Report on QRAM Forum. February 23, 2019

At the AGM on February 23, 2019, QRAM conducted a forum entitled "Choosing one of the five approaches in qualitative research. How do we decide?" We had 128 participants, which includes 54 QRAM members and 74 students. The forum started at 9.10 am and ended at 11.20 am. In this forum we discussed five main approaches in qualitative research and 4 speakers were invited to share their experience and knowledge in the area. The speakers were 1) Prof Rohaida Mohd Saat, Universiti Malaya – Case Study; 2) Prof. Khatijah Lim Abdullah, University Malaya – Phenomenology & Grounded Theory; 3) Prof Lee Ei Leen, Berjaya College University – Ethnography; 4) Assoc. Prof Christy P. Gomez, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn – Action Research. Dr. Shahrim Karim from University Putra Malaysia was the moderator of the session.

The forum started with Dr. Shahrim introducing all the four panellist and posing several questions to the panel. There were 3 main questions discussed in the first part of the forum. They were: (i) what are the characteristics or unique features of the specific methodology (ii) how does the methodology contribute to the understanding of the social world and the significance of the methodology? and (iii) What are the characteristics of a good study using the specific methodology.

Brief Summary of the approaches discussed:

Case Study Research. This research arises out of a desire to understand complex social phenomena. It allows the investigator to focus on a "case" and retain a holistic and real-world perspective, for example, a small group behaviour, school performance, etc. Researchers will set their boundaries.

Phenomenology. Phenomenology focuses on the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of the phenomenon for this person or group of people who are the subjects of the study. Specifically, phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experience, for example the lived experience of a cancer patient.

Ethnography. What is the culture of a group of people. Prof Lee discussed about the Kristang community in Melaka and their language. Three generation were analysed and in general she related the research process in studying how this language is being sustained and the challenges in sustaining it. The research process took almost 9 months for data collection.

Action Research. Is an emergent inquiry process in which applied behavioural science knowledge is integrated with existing organizational knowledge and applied to solve real organizational problems. Mainly concerned with bringing about change in organizations and it is an evolving process. Primarily, it is research undertaken with the target community or organization. Dr Gomez related his experience working with quality managers in the UK to develop quality improvement methodologies in their construction organizations. The particular approach taken was that of participatory action research (PAR), with the researcher being involved actively in the change process.

Grounded Theory. This approach focuses on the process of generating theory inductively. It emphasizes steps and procedures through the constant comparative methods specifically to generate theory that are grounded in the data generated from the participants.

In the session, Q and A was conducted using "SLIDO", an online application. A number of interesting queries touching on all the five qualitative approaches were put forward by the audience which was answered by the respective panels. It proved to be an interactive session and the audience seemed to learn a lot from this exercise. The panel were not able to answer all questions due to time limit. There were many attendees who preferred to have one-to-one discussions after the forum, and there was good networking. In conclusion, the forum was a great success and was able to achieve its objectives of providing qualitative researchers an opportunity to clarify key issues related to the different qualitative research methodologies.

Reported by,

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