

## PERSONAL, PRACTICAL, & INTELLECTUAL GOALS FOR RESEARCH:

Maxwell (2005): suggests three sources of motivation that lead researchers to select a research topic.

1. **Personal goals** – things that motivate you to do the study, but are not necessarily official or important for others
  - E.g.:** curiosity about a certain topic, desire to change or improve a situation you are in, preference for a particular type of research, or trying to advance your career.
  - Determines the issue/topic you select for study.
  - Determines the choice of your research design (Qual/Quan)
  - Enhances your motivation to do the study.
2. **Practical goals** – are focused on accomplishing something
  - E.g.:** meeting some need, changing some situation, or achieving some objective.
  - May include administrative, policy, or practitioner goals
3. **Intellectual (scholarly) goals** – are focused on understanding something
  - E.g.,** gaining insight into what is going on and why this is happening, or answering some questions that previous research has not adequately addressed

Essential rule of thumb in framing and writing research questions:



**DO NOT** write your practical or personal goals as your research questions. Instead, use your intellectual goals to frame your research questions.

**HOWEVER,** acknowledge your practical and personal goals and discuss them in your background, problem statement, research rationale/justification, researcher positionality, etc.

**FIVE INTELLECTUAL GOALS FOR QUALITATIVE RQS (MAXWELL, 2005):**

1. Understanding the *meaning*, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions they are involved with or engaged in.

**“Meaning” is NOT:**

- Mere account of events and actions that are going on, behaviors that are taking place, or assessment of truth or falsity of participants’ accounts,

**“Meaning” is:**

- Cognition, affect, intentions, etc. that can be understood as “participants’ perspective.” E.g., how their understanding influences their behavior.

2. Understanding the particular *context* within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions.

**“Context” is NOT:**

- A single reality that all participants are assumed to be living in

**“Context” is:**

- Unique circumstances surrounding participants; the individuality of each participant; how events, actions, and meanings are shaped by the nuances of the circumstances

3. Identifying *unanticipated* phenomena and influences, and generating new, “grounded” theories about the later.

**“Unanticipated phenomena and influences” are NOT:**

- Driven from hypothesis and statistical rules or findings
- Comparative and generalizing focus

**“Unanticipated phenomena and influences” are:**

- New discoveries and relationships that are uncovered by the researcher
- Such discoveries are driven from particularity of cases

4. Understanding the **process** by which events and actions take place.

- Qualitative research is inherently interested in process than outcome

**“Process” is NOT:**

- The given visible condition that is obvious to all

**“Process” is:**

- What led to the outcomes and how; what is going on; what is happening

5. Developing **causal explanations** that show what role a certain event/process played in resulting in a certain outcome.

Qualitative method is deemed *better* by some for a much more realistic causal explanation than quantitative method

**“Causal explanations” in QR is NOT:**

- Whether x causes y (“variance theory”)

**“Causal explanation” is:**

- How x causes y; how each even flows into the next (“process theory”)

**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

- Guide both the theoretical and methodological direction of the research.
- Require plan, but no pre-formed hypothesis. Are formed as tentative and exploratory.
- Continue to be refined in ALL stages of the research as the researcher's understanding grows.
- New questions may be added along the course of the research.
- May be formulated in collaboration with research participants.

**FOCUS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

- Focus on the why and how of human interactions.
  - The researcher inquires how people are experiencing an event, a series of events, and/or a condition.
  - The researcher seeks to uncover the perspectives of an individual, a group, or different groups

**FRAMING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS:**

- Begin from broad (generative) self-questions such as:
  - “What do I want to know in this study?”
  - “What’s going on here?”
  - “What are the basic social processes?”
  - “What are the basic social psychological processes?”

- Discipline-specific questions for basic research, or Interdisciplinary questions on significant social problems for applied research (Patton, 1990)

SAMPLE FUNDAMENTAL DISCIPLINARY QUESTIONS (See Patton 1990, p. 216)

SAMPLE INTERDISCIPLINARY APPLIED RESEARCH QUESTIONS (See p. 218)

### **GOOD QUALITATIVE RESEARCH QUESTIONS (Agee, 2009):**

- Arise out of intellectual curiosity and passion about a certain issue
  - Should invite process of exploration and discovery (not yes/no question)
    - This broad question may capture the goal of the study.
    - But, the question needs to move the researcher toward discovering what is happening in a *particular* situation with a *particular* person or group
- E.g., How do you think the following question can be modified?
- “Do medical doctors experience post-traumatic stress disorder?”

### **CENTRAL QUESTIONS AND SUB-QUESTIONS**

- Creswell (2005) suggests writing one overarching question and several sub questions
  - Start by stating the broadest question you could pose about your research problem.
  - Then state the next questions based on varying the context (issue questions) or the anticipated information need (procedural questions)

### **EXAMPLE:**

Central Question:

What does it mean to be a college professor for instructors at BDU?

Issue questions:

What does it mean to be a college professor as a teacher?

What does it mean to be a college professor as an advisor?

What does it mean to be a college professor as a researcher?

Procedural questions:

How do instructors at BDU conceive their role in society as professors at BDU?

How does instructors' understanding of their role shape their goals and aspirations?

How do community members perceive the accomplishment of college professors?

### **THE WAY ANSWERS FOR QRQs EVOLVE:**

- Answers for qualitative RQs unfold gradually through an on-going process of questioning.
  - No direct response to research questions from field data
  - Data used to generate more relevant questions