



# Qualitative Research in IS: Issues and Trends

By Eileen Moore Trauth

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This study seeks to help the information systems researcher determine which qualitative methods are most appropriate for addressing their particular research questions. The details of specific research projects provide the backdrop for the discussion of methodological issues.

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## Qualitative Research in IS: Issues and Trends By Eileen Moore Trauth Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #5161247 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Idea Group Publishing
- Published on: 2001-04
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 10.00" h x .75" w x 7.01" l, 1.24 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 308 pages

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Eileen Trauth's book is a valuable contribution to the Information Systems discipline, especially to researchers." -- *Dorothy G. Dologite, City University of New York*

The author draws on the collective expertise of IS specialists to explore the issues they've encountered in using qualitative methods. -- *Business Horizons, January-February 2002*

This book presents what many PhD students want to read: Practical, relevant accounts of issues encountered by qualitative IS researchers. -- *Walter Fernandez, Information Systems Management Research Center*

Trauth has assembled 11 chapters that report on the authors' use of qualitative research in the field of information systems. -- *Book News, Inc., 5-29-01*

#### About the Author

Eileen M. Trauth is Professor of Management Information Systems in the College of Business Administration at Northeastern University in Boston. Her research interests are at the intersection of socio-cultural and organizational influences on IT and the IT profession. She has just completed a multi-year investigation of socio-cultural influences on Ireland's information economy. Her book, *The Culture of an Information Economy: Influences and Impacts in the Republic of Ireland* was published in 2000. Trauth has recently embarked upon a multi-country study of socio-cultural influences on gender in the IT profession. She has also published papers on global informatics, information policy, information management, IT skills, and qualitative research methodology. In addition to editing this book, Dr. Trauth is co-author of *Information Literacy: An Introduction to Information Systems*. She has taught and conducted research in Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, The Netherlands, New Zealand and the UK, and serves on the editorial boards of several international journals. Dr. Trauth received her Ph.D. in information science from the University of Pittsburgh.

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As information technologies have evolved, so too has our understanding of the information systems that employ them. A significant part of this evolving understanding is the role of the human contexts within which information systems are situated. This, in turn, has led to the need for appropriate methods of studying information systems in their context of use. There is a growing consensus that qualitative research methods offer important benefits to the study of information systems. This recognition has spawned the demand for more in-depth discussion of the various types of qualitative IS methods so that researchers can determine ones that are most appropriate for addressing their particular research problems. The objective of *Qualitative Research in IS: Issues and Trends* is to address this need. Its intent is to assist IS researchers in their efforts to learn about and employ qualitative methods for IS research. A significant portion of established and emerging IS researchers are grappling with the issue of learning about new research methods even as they struggle to keep up with new information technologies. This is especially the case for qualitative methods. Many current IS researchers learned research methodology at a time when quantitative analysis was deemed the only legitimate scientific approach. They are now confronted with the need to teach themselves these new qualitative methods. Others may have developed expertise in the use of one particular qualitative method while in school but would now like to learn about alternative qualitative methods. Finally members of the community of qualitative IS researchers need to hear from each other about the challenges and rewards

of employing qualitative methods for information systems research. This book begins by considering trends in the choice of qualitative methods for information systems research. The book then goes on to explore concrete issues that researchers have encountered in the use of a particular qualitative method. It ends by raising issues for the IS profession and suggesting responses. To achieve its objective, this book draws upon the collective expertise of distinguished scholars who employ qualitative methods in their own research. These individuals are widely known for their experience in conducting qualitative research. They include: Richard Baskerville, Dubravka Cecez-Kecmanovic, Heinz Klein, Allen Lee, Enid Mumford, Michael Myers, Steve Sawyer, Ulrike Schultze, Cathy Urquhart and Eleanor Wynn. These authors address issues for individual researchers and for the IS profession from the vantage point of their own experiences. They draw upon their own published work to consider issues that they have encountered and the ways in which they have resolved them.

The audience for this book includes both IS students and IS academics. This book is suitable for use in a doctoral seminar in qualitative research in IS. It will also find an audience among established researchers. Anyone currently engaged in conducting IS research who would like to learn more about employing qualitative methods will be interested in this book.

This book fills a unique space in the IS research literature. Unlike journal articles, which focus on research findings, the focus of these chapters is on the methodology issues themselves. The details of specific research projects provide the backdrop for the discussion of methodological issues. The book also complements existing books on qualitative methodology. Some books address qualitative methodology in general. The subject of the research is not information systems per se, but rather social science in general. A problem that IS researchers often encounter with using such books is the translation of the general ideas into the specific context of IS research. This book is different in that it shows applications of these qualitative methods in a context relevant to IS researchers. Other books are about a single IS research project that employs qualitative methodology. This book is different from these books because it provides the reader with more than one example of the application of qualitative methods to IS research. A third category of books contains collections of chapters that focus on research methodology as applied to information systems research. This book falls into this category. Like other books in this category, it is a collection of chapters by a variety of established authors. However, what makes it distinctive is that the focus of each chapter is methodology rather than the research findings. While the authors discuss the content of their research projects, methodological issues are in the foreground.

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#### **Antoine Harris:**

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**Ricardo Kiernan:**

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