

tools of the trade

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Qualitative Methods

Qualitative Evaluation Methods. Michael Quinn Patton.
Beverly Hills, California: Sage Publications, 1980. 379 pp.
\$22.50.

This volume is filled with persuasive argument, engaging analogies, useful case examples, and comprehensive information about the central characteristics and techniques of qualitative methods as they relate to evaluation.

The first 100 pages try to convince the reader that the field of evaluation needs a “paradigm of choices” rather than continuing a blind faith in quantification to meet the needs of evaluation users, and that qualitative methods provide a credible alternative. Patton develops ideas concerning the nature of qualitative data, the strategy of qualitative methods in comparison to a variety of evaluation models, and the problems of evaluation design.

Part II of the book deals with procedures for collecting qualitative data—observation and interviewing. Drawing on the extensive resources of several disciplines, he concisely outlines the critical factors to consider, as well as some of the philosophical stumbling blocks such as the “objectivity” of qualitative data.

In Part III, Patton tackles the difficulties of data analysis; the purpose of qualitative analysis, whether “truth, theory, or generalization”; and developing descriptions, case studies, inductive and logical analysis, validation and verification of interpretations, and presentation of findings.

In summary, *Qualitative Evaluation Methods* is a comprehensive treatment of a difficult topic. It provides a complete treatment of the utility of qualitative methods in evaluation. In fact, its primary contribution to the literature is that Patton has applied a variety of resources from social science research methods to evaluation.

A rich volume, it demonstrates Patton’s breadth and depth of experience and training in both qualitative and quantitative evaluation. It also provides insight into the differences between evaluation and research, such as the importance of giving feedback to participants and users as part of the verification process. Patton argues convincingly for the credibility of qualitative approaches, but at the same time is sensitive to the fact that experience hasn’t provided closure in some ambiguous settings.

This is a useful resource for Extension staff at all levels. Those trained primarily in quantitative methods will find it persuasive and educational; those with some training in qualitative methods will find it helpful for implementation strategies; those with training in both approaches will find it a useful condensed resource for designing and implementing evaluation studies.

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