



Qualitative evidence

DOES IT PASS THE TRUSTWORTHINESS TEST?

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Today's session

- Consider why qualitative data (e.g. student feedback) and its analysis is vitally important for institutional research, evaluation and quality assurance purposes
- Consider what constitutes **trustworthy qualitative evidence**



Why? Accountability Culture



‘ambitious regulatory revolutions of the last 40 years... have aimed to hold experts, professionals and institutions to account and to require them to communicate honestly, live up to the commitments they have entered into and perform to required standards of competence’ (O’Neill, 2018: 298)

- Increasing demands for ‘proof’ of competence against expectations – the basis of our culture of evidence-based policy and practice.
- Heightened by
 - the 'consumerist turn' - value for money
 - and the ‘big data’ revolution – metric and analytics
 - Growth of external oversight (and in England regulation)



Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter

- Judging trustworthiness has become an essential skill in contemporary universities – for staff and students.
- For trustworthy communication we need to identify trustworthy sources and methods.
- We are the **‘evidence judiciary’**

[Desert Island Discs BBC Radio 4 – 11th February 2022](#)



Trust vs Trustworthiness

‘Placing and refusing trust intelligently is demanding’

(O’Neill, 2018: 295)



Trustworthiness requires:

- evidence of honesty, competence and reliability
- evidence gathering and evaluation to be everyone's business



Qualitative data is important!

Tendency to prioritise metrics, but ...

- Goodhart's law - 'when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure' (Strathern, 1997: 308).
- McNamara Fallacy - if things that can't be measured are side-lined, then unmeasurable aspects of our lives and cultures can appear unimportant (Yankelovich, 1972)



How can we evidence, for example

- Well-designed courses
- A high-quality student experience
- Student resilience



Be the evidence builders and judiciary

Two questions:

- how valid is your approach for what you are seeking to understand or evidence?
- how reliable is the evidence likely to be?



And remember in qualitative research or evaluation:

- **validity** = the *appropriateness* of approaches and tools i.e. that the results are 'valid' in relation to the context in which they are collected.
- **reliability** = a *consistency* of approach and *awareness* of the multiple ways in which evidence can be collected in any given situation i.e. not giving some forms of evidence unwarranted priority.



Navigating the qualitative data lake



Step beyond untargeted 'feedback' and follow on 'action plans'



Make targeted activity part of a holistic evaluation approach



Choose the right methods (and collecting the right evidence) to answer evaluation questions



Recognise how best to manage and analyse this information to build trustworthiness



Laws of the Academic Jungle

The second law of academic life:

You should never go to a school or department for anything that is in its title (which university consults its architecture department on the estate, or – heaven forbid – its business school on the budget?)

[Prof. Sir David Watson's Laws of the Academic Jungle – 2009](#)

Thank you

Comments and
questions welcome!





References

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