Is QuIP the right approach for me?

Background

The QuIP stands for Qualitative Impact Protocol, and is an impact assessment method devised by Prof James Copestake and Fiona Remnant whilst at the Centre for Development Studies at the University of Bath. Bath Social & Development Research Ltd (Bath SDR), a non-profit independent research consultancy, was set up following the end of the research project with a remit to promote better standards of qualitative and mixed methods impact evaluation of public and private investments with explicit social and development goals. Bath SDR is responsible for the curation of QuIP outside of the university through ongoing application and writing, but also through training practitioners in its use in a range of different contexts.

Bath SDR has now trained numerous data collection teams and analysts, and conducted over 75 QuIP studies in more than 20 different countries. More information on previous studies can be found on our website.

QuIP Approach

The QuIP was designed as a way to address the 'attribution problem', a long-cited problem in impact evaluation. This non-experimental, qualitative approach aims to collect credible information directly from intended beneficiaries on significant drivers of change in selected domains of their life over a pre-defined period of change. This is particularly useful in complex contexts where a variety of factors that are hard to disentangle can influence the outcomes of an intervention.

There are strong ethical grounds for asking people directly about the effect of actions intended to benefit them, doing so can also contribute practically to learning, innovation and wider accountability. But doing so entails finding credible ways to address potential response biases, particularly pro-project or confirmation bias, which is regarded as a major weakness of relying on what people say has happened to them. The QuIP does this by arranging for qualitative data collection to take place with as little reference as possible to the specific activity being evaluated, and by giving equal weight to all possible drivers of change. This is achieved by working, where possible, with field researchers who are completely independent of the organisation responsible for the actions being evaluated. Indeed, where possible field researchers are 'blindfolded' from knowing the identity of the organisation being evaluated, as well as details of what it is doing, and the theory of change behind its actions.

Questionnaires are designed to probe what has changed in respondents' lives in predetermined areas of their lives – looking for 'most significant change' stories and associated reported drivers and outcomes. Narrative data collected by independent field researchers is then cross-analysed against the commissioner's project activities to identify unexpected as well as anticipated drivers of change, and the attribution of those changes – whether to project interventions or other drivers of change. The QuIP uses a unique approach to qualitative thematic analysis to code and present data - focusing on the **causal mechanisms** within responses collected. This task is undertaken by analysts with experience of qualitative thematic coding who are fully briefed on the theory of change of the project being assessed and who can therefore look for evidence of impact relating to the intervention.

Questionnaire design

QuIP questionnaires are tailored specifically to each project's theory of change, but remain very open-ended and exploratory, collecting information about selected aspects of respondents' lives and livelihoods. The questions are deliberately designed to ask about change over a specified period of time and research teams are trained to probe respondents for reasons why change has happened. This aims to elicit unprompted references to drivers of change rather than asking specifically about particular interventions. This enables the creation of a broad picture of change over a defined period, providing more contextual information about the impact of development projects alongside other important drivers. So, rather than asking:

- Please tell me how the training in irrigation methods changed the way you look after your crops?

A QuIP questionnaire would incorporate a section on farming which would start with:

- Please tell me whether the way that you look after your crops has changed in the last two years, and if so why?

  If the training did indeed have an impact on farming methods, you would expect to hear about that in this section, with additional probing questions from interviewers to help ensure that the conversation is detailed enough.

If you need to collect very specific answers to questions about interventions, or if you are unsure that respondents would volunteer responses about change unprompted, you may need to look at an alternative approach.

The questionnaires would be used with a randomised sub-section of a pre-selected purposive sample of households/ individuals as well as focus groups where relevant. Interviews usually take 1 - 1.5 hours, and researchers are trained to use probing questions to collect as much detailed 'attribution' data as possible.

Case selection

QuIP studies are usually planned in discrete sets of around 24 individual interviews and 4 focus groups. From experience we have found that this is a large enough number to gather detailed qualitative information within a selected homogenous group or community, taking account of the likely diminished marginal returns from many more than this number. However, the size of the QuIP is to be confirmed with the Commissioner and this is flexible. Increasing the scope of the QuIP across heterogeneous groups or projects is best done by commissioning a number of 'QuIP studies' across different types of communities and/or beneficiary types rather than simply scaling up within the same sample which would be of limited benefit.

One good starting point for thinking about sampling for a QuIP study is to look at contextual variation. If we expect causal processes to be different for different sub-groups, and we have data that enables us to identify those sub-groups prior to sample selection then there is a case for stratified random sampling.

Exposure variation: Although a control group is not strictly necessary for a QuIP study, it is possible to include data from a sample of non-beneficiaries as a source of extra information about incidental (and potentially confounding) drivers of change. For example, focus groups can be carried out in a 'control' community. Non-direct beneficiaries may also be sampled to

ascertain the success of ripple effects on wider communities. If data is available on variation in who directly received what and when, and it is expected that these differences will have different causal effects, then there is a case for stratifying the sample to ensure it reflects the full range of such exposure. This is particularly the case if one purpose of the study is to aid decisions about which of a range of project activities or packages to expand or to stop. Impact assessment using the QuIP does not require a control group of people completely unaffected by the project. There may nevertheless be an argument for interviewing some people unaffected by the project, but similar to those affected by it in order to explore whether they come up with a different set of drivers of change.

In addition to stratifying according to contextual and exposure variation a third reason for departing from pure randomisation in sample selection is to cluster respondents geographically in order to reduce the time and cost of data collection. There is often a strong case for using contextual information (e.g. about agro-ecological zones) to purposefully select or at least stratify area selection. There may also be a case for staggering studies – i.e. conducting two smaller studies a few months apart rather than doing a single larger study. This can help to build understanding of project impact lags, pathways and cumulative processes, as well as those of other drivers of change. Sampling strategy for repeat studies can also be informed by lessons from earlier studies. Again, the principle here is that credibility of findings builds incrementally with the addition of each extra piece of evidence.

Deciding who to interview, how many people to interview, and how best to select them requires clarity about what information is being sought, by whom and why. Differences in sampling strategy arise from whether the priority is to confirm and quantify the overall impact of a completed project on a defined population in relation to a predetermined set of measurable indicators, or to identify and explore what is happening in a more open-ended way – to improve implementation of an on-going project, for example. The QuIP is a relatively open-ended approach. Its primary purpose is to gather evidence of causal processes at play, not to quantify them.

Deciding on the **number** of interviews and focus groups to conduct depends less on reducing sample bias than on assessing at what point the extra insight into the range of possible causal processes influencing outcomes gained from collecting more data no longer justifies the extra cost.

Data analysis and reporting

Data analysis and reporting is managed by a trained analyst who is fully briefed on the hypotheses being tested, and codes evidence of causal drivers for attribution, according to whether they explicitly refer to project activities, implicitly corroborate its theory of change, or are incidental but potentially significant. This helps to answer the following questions:

1. Is the programme having the expected effect on intended beneficiaries?
2. What other factors have affected expected outcomes, and how do these factors relate to each other?
3. Has the programme had any unanticipated effects, positive or negative?
4. What drivers of change or patterns can be identified that could inform future programme design?

As well as attribution coding, analysts also code for drivers and associated outcomes - reflecting 'causal claims' through chains of drivers and outcomes. The data is presented in a

way which makes cross-reference to raw data very easy, maintaining a close connection between responses and analysis.

This approach enables analysis on how closely respondents' experiences match the presumed theory of change, and how different drivers may have interacted to mitigate or help intended change. Basic reports do not seek to make specific recommendations or place a value on the impacts, but use the evidence to allow the intended beneficiaries' voice to take centre-stage in analysis which can kick-start internal discussions on implications for future programme design. Attendance by the Lead QuIP Evaluator and field team at an un-blindfolding workshop can help to close the feedback loop by discussing implications of findings, discussions which can then be incorporated into a final report. Thematic experts can be recruited to lead on evaluations where recommendations are required.

The credibility of causal claims generated using the QuIP in a particular context, of the type 'X was a cause of a change in Y' can be broken down into four components:

1. There is sufficient evidence that X and changes in Y happened,
2. a sufficient proportion of respondents asserted without prompting that X was a cause of the change in Y,
3. these assertions are consistent with plausible theory explaining how this could have happened, and
4. there is no obviously more credible counter-explanation for why respondents might have said this.

Timings and dependencies

The QuIP was designed to be a time and cost-effective approach, using a limited sample and a structured approach to coding data to speed up the process. However, the logistics of collecting data in remote areas remain challenging and getting all the data required for sampling can be time consuming, so timings can vary. Using a team of two interviewers (usually one male and one female) allow for two interviews per researcher per day. Taking account of travel logistics and availability of respondents, a single QuIP (24 individuals and 4 focus groups) typically takes around 2 weeks (depending on how far apart respondents are located). Coding and analysis of data from a single QuIP should be able to be completed within 2-3 weeks, but this depends on the experience of the analyst and the extent to which they can dedicate themselves to the task. The time for coding a double QuIP will be slightly less than double as there are some time savings from familiarisation with the data.

Budget

Bath SDR budgets are put together for each project depending on the needs of the evaluation as well as the countries we will be working in. Training is available from Bath SDR for different elements of the work to enable you to use your own staff or hired consultants, see our website for further details. When putting together a budget you will need to consider:

- Recruitment and training of a local research team, to include a lead researcher who manages the process and at least two interviewers. One of these interviewers can also be the lead evaluator, but bear in mind that this person will typically command a higher day rate as they are responsible for the organisation of the team and quality control of transcripts. At BSDR we allow for two interviews per day per researcher, plus additional days for training, preparation and writing up. Training is available from BSDR if required - see more details and costs here
- Travel to data collection sites; vehicle hire, fuel and per diems for researchers.
- Training of QuIP analysts and a subscription to Causal Map for coding and analysing the data; www.causalmap.app/subscriptions
- Coding and analysing the data (see preceding section for more on timings)
- Any additional follow-up meetings or workshops.

Other approaches

QuIP is inspired by and closely related to a family of outcomes-based approaches. Before deciding whether QuIP is right for you, you may wish to look at a chapter from the QuIP Casebook: Comparing the QuIP with other approaches to development impact evaluation

More information on QuIP can be found in the book, Attributing Development Impact, freely available online.