

Employing qualitative methods for assessing impacts of major projects in Canada

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E.g., Impact Assessment Act (IAA) 2019

Sustainability criteria?

- Benefits to the environment
- +/- Impacts to health
- Social and economic wellbeing
- Impacts to Section 35 Indigenous rights
- Indigenous knowledge & community knowledge
- Cumulative effects
- Cultural effects
- Intersectional identity, sex, & gender



Qualitative methods

- Science that embraces the subjectivity of human decision-making
- Well-established design approaches, literature, & methods
- Authoritative & replicable
- Evidence-based



Research purpose

To explore how qualitative methods from the social sciences can contribute to the evolution of the next generation of IA.

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Qualitative Methods for the Next Generation of Impact Assessment



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Methods

Case-study selection

- Key word search in Registry
- Select three case studies
- Preliminary document review

Data collection

- Practitioner interviews (21) on Zoom
- Assessment & supplementary document review

Data analysis

- Deductive coding following interview questions
- Inductive coding (NVivo 11)
- Creswell's Checklist for Qualitative Design (MS Excel)



Findings

Interviews

“Whatever you’re using to record that [interview] is actually new information that is created from a social encounter” (VOL, practitioner).



Findings

Interviews

“So interviews are really more specific and they're like an individual's experience” (L6K, practitioner).



Findings

Focus Groups

“Focus groups we use more-so in situations where we need to get at understanding an issue or a concern or a value” (1W4, practitioner).



Findings

Focus Groups

“Because we work in the space of Indigenous interests and rights, which are holistic and connected I guess there's so many complex relationships we need to use qualitative methods to make sense of what the local situations are: very complex social, geopolitical type situations as well, as environmental changes that are happening that are affecting culture or livelihoods or rights” (L6K, practitioner).



Findings

Challenges for designing QMs

- Ownership
- Confidentiality
- Relationships
- Human experiences
- Sampling



Takeaways

Qualitative methods provide the means of integrating broader considerations into IA

- A proven track record for empirically addressing human concerns and tackling social impacts
- Careful planning and design is necessary
- Trained practitioners and ethical standards



Questions?

For more see “Qualitative Methods for the Next Generation of Impact Assessment,” Walker et al. 2023. Impact Assessment Agency of Canada.



Creswell, J. W. (2014a). Qualitative methods. In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th Edition, pp. 183–184). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Table 9.1 A Checklist of Questions for Designing a Qualitative Procedure

_____	Are the basic characteristics of qualitative studies mentioned?
_____	Is the specific type of qualitative design to be used in the study mentioned? Is the history of, a definition of, and applications for the design mentioned?
_____	Does the reader gain an understanding of the researcher's role in the study (past historical, social, cultural experiences, personal connections to sites and people, steps in gaining entry, and sensitive ethical issues) and how they may shape interpretations made in the study?
_____	Is the purposeful sampling strategy for sites and individuals identified?

(Continued)



Creswell, J. W. (2014a). Qualitative methods. In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (4th Edition, pp. 183–184). SAGE Publications, Inc.

Table 9.1 (Continued)

_____	Are the specific forms of data collection mentioned and a rationale given for their use?
_____	Are the procedures for recording information during the data collection detailed (such as protocols)?
_____	Are the data analysis steps identified?
_____	Is there evidence that the researcher has organized the data for analysis?
_____	Has the researcher reviewed the data generally to obtain a sense of the information?
_____	Has the researcher coded the data?
_____	Have the codes been developed to form a description and/or to identify themes?
_____	Are the themes interrelated to show a higher level of analysis and abstraction?
_____	Are the ways that the data will be represented mentioned—such as in tables, graphs, and figures?
_____	Have the bases for interpreting the analysis been specified (personal experiences, the literature, questions, action agenda)?
_____	Has the researcher mentioned the outcome of the study (developed a theory, provided a complex picture of themes)?
_____	Have multiple strategies been cited for validating the findings?





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