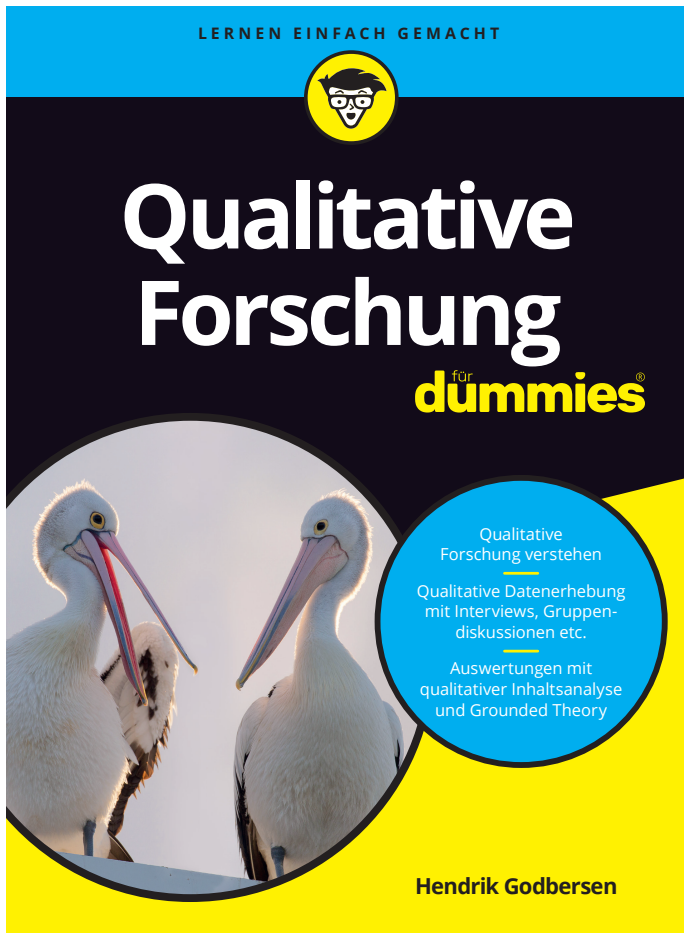Prof. Dr. Hendrik Godbersen

Analysis of Qualitative Interviews & Group Discussions

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A Step-by-step Guide

Godbersen, H. (2024). Qualitative Forschung für Dummies. Weinheim: Wiley-VCH.

The objective of Qualitative Research is

- to comprehensively examine the experiences of people with regard to specific situations and/or objects,

- to discover and explain their thoughts, emotions and behaviours in these contexts, and

- to develop generalisable theories (models) on this basis.

Application-oriented guide for
qualitative analysis, model development & result reporting

Content of the guide
- 4 phases
- 9 respective steps

Guide shows similarities to
- Qualitative Content Analysis according to Kuckartz

Methodology foundations of this guide
- Qualitative Content Analysis – cf. esp. Kuckartz, U. & Rädiker, S. (2018). Qualitative Content Analysis: Methods, Practice and Software.
- Grounded Theory Methodology – cf. esp. Strauss, A.L. & Corbin, J.M. (1996). Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques for Developing Grounded Theory.

1 Preparatory Steps

1.1 Defining the analytic frame on the basis of theory, research questions & interview guideline

1.2 Transcription of interview recordings

2 Coding & Category System

2.1 Comprehensive familiarisation with transcripts

2.2 Deriving the deductive categories from theory, research questions & interview guideline

2.3 Deductive & inductive coding of the transcripts & development of a (hierarchical) category system

3 Model Development

3.1 Analysing the contexts of categories

3.2 Deriving a theoretical model from the category system & contexts of categories

4 Result Reporting in Research Paper

4.1 Reporting of categories

4.2 Reporting of developed model

1.1 Defining the analytic frame on the basis of theory, research questions & interview guideline

- Defining the analytic frame (objective & basis for the analysis) in three steps

  - Research questions as basis

  - Interview guideline as basis

  - Theory as basis

- Maintaining theoretical sensitivity (openness to different theoretical explanations)

1.2 Transcription of interview recordings

- Decision for rather complex or rather simple transcription of the audio/video recordings on the basis of the analytic frame (step 1.1)

- Advice for research practice: rather simple transcription, which, however" must include all of the verbal and non-verbal expressions that are relevant for the research project

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- "Primal academic dilemma": Trolley Dilemma

  - Runaway trolley rolls down the main track & would kill five workers

  - Pulling a lever directs the trolley to a side track which leads to the death of one worker

Runaway trolley

Five workers

One worker

Pulling the lever can direct the train to the side track
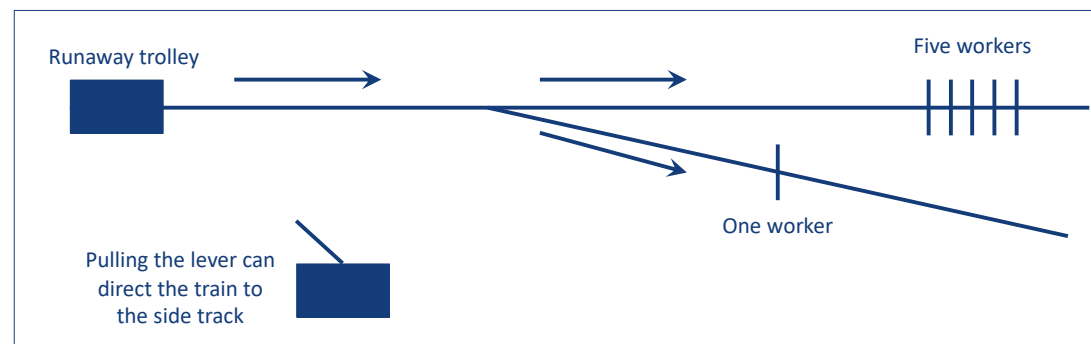
- Possible decisions

  - Utilitarian decision (pulling the lever): maximising the utility for a maximum number of people

  - Deontological decision (not pulling the lever): focusing on rules & individual rights & duties

- Research objectives: development of a model/theory about

  - Subjective reasons for & against moral dilemma decisions

  - Dealing with inner conflicts when making moral dilemma decisions

  - Application of utilitarian & deontological decision-making in "real" life

Source: Godbersen, H. & Ruiz Fernández, S. (in preparation). Subjective Decision-making and Reasoning in Moral Dilemma Situations.

2.1 Comprehensive familiarisation with transcripts

- Reading the transcripts to gain an overview ("feeling") of the data

2.2 Deriving the deductive categories from theory, research questions & interview guideline

- Defining the deductive categories on the basis of the research questions, interview guideline & theory

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2.3 Deductive & inductive coding of transcripts & development of (hierarchical) category system

- Deductive coding
  - Assigning the deductive categories to parts of the transcripts (words, statements, sentences, etc.)
- Inductive coding
  - Going through the transcripts line by line to develop and assign inductive categories
  - Categories must be abstract enough for theory development & concrete enough to represent the subjective world of participants
- Regular refinement of the inductive categories & development of a hierarchical category system
  - "Constantly" assessing and adjusting the categories with regard to explanatory & discriminatory power
  - Assigning inductive categories to more abstract higher level categories & deductive categories

Deductive & inductive coding

Example of a hierarchical category system – Moral Dilemma Decisions

- 1.1 Reasons for utilitarian decisions → Deductive category
  - 1.1.1 Situation & decision-related reasons
  - 1.1.2 Value-based reasons → Inductive category
  - 1.1.3 Determination of own actions by fate/God
- 1.2 Reasons for deontological decisions → Deductive category
  - 1.2.1 Situation & decision-related reasons
  - 1.2.2 Value-based reasons
  - 1.2.3 Non-interference with course of events determined by God/fate → Inductive category
  - 1.2.4 De-Involvement because of indifference toward people
- …

Source: Godbersen, H. & Ruiz Fernández, S. (in preparation). Subjective Decision-making and Reasoning in Moral Dilemma Situations.

Research Example: Moral Dilemma Decisions

Category system

1 Resaons for decision

  1.1 Reasons for utilitarian decision

    1.1.1 Situation & decision-related reasons

      1.1.1.1 5 persons > 1 person & 1 person < 5 persons

        1.1.1.1.1 Well-being of 5 persons > well-being of 1 person

        1.1.1.1.2 Suffering of 1 person < suffering of 5 persons

        1.1.1.1.3 Objective of a lower number of bereaved

        1.1.1.1.4 Effect on life of 5 persons > effect on life of 1 person

      1.1.1.2 Reducing guild by choosing the lesser evil

      1.1.1.3 Reflexive action based on common sense

    1.1.2 Value-based reasons

      1.1.2.1 Roots in socialisation & expereinces

      1.1.2.2 Equality of human lives as basic principle

      1.1.2.3 Social responsibility as basic principle

      1.1.2.4 Self-determination through activity

      1.1.2.5 Understanding non-decisions as active decisions

    1.1.3 Determination of own actions by fate/God

  1.2 Reasons for deontological decision

    1.2.1 Situation & decision-related reasons

      1.2.1.1 Reducing guild through avoiding active decision

      1.2.1.2 Innocence of person affected

      1.2.1.3 Reflexive action based on (gut) feeling

    1.2.2 Value-based reasons

      1.2.2.1 Roots in socialisation & experiences

      1.2.2.2 Rejection of charging lives against each other

        1.2.2.2.1 Rejection of charging the values of human lives against each other

        1.2.2.2.2 Rejection of charging the values of the effects of humans on live against each other

      1.2.2.3 Proscription of deciding about life and death

      1.2.2.4 Differentiating between active decision & passiveness

    1.2.3 Non-interference with course of events determined by God/fate

    1.2.4 De-involvement because of indifference toward people

Research Example: Moral Dilemma Decisions

Category system

1.3 Additional factors for decision-making

  1.3.1 Characteristics & value of those affected

    1.3.1.1 Positive characteristics of persons affected

      1.3.1.1.1 Achievements (potential) for closer social environment

      1.3.1.1.2 Achievements (potential) for wider social environment

      1.3.1.1.3 Potential for future life experiences & good life

    1.3.1.2 Negative characteristics of persons affected

  1.3.2 Emotional relationship to persons affected

  1.3.3 Personal advantage from consequences of decision

2 Reasons against decision

  …

3 Dealing with inner conflicts

  …

4 Decision-making in "normal" life

  …

Source: Godbersen, H. & Ruiz Fernández, S. (in preparation). Subjective Decision-making and Reasoning in Moral Dilemma Situations.

3.1 Analysing the context of categories

- Analysing the context of categories to possibly discover relationships – possible guiding questions

  - Who does/says something?

  - When does a person do/say something?

  - Where does a person do/says this?

  - How does a person do/say this?

  - Why/to what end does a person do/say this?

- Please note: A separate context analysis is not necessary in every research project, as the context might be already analysed & considered during coding & category system development

3.2 Deriving a theoretical model from the category system & context of categories

- The type of model depends on the research questions (& theory) & analysis (&data)

  a) "Static phenomenon": Hierarchical category system = developed model

  b) "Dynamic phenomenon": Network model, process model or root-cause model has to be derived from hierarchical category system & context of categories

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4.1 Reporting of categories

- Objective
  - Reader should comprehend categories on a theoretical level
  - Reader should comprehend the subjective world of the participants based on the categories
- Reporting categories in research paper
  - Label/name of the category
  - Theoretical definition & characterisation of the category
  - Quote from the transcripts as a concrete example of the category

4.2 Reporting of developed model

- Objective
  - Reader should comprehend the developed model
- Reporting of developed model in research paper
  - Normally, presentation of a graphical model
  - Please note: model must also be explained in text

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Reporting the category "Hoping for understanding and forgiveness" in article

"An aspect of dealing with the inner conflict after a decision in a moral dilemma decision can be

to hope that others understand the decision and that the bereaved can forgive the actions

taken, e.g., "…naturally, the forgiveness and understanding of the bereaved is important to me".

Source: Godbersen, H. & Ruiz Fernández, S. (in preparation). Subjective Decision-making and Reasoning in Moral Dilemma Situations.

Overall model of decision-making & dealing with inner conflicts in moral dilemma situations
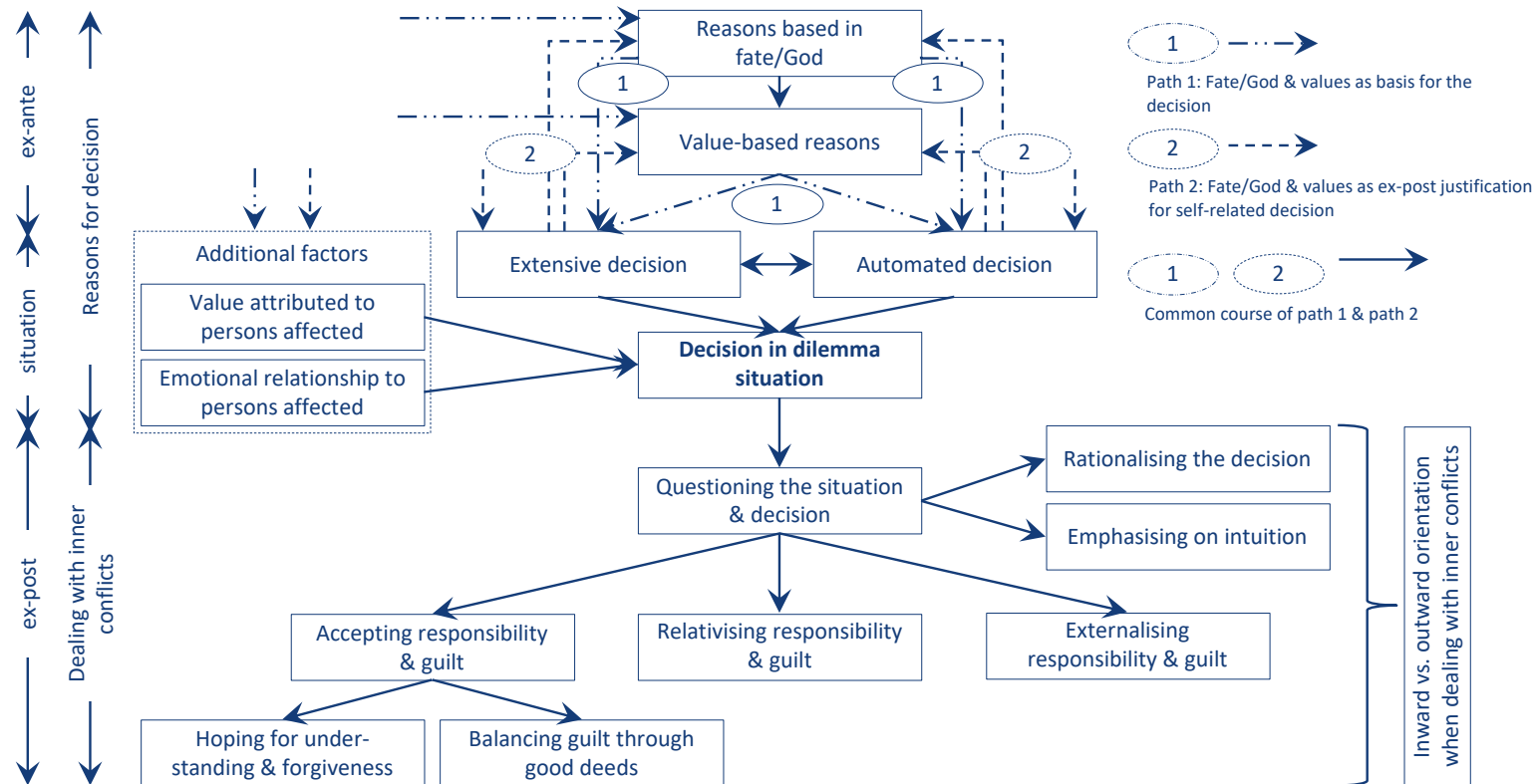
Source: Godbersen, H. & Ruiz Fernández, S. (in preparation). Subjective Decision-making and Reasoning in Moral Dilemma Situations.

Differentiated model of decision-making in moral dilemma situations (utilitarian vs. deontological decision)

Reasons based in fate/God

Utilitarian decision
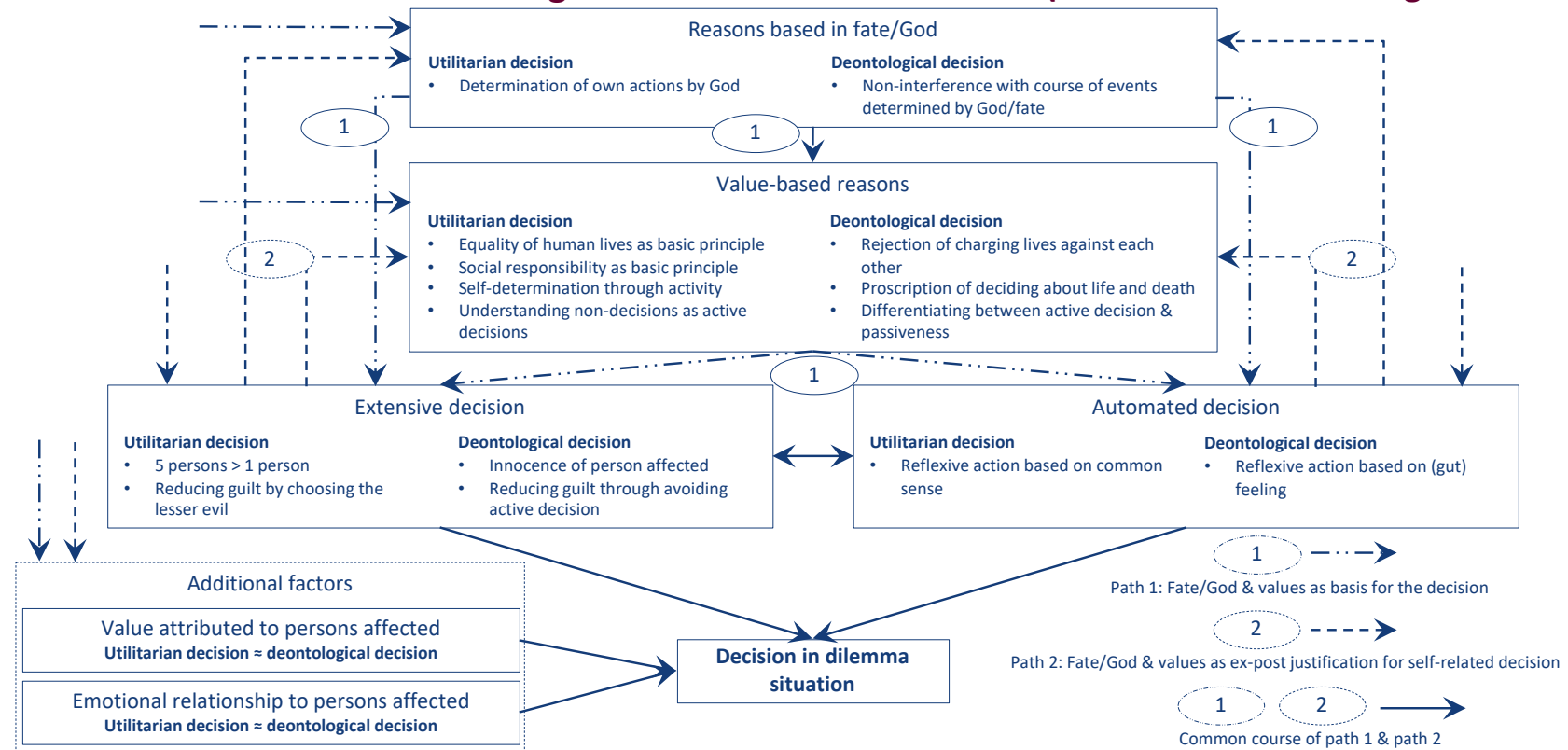- Determination of own actions by God

Deontological decision
- Non-interference with course of events determined by God/fate

① ① ①

Value-based reasons

Utilitarian decision
- Equality of human lives as basic principle
- Social responsibility as basic principle
- Self-determination through activity
- Understanding non-decisions as active decisions

Deontological decision
- Rejection of charging lives against each other
- Proscription of deciding about life and death
- Differentiating between active decision & passiveness

② ②

Extensive decision

Utilitarian decision
- 5 persons > 1 person
- Reducing guilt by choosing the lesser evil

Deontological decision
- Innocence of person affected
- Reducing guilt through avoiding active decision

① **Automated decision**

Utilitarian decision
- Reflexive action based on common sense

Deontological decision
- Reflexive action based on (gut) feeling

Additional factors

Value attributed to persons affected
Utilitarian decision ≈ deontological decision

Emotional relationship to persons affected
Utilitarian decision ≈ deontological decision

Decision in dilemma situation

① Path 1: Fate/God & values as basis for the decision

② Path 2: Fate/God & values as ex-post justification for self-related decision

① ② Common course of path 1 & path 2

Source: Godbersen, H. & Ruiz Fernández, S. (in preparation). Subjective Decision-making and Reasoning in Moral Dilemma Situations.

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