

■ **TABLE 12.1** Twelve Major Characteristics of Qualitative Research

### Design Strategies

1. *Naturalistic inquiry*—Studying real-world situations as they unfold naturally; nonmanipulative and noncontrolling; openness to whatever emerges (lack of predetermined constraints on findings).
2. *Emergent design flexibility*—Openness to adapting inquiry as understanding deepens and/or situations to change; the researcher avoids getting locked into rigid designs that eliminate responsiveness and pursues new paths of discovery as they emerge.
3. *Purposeful sampling*—Cases for study (e.g., people, organizations, communities, cultures, events, critical incidences) are selected because they are “information rich” and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest; sampling, then, is aimed at insight about the phenomenon, not empirical generalization from a sample to a population.

### Data-Collection and Fieldwork Strategies

4. *Qualitative data*—Observations that yield detailed, thick description; inquiry in depth; interviews that capture direct quotations about people’s personal perspectives and experiences; case studies; careful document review.
5. *Personal experience and engagement*—The researcher has direct contact with and gets close to the people, situation, and phenomenon under study; the researcher’s personal experiences and insights are an important part of the inquiry and critical to understanding the phenomenon.
6. *Empathic neutrality and mindfulness*—An empathic stance in interviewing seeks vicarious understanding without judgment (neutrality) by showing openness, sensitivity, respect, awareness, and responsiveness; in observation it means being fully present (mindfulness).
7. *Dynamic systems*—Attention to process; assumes change as ongoing whether focus is on an individual, an organization, a community, or

an entire culture; therefore, mindful of and attentive to system and situation dynamics.

### Analysis Strategies

8. *Unique case orientation*—Assumes that each case is special and unique; the first level of analysis is being true to, respecting, and capturing the details of the individual cases being studied; cross-case analysis follows from and depends on the quality of individual case studies.
9. *Inductive analysis and creative synthesis*—Immersion in the details and specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes, and interrelationships; begins by exploring, then confirming, guided by analytical principles rather than rules, ends with a creative synthesis.
10. *Holistic perspective*—The whole phenomenon under study is understood as a complex system that is more than the sum of its parts; focus on complex interdependencies and system dynamics that cannot meaningfully be reduced to a few discrete variables and linear, cause-effect relationships.
11. *Context sensitivity*—Places findings in a social, historical, and temporal context; careful about, even dubious of, the possibility or meaningfulness of generalizations across time and space; emphasizes instead careful comparative case analyses and extrapolating patterns for possible transferability and adaptation in new settings.
12. *Voice, perspective, and reflexivity*—The qualitative analyst owns and is reflective about her or his own voice and perspective; a credible voice conveys authenticity and trustworthiness; complete objectivity being impossible and pure subjectivity undermining credibility, the researcher’s focus becomes balance—understanding and depicting the world authentically in all its complexity while being self-analytical, politically aware, and reflexive in consciousness.