Apply

# Exercise 8.1

## Student example

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:

 What is the best way to write field notes in order to facilitate later analysis?

 How best to incorporate fieldnotes and narratives?

 What to consider in assessing the impact of my own background (as a medical doctor) [Maria, medicine, UK].

How would you answer Maria’s questions?

# Exercise 8.2

Mason (1996: 19) 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 8.3

Review my dialogue with Pierre-Nicolas Schwab in Section 8.5. 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 the early coding of data.

# Exercise 8.4

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

 Now review the counter-arguments (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 8.5

Holly Hasted is studying at 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?

## Answer to exercise 8.5

Holly was just beginning her research when she sent me her questions. I have listed them below with my answers in italics. As you can see, she was well aware of the possibly over-ambitious nature of her research design.

 Writing and reflecting upon my interview questions – I realised that I emphasised the perceptions and values of the informants and not actually what they do. Is that a bad thing? How museum employees perceive and value their own expertise in relation to their colleagues – as well as how they perceive their role within the museum is interesting. So does the research focus/research questions perhaps need tweaking?
*Interviews can only reveal how interviewees construct narratives with interviewers. From a constructionist viewpoint, they tell us nothing about what interviewees think or do*

 I am interested in extracting stories from research informants (this perhaps lends itself better to narrative analysis as opposed to grounded theory – but that’s another issue!). By analysing accounts of stories, I had hoped to avoid informants’ carefully curated descriptions. But the problem is that people tend to remember the remarkable (and not the unremarkable) don’t they? And what might emerge during the analysis of stories are the various discourses people have about expertise and knowledge production (based on their selective memory of remarkable incidences). Is this a bad thing? *Don’t worry about this. If they are emphasizing the extra-ordinary, that is a finding*

 The language barrier (my limited Norwegian) is a concern in terms of naturally occurring data. I have been thinking about how I can best use documents and observation. My thoughts are as follows: what if I drop observation? What if instead I focus on the documents the museum produces around a single object or objects – everything from a fieldwork report to an academic paper to an exhibition text panel to a marketing flyer – and analyse these (what do they value?) instead?
*The advantage of documents is that they happened without being a response to a researcher’s question.*

 Following this approach, the interviews could provide data on people’s perceptions of knowledge production processes. The documents could provide data on the actual knowledge produced. I believe this approach has potential. What do you think?
*I don’t think you should do both.*