data source options. Explain why you are accepting or rejecting each one.

2. Answer the following questions (adapted from Mason, 1996: 20–1):

* What data sources and methods of data generation are potentially available or appropriate?
* What can these methods and sources feasibly tell me?
* Which phenomena and components or properties of social ‘reality’ might these data sources and methods potentially help me to address?

## Exercise 3: Learn what your research is telling you about data, coding, and sample sizes

Review my dialogue with Pierre-Nicolas Schwab in Section 9.5 of the book. What methodological lessons can you learn from it for your own research? In particular, consider:

* the use of naturally occurring data
* the size of your sample
* the problems that arise from early coding of data.

## Exercise 4: Play devil’s advocate on your own method selection

List the reasons why it might make sense for you to combine qualitative and quantitative methods on your research project.

Now review the counterargument (e.g. if you are thinking of using multiple methods, consider whether quantitative methods are appropriate to your theoretical model and whether you would have the time to do a good job by using multiple methods).

## Exercise 5: Edit and simplify a research design

Holly Hasted is studying Tromso Museum in Norway while doing research at Tromso University. Her topic is knowledge production and expertise at this museum. She wants to understand how museum staff, who often come from different disciplines, transfer knowledge between each other. She is mixing different sets of qualitative data: short open-ended interviews with all 108 museum employees, multiple in-depth interviews with 15–30 informants, observation of work processes and document analysis of relevant texts. She is using constructionist grounded theory and hopes to come up with findings relevant to Museum Studies, Social Studies of Science and Organization Theory.

* Do you think her methodology fits her research design?
* Can you suggest any ways that her research could be simplified?