

Nick EMMEL: Sampling and Choosing Cases in Qualitative Research. A realist approach

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ABSTRACT

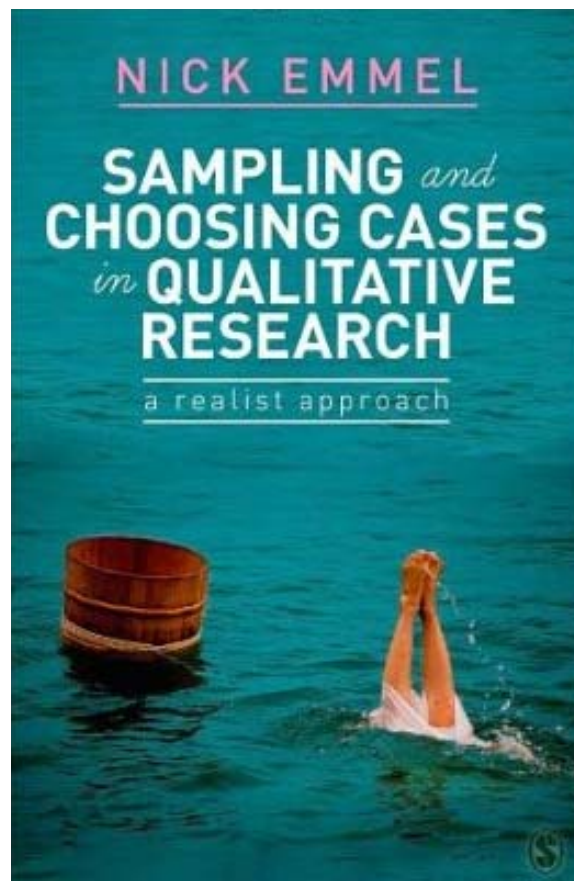
Nick Emmel's book, *Sampling and Choosing Cases in Qualitative Research. A realist approach*, stresses and lightens an important issue in qualitative research conducted in social sciences: sampling or choosing cases.

Key words: sampling; qualitative research; choosing cases; Nick Emmel

From a structural perspective, the book's information is organized in two main parts: the first one including three chapters and the second one divided into six chapters. The nine chapters are preceded by the *Introduction: from sampling to choosing cases*.

From the early beginning, the author expresses in *Introduction* its dubitative opinion regarding the appropriate use of the verb sampling in the context of the qualitative research. Emmel apprises that this conceptual fuzziness doesn't lay only on this sampling issue but goes further on the three main cases of sampling: theoretical, purposeful and theoretical or purposive.

Based on the three traditions in qualitative research sampling, the author builds the first part of the book taking a lot of care for historical, methodological and conceptual details. The first chapter develops the evolutionary story of the grounded theory and theoretical sampling form positivism to constructivism. Emmel starts by presenting Glaser and Strauss (1967) theoretical and research work in the field of grounded theory



and scaffolds his argumentation with the work of Strauss and Corbin (1990) ending in the paradigm of the constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006). In the end of the first chapter it is pointed out one of the biggest changes in theoretical sampling: the reflexive researcher.

The next chapter moves to *Purposeful Sampling* and introduces the pragmatic researcher using purposeful sampling strategies. Patton's 14+1 sampling strategies are the core of the chapter adding value to the qualitative research form a practical perspective. The last chapter of the part one is focused on the case of theoretical or purposive sample bringing in the interpretative analytic induction. The author emphasizes the new position of the researcher as a part of his research work, making decisions and being intellectually involved.

In the second part of the book the focus is on a realist approach to sampling in qualitative research as the author himself states. This six-chapter part starts by retaking into account the five propositions Emmel made in *Introduction*. Chapter four is designed to state the basics of a realist approach in qualitative research. Chapter five continues the reflection on the purposive work and on the role of the intellectual work of the researcher in his work and decision making process. In this case the presuppositions, opinions, interests and knowledge of the researcher have a significant influence in research shaping. Chapter six puts into the light the concept of cases and explains how cases become research based on purposeful choices. The role of the researcher is essential and active in transforming a sample into cases and furthermore in valuable insights through interpretation and explanation. The seventh chapter reveals how researcher's ideas could transform purposive sampling into a purposeful one. Also in this chapter the reader will find some challenges emerging form a realistic casing methodology such as unrepresentativeness of the sample and difficulties in generalizing the findings. The author continues in chapter eight with expressing another actual and present challenge in qualitative research: the sample size. He reflects on issues like small samples and number of cases to be sampled in qualitative research. Chapter nine lightens up the ideas of the author in choosing cases in qualitative research from a very practical and realistic point of view.

Nevertheless the book proposes a dense lecture and addresses a wide range of scholars in social sciences like researchers or teachers, young PhDs and students interested in qualitative research. Emmel presents and critically evaluates different methodologies used to casing in qualitative research. *Sampling and Choosing Cases in Qualitative Research* builds in a relevant and interesting way a link between theoretical framework, author's personal reflection and examples coming from the research practice.