
Abstract
XH: Experience and/or Heuristic
Studies reported here of <qualitative empirical software engineering research> supported by <observation/interview, coding, and some quantitative methods> generate a number of findings concerning <how to do qualitative software engineering research>, including <proper consideration of tradeoffs implicit in techniques available (e.g.: wrt structuring interviews, checking for inter-rater reliability, and maintaining optimal distant from subjects>). They indicate that <scientific rigor> is met by <applying these guidelines>.

Question - [Method/means of development]
What is a better way to do qualitative empirical software engineering research?

Results - [Report]
The authors weave a number of guidelines into their survey of various qualitative research techniques. While the authors note that the high complexity of software engineering research makes these guidelines even more valuable, it is important to notice that these guidelines actually apply to qualitative research in general, and not just to software engineering in particular.

The guidelines largely center on the importance of considering tradeoffs implicit in the techniques available for qualitative research. For example:

- Increasing the structure of an interview facilitates analysis but decreases the possibility of adequately capturing the full context and information available.
- Checks for inter-rater reliability increase the believability of results, except for the fact that they usually highlight how different raters’ impressions really are, forcing a “fix-up” stage.
- Keeping a close relational distance to the subjects helps to ensure that the researcher really understands the context and information, but it can also lead to bias.

The authors do not seem to offer any hard-and-fast rules concerning these tradeoffs, but rather argue that researchers should be aware of these tradeoffs so in order to be able to prevent excessive deleterious effects from erring too far to one side on any particular tradeoff.

Validation – [Experience]
The authors use a series of real software engineering research studies to exemplify how these issues apply to our domain of research and to show that they are valid considerations for software engineering researchers.