



Cuadernos de Economía y Dirección de la  
Empresa

ISSN: 1138-5758

cede@unizar.es

Asociación Científica de Economía y Dirección  
de Empresas  
España

Ryan, Gerard; Valverde, Mireia

First Things First: The Path Into Qualitative Research in Management. A review of Doing Qualitative  
Research (4th Ed.) by David Silverman (2013), Sage, London.

Cuadernos de Economía y Dirección de la Empresa, vol. 16, núm. 3, julio-septiembre, 2013, pp. 218-  
220

Asociación Científica de Economía y Dirección de Empresas  
Madrid, España

Available in: <http://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=80728045007>

- How to cite
- Complete issue
- More information about this article
- Journal's homepage in [redalyc.org](http://redalyc.org)

[redalyc.org](http://redalyc.org)

Scientific Information System

Network of Scientific Journals from Latin America, the Caribbean, Spain and Portugal

Non-profit academic project, developed under the open access initiative

artículo de Christman (2000), clave para comprender el papel de las multinacionales y la gestión del medio ambiente.

En resumen, considero que este libro es una guía realmente interesante para cualquier investigador que esté realizando su investigación en el campo de la gestión medioambiental de la empresa y la sostenibilidad corporativa o quiera iniciarse en ella. Sin duda alguna es especialmente atractiva para los estudiantes de doctorado, ya que este libro les ofrece una visión completa de los tópicos más relevantes, ofrece una revisión de los artículos más

importantes y, sobre todo, es una fuente de inspiración para conseguir nuevas preguntas de investigación en este apasionante campo de investigación.

Javier Delgado-Ceballos

Universidad de Granada, Granada, España

Correo electrónico: [jdc@ugr.es](mailto:jdc@ugr.es)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cede.2013.06.001>

## First Things First: The Path Into Qualitative Research in Management.

**A review of *Doing Qualitative Research* (4th Ed.) by David Silverman (2013), Sage, London.**

### 1. Introduction

This book review responds to the limited but growing interest in qualitative research methods among management researchers in Spain. Given the traditional predominance of quantitative methods and the limited presence of qualitative research techniques on many doctoral training programs in Spain, this review intends to identify and briefly review a suitable textbook on qualitative research techniques for seasoned quantitative management researchers who seek a route to the qualitative approach. It may also be of interest to academics with a quantitative background who, as reviewers for scientific journals, increasingly encounter manuscripts on qualitative research, and who feel that they require further knowledge of qualitative research in order to adequately fulfil their tasks as reviewers. Before addressing the review of the book, we begin with a brief overview of the state of qualitative research in scientific research on management in Spain.

### 2. Qualitative Research in Management in Spain

Few would contest the suggestion that, in comparison with more quantitative or positivist approaches, there is less tradition of qualitative research in management in Spain. Indeed, a study by Bayo-Moriones and Larraza-Kintana (2012) that analysed articles written by Spanish authors in management and human resource management ranked journals between 2001 and 2010, shows how only 3,7% of these were carried out using qualitative methodologies. This shortage of strong and rigorous qualitative research in Spain has also been pointed out for human resource management studies by Rodríguez Ruiz and Martínez Lucio (2010), who highlight the need and potential for theory building. Similarly, Martínez Lucio and Rodríguez Ruiz (2010) comment on the need to contextualise Spanish research in the managerial, normative, political and economic traditions of this country, rather than assuming that the business context is akin to that in the United States. This contextualisation effort would need to be carried out with exploratory and qualitative work.

Although this situation has slowly begun to change in recent years, many management researchers still look on qualitative research with a degree of suspicion. For many, qualitative research merely consists of carrying out a focus group or a few preliminary interviews at the beginning of a research process, with

the limited aim of exploring or 'getting to know' the research context. According to this view, the 'real' research comes later in the guise of quantitative data collection and quantitative analysis. Qualitative research is often viewed as 'wishy-washy', haphazard and subjective. Proponents of quantitative methods commonly see it as unsystematic, lacking in established procedures, providing at best anecdotal evidence and at worst lacking in rigour. Thus, it is often considered 'unscientific' and not 'real' or 'serious' research.

We would argue that because qualitative research is seen in this negative light, there is still a generally held belief that qualitative research is an 'easy route' to research and that it can be carried out with little formal training or preparation in qualitative research methods. Undeniably, almost anyone can organise a focus group or a few interviews and subsequently draw some basic conclusions on the opinions expressed by the participants. But this would not qualify as the "rigorous qualitative research" that Rodríguez Ruiz and Martínez Lucio (2010) suggest we are in need of. As an example, we have been present at more than one doctoral defence at which the doctoral candidate demonstrates a high degree of skill in the use of quantitative research methods but shows little regard for achieving rigor in the design, implementation and analysis of the exploratory, 'qualitative' stage of their research. Nevertheless, rarely do doctoral panel members question the candidate on the weaknesses of the qualitative part of their research.

Indeed, much of qualitative research's reputation in the management sciences in Spain may be well deserved because much poor 'quality' research is carried out under the guise of the qualitative methodology. However, this is precisely because qualitative research is too often carried out in the very manner we describe above, by researchers who are not sufficiently versed in qualitative research methods. Nevertheless, we would like to dispel the myth that it is difficult or plainly not possible to publish in good quality journals by presenting entirely qualitative studies. In this sense, some of our more better ranked publications are wholly qualitative studies (e.g. Ryan and Valverde, 2006; Papaiconomou et al., 2012; Valverde et al., 2013). However, it is not unusual to receive criticism of qualitative research based on its lack of representativeness or related sampling flaws, from reviewers who are more accustomed to quantitative methodologies and carry out their reviews based on quantitative quality criteria.

In recent times, Spanish management journals are becoming more receptive to accepting qualitative research, yet they are sometimes short on sufficient reviewers who are willing, or feel reasonably able to adequately review qualitative manuscripts. In this sense, we are increasingly encouraged when we are approached by colleagues who, feeling unaccustomed with qualitative research methods or unprepared to judge and complete, enquire about a suitable entry-level, yet rigorous and complete book on qualitative research for experienced (quantitative) researchers. It is primarily with this audience in mind that we approached this book review.

### 3. Choosing a book to review

For some time we tended to suggest that colleagues read the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (2011). This milestone book was first published in 1994 as *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994), with its latest edition from 2011. Denzin & Lincoln represents the state-of-the-art in qualitative research theory and practice, dealing with advanced contemporary issues, so much so that the chapters change significantly between different editions. However, while Denzin & Lincoln is a 'must' purchase for all advanced qualitative researchers, it presents a high entry barrier for researchers entering qualitative research for the first time. We found that for this reason, Denzin & Lincoln turned off many newcomers to qualitative research. With this in mind, in this review, we recommend David Silverman's 'Doing qualitative Research', because of its more practical, hands-on approach for newcomers to qualitative research.

#### 3.1. *Doing Qualitative Research*, by David Silverman

This book was first published by Sage in 2000 (Silverman, 2000). Since then it has seen a second (Silverman, 2005), third (Silverman, 2010) and the current fourth edition, published in April of 2013 (Silverman, 2013b). David Silverman is a sociologist who spent much of his academic career at Goldsmith College, the University of London. He is also the author of a number of other books on qualitative research methods such as 'A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Qualitative Research' (Silverman, 2007) from the book series 'Very Short, Fairly Interesting & Cheap Books', now in its second edition in (Silverman, 2013a) and 'Interpreting Qualitative Data' (Silverman, fourth edition, 2011). While his 'A very short.' book takes an argumentative approach to examining many of the contentious issues involved in using qualitative methods in research, 'Doing Qualitative Research' is a straightforward, no nonsense, practical handbook on the 'hows and whys' of using qualitative research methods.

The book is divided into six parts that cover (and roughly follow in sequential order) the entire qualitative research process from Introduction, to Starting Out, Collecting and Analysing Your Data, Writing Up, Getting Support and The Aftermath. The book begins in Part 1 (chapters 1 to 5) with an extensive introduction to qualitative research. Silverman begins chapter 2 by asking the reader to consider *why* researchers use qualitative methods. For *what types of research questions* is the qualitative approach most useful? *When* should (and shouldn't) the researcher consider using qualitative methods? In chapter 3, he outlines and considers the many issues involved in the development of a qualitative research project from *generating the initial ideas* to *collecting* and *analysing* the qualitative data, while placing special emphasis on *linking theory and method*. All the while, he adopts an innovative and highly illustrative approach to considering the complexity of the qualitative research process by drawing from the research diaries of former students. In this way, he draws deeply from past experiences in supervising (more than 30) doctoral research projects in order to identify and illustrate, in a very readable manner, the appropriate implications of the real research experiences. In the way, he effectively covers a significant range of issues such as *finding an appropriate topic*, considering *theoretical orientations*, *generating the research problem*, *sampling* and sample size decisions, practical *implications* and *relevance*, *technical* and technological issues in data gathering, and *access* to qualitative data, and so on.

Chapter 4 deals with the many and complex issues in qualitative research design. Again Silverman takes a hands-on approach to illustrating these issues by drawing upon actual research projects in order to highlight and consider the "analytical, methodological

and practical" issues faced by qualitative researchers. In this way, Silverman forces the reader to identify and consider the logic for each research design choice and the implications of these (*Are you making too large claims about your research? What is involved in coding data? Are my data partial? How much data do I need? How are you going to identify and make sense of deviant cases?*). Chapter 5 completes Part 1 of the book by examining 'originality' and what constitutes an appropriate and distinct 'contribution' in qualitative research. Hence, this chapter will be of particular interest to reviewers of qualitative research articles.

Part 2 of 'Doing Qualitative Research' entitled 'Starting Out' covers chapters 6 through 11. Chapter 6, an entirely new chapter in the fourth edition, deals in length with the practicalities of *selecting a research topic and formulating a research question*. Silverman also examines the many differences in what constitutes 'good research design' in qualitative versus quantitative research, including the *language* employed by each approach. This section is particularly useful for experienced quantitative researchers in terms of developing a thorough understanding of the more profound differences in what qualitative and quantitative researchers set out to achieve.

Chapter 7 considers *how theories are used* in qualitative research (dealing separately with theories, models, hypothesis, methods and methodologies in qualitative research). Chapters 8 and 9 deal with the *differences* between the qualitative and the quantitative approaches and the subsequent implications for methodological choices. For instance, chapter 9 examines the quantitative mode of *generalization* and compares this with the qualitative logic of researching a limited set of case studies. Finally, chapter 10 examines the increasing significance of *ethical issues* in research, while chapter 11 deals with *writing a research proposal*.

Part 3, running from chapters 12 to 17, deals with *collecting* and *analysing* qualitative data. Chapter 12 examines how *data is collected* using interviews, focus groups, ethnographic data and Internet data (interviews guides, types of questions to ask, how many interviews are required, recording and transcribing, gaining access, recording observations). Chapter 13 looks at how to *analyse qualitative data* (how to ask questions of the data, how to use field notes, coding and interpretation of data). Chapter 14, written by Clive Seale, explains the use of *computers in analysing qualitative data*. The chapter explains what the researcher can expect from software (and what they can't expect), covering many of the most widely used software.

The 'quality' of qualitative research is a theme that runs throughout the book. Indeed, this is essential because one of the main differences between qualitative and quantitative research is that the canons of rigour in qualitative research must be incorporated throughout the entire research process. This begins at the very outset of any qualitative research process and continues through research design and analysis. In this way, in qualitative research, it is not possible to carry out a chi-square or other statistical reliability and validity tests at the end of the analysis in order to confirm the quality of the results. Chapter 15 of Silverman is exclusively dedicated to considering what *quality* means and why *quality matters* in qualitative research. He deals with questions of *saturation* (What is *enough* data?), the conception and indicators of *representativeness* in qualitative methods, qualitative sampling choices, the meanings of *validity* and *reliability* in qualitative research and how these are achieved (as opposed to how they are achieved in quantitative research). Chapter 16, entitled *Evaluating Qualitative Research*, introduces the reader to the key criteria used to evaluate qualitative research, the questions to keep in mind when considering the merit of published qualitative studies, as well as the contribution of qualitative research to practise. Chapter 17 is designed as an overview of the book so far with the objective of bringing together the main topics already presented.

Part 4 of the book, running over five chapters from chapter 18 to 22, is clearly aimed at doctoral research students in the writing up stage of their doctoral thesis. The topics covered are; how to begin *writing up*, how to write the *literature review*, the *methodology* chapter, the *data analysis* chapter and how to draw *conclusions* and *implications* from qualitative data. Part 5 of the book, entitled 'Getting Support' also deals with significant issues for doctoral students related to finding support during the research process, from dealing with the doctoral supervisor (and getting the most from them!), and looking for feedback on research. Finally, Part 6 covers the aftermath and outputs of a research project including the doctoral project defence and how to publish from qualitative research.

Despite the roughly chronological order of the book structure, it makes sense to dip in and out of the book at different chapters, rather than following a sequential reading from beginning to end.

The new edition is a significantly expanded book (469 pages) when compared with the first edition (316 pages) but not much longer than the 2010 third edition (456 pages). Chapter 6, new to the fourth edition, fills an important gap of earlier editions by adding an examination of the formulation of the research question. This is one of the more arduous tasks facing novice researchers, highlighting how the *types* of research questions posed in qualitative research can be very different to quantitative research. Also, there is new and improved material on the use of theory in qualitative research (with examples on grounded theory, narrative analysis and discourse analysis) and the nature of qualitative sampling, the inductive nature of qualitative research and the increasingly popular use of internet data in qualitative research. In addition chapter 14, on the use of qualitative data analysis software, has also been updated.

The companion website has also been updated for the fourth edition (<http://www.uk.sagepub.com/dqr4/main.htm>) and now includes links to useful video clips on various aspects of the books, an updated series of linked full-text journal articles, as well as a more aesthetic interface. The new website also includes an additional section dedicated to instructor resources for those who teach qualitative research methods. This section is password protected and only available to university professors who adopt the textbook in their courses. It is also worth noting that there is an electronic version of the book available (from June 2012). However, the electronic version is little more than the third edition of the book made available in this format with no extra features.

By way of criticism, one of the main advantages of Silverman's book, his use of real life examples to illustrate concepts, can at times be overdone. We sometimes find ourselves skipping over the examples, even though many of these have already been shortened in this latest edition. Also, although not a direct criticism,

the book clearly illustrates Silverman's extensive experience in research in sociology, but there is a limited number of examples from the management arena. Nevertheless, his book achieves a multidisciplinary focus with examples that may be imagined in any fields. Although we review Silverman with experienced quantitative researchers in mind, there is no doubt that the book's principle audience consists of novice researchers and doctoral students. This means that many of the chapters in the final two parts of the book tend to be skipped over by non-PhD readers. While we wait for Silverman to write a similar and equally readable book for experienced quantitative researchers in management, this book represents a highly suitable entry point to the world of qualitative research.

## References

- Bayo-Moriones, A., Larraza-Kintana, M., 2012. Investigación en recursos humanos en España de 2001 a 2010: ¿la década prodigiosa? Cuadernos de Economía y Dirección de la Empresa 15 (4), 181–191.
- Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S., 1994. *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N.K., Lincoln, Y.S., 2011. *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Martínez Lucio, M., Rodríguez Ruiz, O., 2010. La americanización como modelo global en la investigación sobre recursos humanos. *Universia Business Review* 27, 104–123.
- Papaoikonomou, E., Valverde, M., Ryan, G., 2012. Articulating the meanings of collective experiences of ethical consumption. *Journal of Business Ethics* 110 (1), 15–32.
- Rodríguez Ruiz, O., Martínez Lucio, M., 2010. The study of HRM in Spain: the Americanization of Spanish research and the politics of denial? *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 21 (1), 125–143.
- Ryan, G., Valverde, M., 2006. Waiting in line for online services: A qualitative study of the user's perspective. *Information Systems Journal* 16 (2), 181–211.
- Silverman, D., 2000. *Doing qualitative research: a practical handbook*. Sage, London.
- Silverman, D., 2005. *Doing qualitative research*, 2nd ed. Sage, London.
- Silverman, D., 2007. *A very short, fairly interesting and reasonably cheap book about qualitative research*. Sage, London.
- Silverman, D., 2010. *Doing qualitative research*, 3rd ed. Sage, London.
- Silverman, D., 2011. *Interpreting Qualitative Data*, 4th ed. Sage, London.
- Silverman, D., 2013a. *A very short, fairly interesting and reasonably cheap book about qualitative research*, 2nd ed. Sage, London.
- Silverman, D., 2013b. *Doing qualitative research*, 4th ed. Sage, London.
- Valverde, M., Scullion, H., Ryan, G., 2013. Talent management in Spanish medium-sized organisations. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management* 24 (9), 1832–1852.

Gerard Ryan\*, Mireia Valverde  
 Departamento de Gestión de Empresas, Universitat Rovira i Virgili,  
 Avda, Universitat 1, 43204 Reus, Tarragona, Spain

\* Corresponding author.  
 E-mail address: [gerard.ryan@urv.cat](mailto:gerard.ryan@urv.cat) (G. Ryan),  
[mireia.valverde@urv.cat](mailto:mireia.valverde@urv.cat) (M. Valverde).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jced.2013.06.002>

When I wrote the original *Qualitative Researching* I was convinced that new and would-be qualitative researchers needed a handbook that bridged the gap between "cookbook" texts and abstract theoretical discussions of methodology. I wanted to produce a book that would encourage readers to engage actively with the doing of qualitative research, rather than simply to follow "recipes". I wanted to help people to use theory in a grounded way in their research practice, and to recognize how they do so, rather than to set out for them my assessment of the full range of the theoretical debates informing q... A review of *Doing Qualitative Research* (4th Ed.) by David Silverman (2013), Sage, London. 1. Introduction. This book review responds to the limited but growing interest in qualitative research methods among management researchers in Spain. Indeed, much of qualitative research's reputation in the management sciences in Spain may be well deserved because much poor "quality" research is carried out under the guise of the qualitative methodology. However, this is precisely because qualitative research is too often carried out in the very manner we describe above, by researchers who are not sufficiently versed in qualitative research methods. By utilizing qualitative research may raise new and unexpected findings leading to reformulation of old theories. "Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin and Lincoln 2000:3). In addition, "qualitative methodologies refer to research procedures which produce descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour" (Bogdan and Taylor 1975:4) *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. David Silverman Sage Publications: London 1999 0761958231 (pb); 0761958223 (hb) ; 1/215.99 (pb); ; 1/249.50 (hb) 336. Order this book. This is an exemplary book; it is not only very practical but truly scholarly. As befits any text on qualitative methodology, or indeed any contemporary social endeavour, the author dismisses dualism. Given these foundations, the chapters which follow on methodology, data collection and analysis, management of the research process, and the writing up of research are all excellent. One of the delights to me is to find that the author strongly challenges the sacred cow of triangulation, but then my one disappointment is that he might have dealt more fully with the potential values of multiple-methods studies. What is Qualitative Research? Why Do Some Researchers Prefer Qualitative Methods? Are Qualitative Methods Always Appropriate? Should You Use Qualitative Methods? Dig deeper into key concepts and understand how they might relate to your own research project via guided website searches and online discussion questions. Practice " Multiple Choice Questions: Test your knowledge with quick questions in-text and double-check your answers and logic online. There is no doubt that "Doing Qualitative Research" is a Bible for all qualitative researchers. Unlike the Bible, however, it is constantly updated, taking into account both new methods and new circumstances in which research takes place. A classic, but always relevant. Barbara Czarniawska.