

# Qualitative Research and Teams: Exploding the Myth of the Lone Researcher

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## Dominant Methodological Narrative:

Real qualitative researchers work alone!






## The truth is...

Increasingly—  
qualitative researchers work in  
complex teams.

- Address complex problems
- Interdisciplinary
- Multiple sites--Global in scope
- Diverse membership
- Multi-methodological
- Work across many kinds of digital tools

Despite this shift, we continue to train qualitative researchers as if they will work alone.



<b>Instruction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Often focused on Lone Research Models</li><li>• Faculty unsupported to create team instructional models</li></ul>
<b>Instructional Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Textbooks organized around Lone Research Model</li><li>• Limited logistical information for teams</li></ul>
<b>Technology</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Many universities and others lack knowledge of and access to needed digital tools for complex teams</li><li>• Many also underestimate the importance of access to deep digital expertise during the course of a project</li></ul>

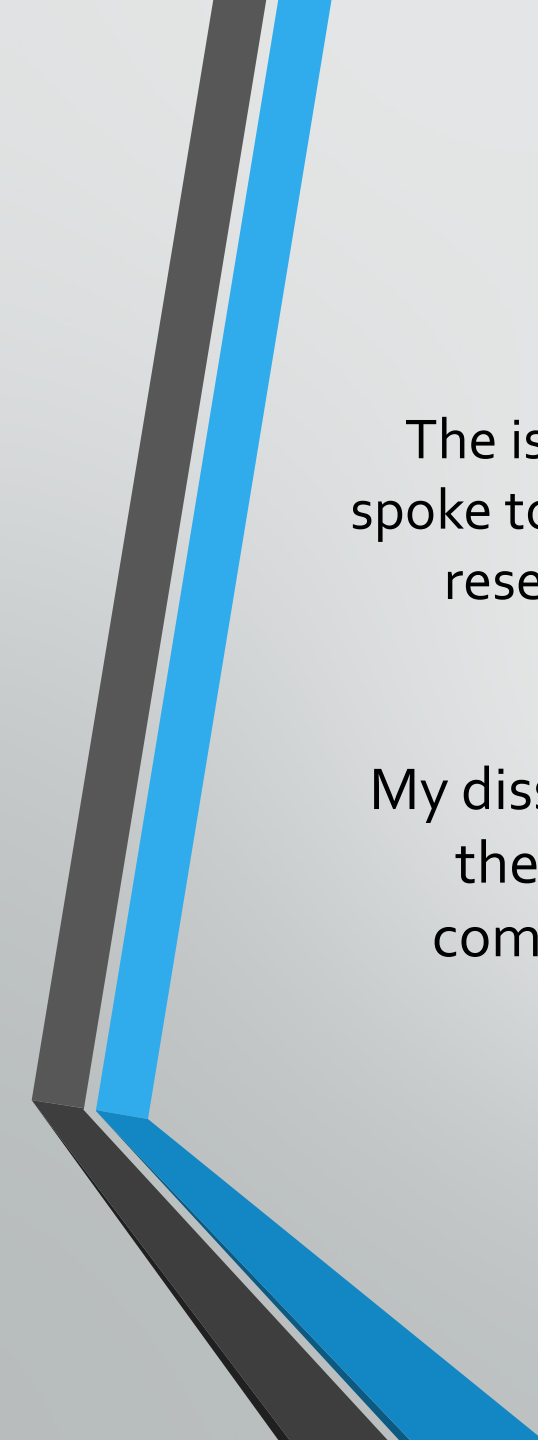
I began thinking about teams as a methodological topic when I was a graduate student.

With mentor Liora Bresler



Co-authored

- “The interpretive zone: Conceptualizing collaboration among teams of qualitative researchers”
- *Educational Researcher*, 26 (4), 5-15.
- Wasser (Davidson) and Bresler, 1996

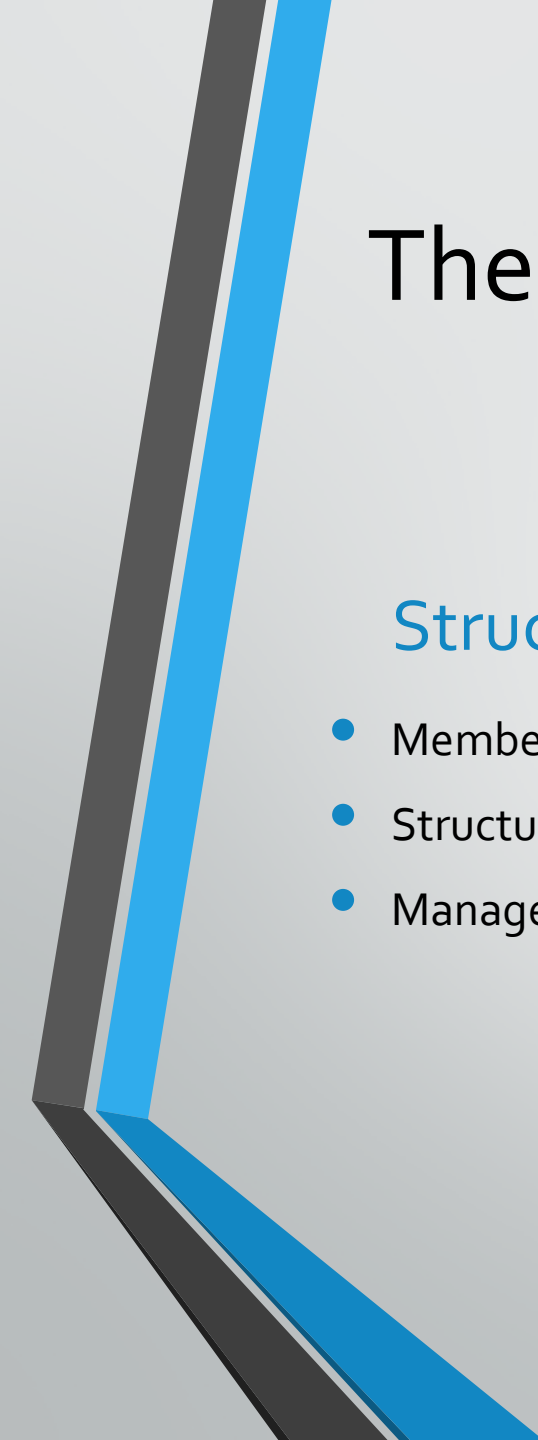


The issue of teams also spoke to me as a qualitative researcher because:

My dissertation is almost the only study I've completed as a lone researcher.

I have served as member of research teams studying:

- adolescent literacy;
- arts specialists in elementary schools;
- merger of an at-risk and special needs pre-school;
- an innovative higher education teacher STEM preparation program;
- networked technology integration of a 4 school K-12 system; and,
- views of youth sexting from teens, parents, and those who work with teens.



# The literature of complex qualitative research teams focused on two arenas:

## Structural Issues

- Membership
- Structure
- Management

## Processual Issues

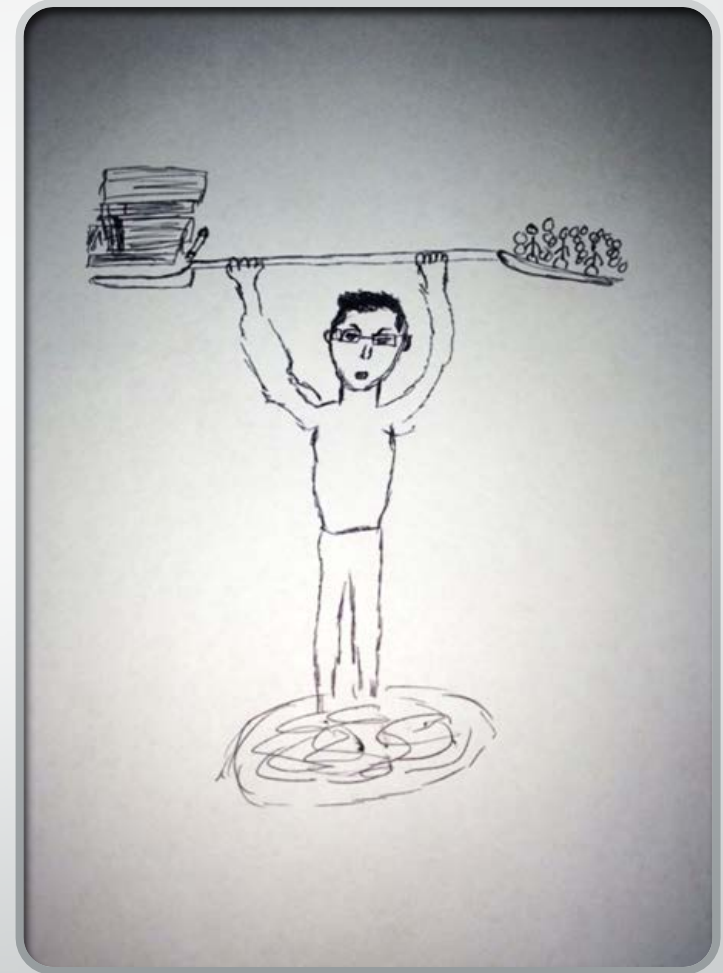
- Interpretive processes
- Intersubjectivity
- Collaborative processes

A deep dive into the issues of teams and qualitative research instruction:

*Through Their Eyes* project

A two semester experiment teaching qualitative research as a team sport.

(Spring 2015; Spring 2016)





# Thus was born...

## *Complex Teams in Qualitative Research*

- Oxford University Press, 11/2018
- **Text**--designed for qualitative researchers (and others working with them).
- **Focus**--Take advantage of the special goodness qualitative research offers the research endeavor
- **Emphasis**-- Writing strategies for complex teams incorporating qualitative research approaches



# Qualitative Research and Complex Teams



- The Rise of Complex Research Teams
- Research Design in Team-Based Qualitative Research
- Methodological Writing in Team-Based Qualitative Research
- Substantive Writing in Team-Based Qualitative Research
- Trends, Issues, and Considerations on the Horizon

## Today's Focus:

...getting beyond the lone researcher model

Three Components of Research Design  
for Complex Teams Employing  
Qualitative Researchers

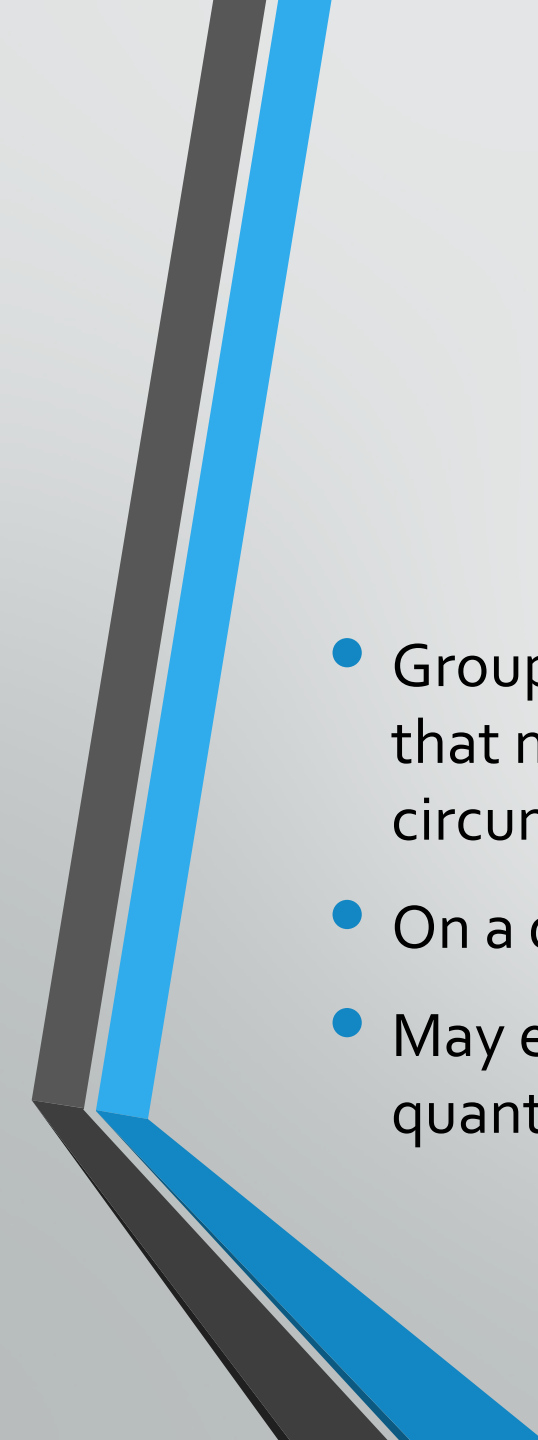
Team  
Formation



Documentation  
Decisions



Digital Toolkit



## Definition:

# Complex Qualitative Research Team

- Groups of four or more individuals working together on a research endeavor that may be in a specific geographic location, in virtual space, or in hybrid circumstances
- On a defined topic or issue for a specific period of time
- May employ qualitative research techniques solely or use a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods



## Qualitative Research

Can bring **incredible goodness** to the work of complex teams, including:

Qualitative researchers:

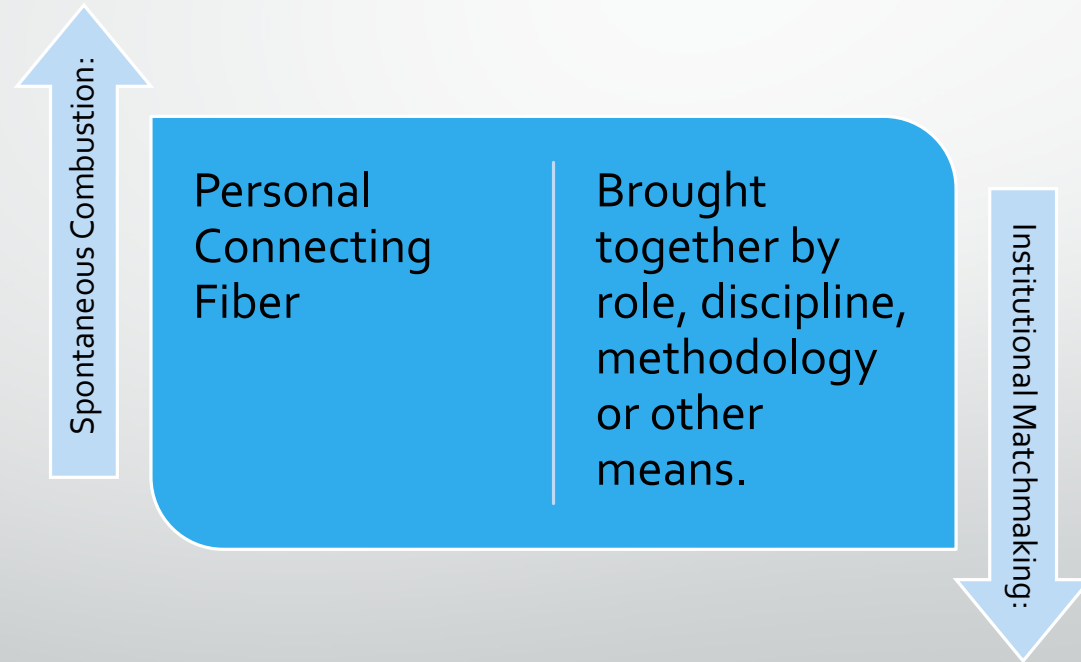
- Pay special attention to the notion of subjectivity and possess comfort with difference and its exploration—inside and outside the team.
- Emphasize writing (we have experience with textual tasks of many kinds); and,
- Respect process as practice.



# 1. Team Formation

Beginning the Conversation: Creating a Dissemination Agreement

# How are complex teams formed?



# What is the role of qualitative research on the team?



Project  
Generators?

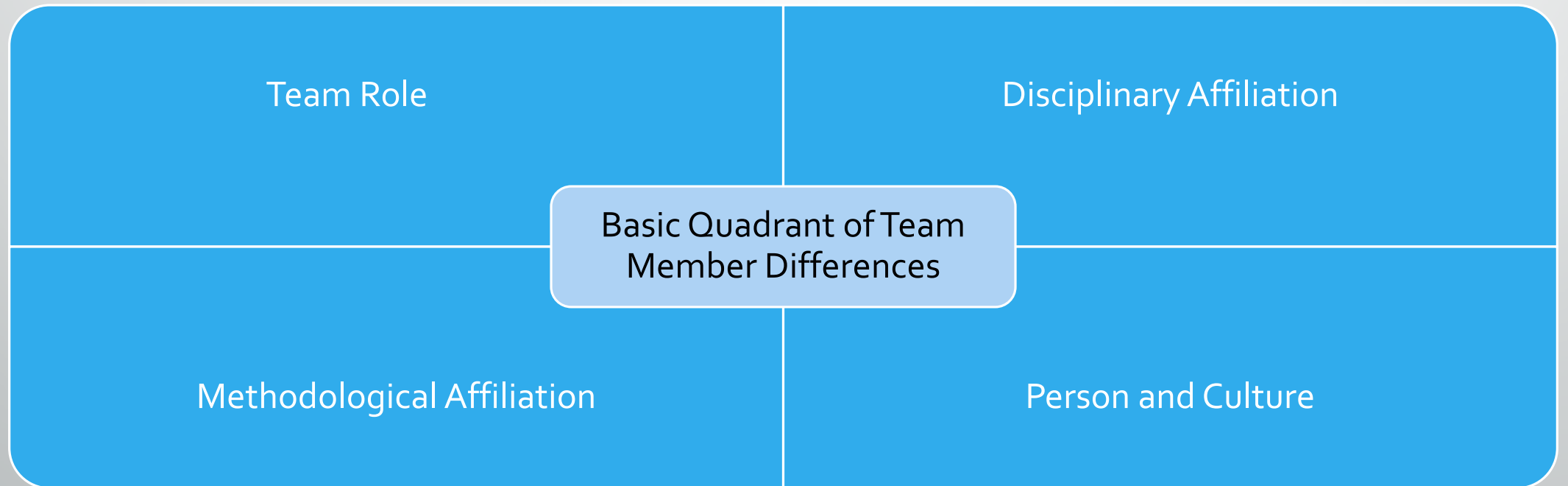
Outsourced  
Help?



Everything  
Else?



# Beginning the Conversation:






## Some Key Considerations

As you enter initial discussions:

- Do not assume everyone is working on the same set of principles,
- Do not assume communication about these issues has been transparent to all,
- Do not assume everyone feels they can speak freely and openly.

# Questions to Cover in a Dissemination Agreement

- Who “owns” the data? What does this mean to different team members?
- If the project is grant-supported, does the funder have dissemination requirements that need to be addressed?
- Who are the critical gatekeepers in regard to making decisions about the use of the data or public discussion of the project?
- What are the rights or responsibilities of different project roles in regard to data use or public discussion of the project?
- What is the process for a project member to follow when s/he would like to use the data for a writing or dissemination project?
- Who should review documents, materials, or other dissemination items to insure that team guidelines have been followed?



## 2. Documenting Qualitative Research Activity

Forms of Writing; Decisions about Team Writing Activities;

No matter what--writing is the core!

# Early Forms of Project Writing

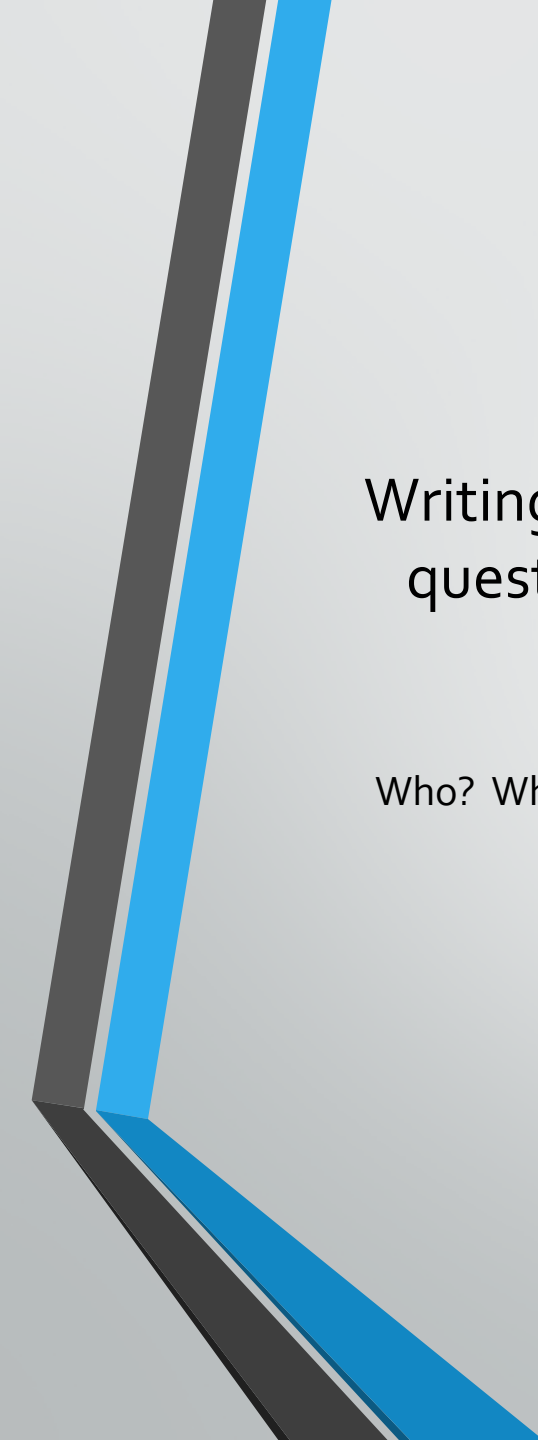


- Research or funding proposal
- Ethical Agreements/Informed Consent
- Project protocols
- Access requests
- Member Biographies
- Project descriptions

# Later Forms of Project Writing



- Fieldnotes
- Codes (This is also writing!)
- Journals and logs
- Memos
- Preliminary Findings
- Presentations
- Papers



## Writing raises important questions for a team:

Who? What? Where? When? How?  
With What?...

- What conventions will be used for writing fieldnotes and memos...and for their storage and management?
- Who will document what? When?
- How will the documentation be stored?
- How can documentation be accessed? By whom?
- How do we organize repositories for meeting notes, email, policy decisions?
- What tools will make the work easier...in the field...in the region...at the headquarters?
- How will we check, review, and make improvements in the ways we are capturing information?

# Qualitative researchers are responsible for:

## Methodological Writing

- Creation of texts through data collection
- Document and examine the research process
- Provide context for understanding the project in relationship to other methodological work

## Substantive Writing

- Write to understand the substance of the project
- Describe the findings and discussing the conclusions
- Provide context for understanding the project in relationship to other research on this topic.







# 3. Development of a Project Management System Using a Digital Toolkit Approach

Communications, Management, Data, Analysis, and Presentation

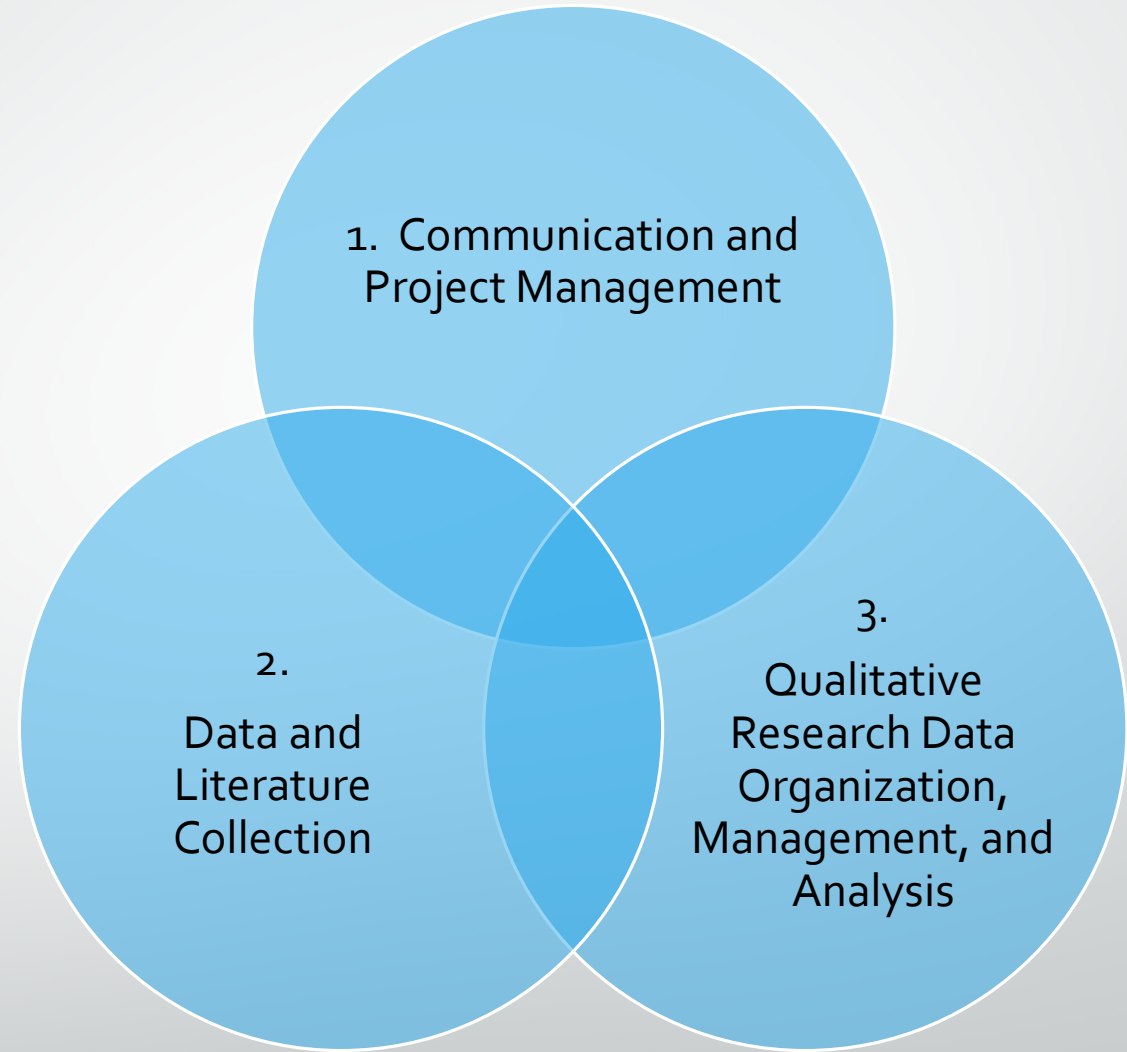
# Digital Tools are a Necessity for Everyone: Including Qualitative Researchers

- Teams generate more materials than lone researchers.
- On a team, research materials need to be accessible to all, and this requires good organizational tools and well trained team members.
- Teams have to review, add, and change tools on an ongoing basis to meet the needs of the project.
- Teams have to be flexible working around the digital constraints of all members.



## Three Components of a Digital Toolkit

For the  
Complex  
Qualitative Research  
Team



# Tools in the Communication and Management Component of the Digital Toolkit

Synchronous and  
Asynchronous  
Communication  
Tools

Project Planning  
Tools

Digital Storage

Tools to Support  
Individual and  
Collaborative  
Writing

Dissemination  
Tools including  
Social Media

# Data and Literature Collection

## Data Collection

- Note taking devices
- Mobile Applications: Audio/visual

## Literature Collection

- Reference Manager
- Web Clipping and Note Saving Tools

Data Storage



Data Organization and  
Management



Data Inquiry: Visualize, Interrogate,  
Compare, Juxtapose, Integrate,  
Interpret



# Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS): Two Key Issues

## 1. Access

- There are a range of QDAS products available, and most products can perform a similar set of basic functions.
- What tools can you and your partners access?




## 2. Expertise and Supervision

- Are senior team members willing to develop adequate QDAS skill to be able to oversee use by junior team members?
- Does your team possess, or can it obtain, advanced expertise in research design in the QDAS tool selected?

# Complex Teams are the Future of Qualitative Research





# As we move into this future world: Promote the Goodness of Qualitative Research

- **Spread the word:** Teach the team what qualitative research is and what it can contribute
- Listen and learn to team members' perspectives on qualitative research
- Provide information on your background and approach to qualitative research
- Help team members develop a richer knowledge base in regard to qualitative research
- Help team members understand qualitative research in historical and contemporary contexts

# The Goodness of Qualitative Research

- **Share the wealth:** Share the capacities you have thanks to qualitative research
- Offer to help facilitate discussions that touch on team member characteristics and differences
- Offer guidance in talking about issues of difference inside and outside the team
- Share your expertise in writing tasks and their management
- Insure that qualitative research use on the project is full and appropriate

# Extol the Virtues of Qualitative Research for Complex Teams!



Never forget that in qualitative research:  
Writing is first, last, and forever!

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