Qualitative Data Analysis for Social Research III

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**Introduction**

The purpose of COM-968-QDA is to equip doctoral students in the fundamental skills of doing qualitative research. This includes the essential elements of inductive data coding, thematic analysis, and understanding the nature and value of analyzing thick descriptions. In addition to these essential elements, this course provides exposure to recommended qualitative software platforms that assist in the coding, analyzing, and interpreting descriptive data.

COM-968-QDA is one of two required courses for Core 5, which is the last academic core before transitioning to another phase of developing one’s prospectus and proposal for the dissertation. I experienced working through the assignments and completing this course in qualitative data analysis as a significant milestone in my academic journey. This was the course where I hit the wall back in 2020 and had to withdraw from Omega Graduate School due to the demands of a large consulting contract that required intense focus and effort for me to complete.

From my perspective as a doctoral student, Core 5 is much better now than it was back then. In 2020 the courses were much more complicated and difficult to navigate, and the assignments were not as well aligned with the learning objectives that would prepare an adult learner to complete his or her dissertation and graduate. OGS was going through a difficult transition from the old regime to the new in academic leadership and struggling to achieve financial stability. Now that I have returned to the program, I have experienced a significant improvement in the curriculum design and the internal coherence of the COM-968-QDA course. My Professor, Dr. Curtis McClane, has been very supportive of my academic and professional goals and provided me with timely guidance and flexibility to efficiently complete the

assignments. Through the process of completing this course, I have grown in confidence that I can finish the task of earning my Ph.D. from Omega Graduate School.

**Personal Growth**

The greatest challenge that I had to address in COM-968-QDA was how to use qualitative data analysis software to complete Assignment #3 that required a qualitative data analysis of three fictional focus group interviews. I wanted to learn how to use one of the major software tools in preparation for the qualitative research required for my dissertation case study. I evaluated several software platforms and narrowed them down to two candidates: Atlas.ti and Dedoose. Both had outstanding reviews, but I choose Dedoose for its robust features at a very reasonable cost. Once I got into the software program, I found it very difficult to learn the mechanics of the program and do the actual analytical work. The program did not provide the flexibility that I needed to work with the text and use my intuitive ability to see the patterns and themes that would produce a good scholarly result.

My deadline for Assignment #3 was looming and I didn’t see a path to sufficiently learn the Dedoose platform and get the required qualitative work done on time. This impasse raised some old anxiety and fear about being able to complete doctoral work at this stage in my life. I made the decision to abandon Dedoose and use Microsoft Word to analyze the interview data and finish the assignment. In the time that I had left, I experienced a breakthrough in using MS Word as it was much easier to code the data, create tables to support patterns and themes, and display the interpretive results effectively. I was very relieved to have completed the assignment on time with the support and encouragement of Dr. McClane. I gained confidence through the

process of doing the qualitative data analysis that I have the talent and ability to accomplish the qualitative case study that I have planned for my dissertation.

The insights and skills that I developed from completing this course came from actually doing the analytic and thematic work required by a qualitative study. During my academic studies, I had read a lot about qualitative data analysis and how to design and develop a qualitative dissertation, but I had never had the opportunity to analyze an interview until COM 968. Even though the assignment was based on a fictional focus group, it required me to go through the iterative process of coding, analyzing, and interpreting the interview data. Once I broke through the impasse of trying to use Dedoose, I got into the flow of working with the emergent themes, creating tables to display the analytical insights, and then grounding the interpretations in the descriptive data. The fictional study was a low-risk way of experimenting and learning from the iterative and emergent process that will be a building block for the challenge of completing a qualitative dissertation.

**Reflective Entry**

My professional consulting work has been strengthened through the process of completing this course in qualitative data analysis. Narrative analysis will be an important part of fulfilling my current consulting contract with Ashley Furniture. I will be interviewing executive leaders about the turning points in the company’s history and the career arc that many leaders and managers have traveled to be in their current roles and responsibilities. I will need to apply the insights and skills of qualitative research to help the company understand how the decisions that were made in the past, especially in times of crisis , have impacted the organizational

culture today. I feel more equipped to analyze and interpret these historical accounts because of the experience that I gained through analyzing the fictional focus group interviews.

As far as questions or concerns that came from COM-968-QDA, I would point to the qualitative software platform challenge that I encountered. Have I given Dedoose a fair trial in that I had a very short time to master the program before the deadline? Or do I need to try Atlas.ti and evaluate whether it will be more efficient in supporting qualitative research? Maybe the final solution is the new qualitative tool that Dr. Reichard has developed for the DSL program. What I learned from completing the assignment with Microsoft Word is that whatever software tool I use, it must allow me to use my natural analytical strengths in working directly with the texts. I want the software platform to support the actual analytical work and not create layers of complex features that are difficult to learn and create barriers to interpreting the meaning of the qualitative data.

**Conclusion**

COM 968-QDA has been very helpful in getting my feet wet in doing the work of qualitative research and preparing me for the Prospectus phase of my dissertation. Overcoming the fear and anxiety of being blocked was an important part of the learning process as well. I will face more challenges like the one I had with Dedoose that will test my resolve to complete such a major undertaking as a Ph.D. dissertation. Through completing the building block assignments in this course, I know that I have the capacity and confidence to meet the challenges that I will face in the future with the help and support of the faculty at OGS.