

evidence about the data in order to be able to make a conclusion and justify his/her decision to generalise. The qualitative researcher can aid this process by undertaking a thorough job of describing the research context and the assumptions that were central to the research so that the person, who wishes to make the transfer, can make an informed judgement about whether, or not, it is sensible to generalise the data to his/her context.

- **Dependability**

The quantitative perspective of reliability is based on the assumption of repeatability (see above). In qualitative research dependability relates to the stability of the data over time and conditions. This emphasises the need for researchers to account for the ever-changing context within which the research occurs, describing the changes that occur in the setting and how these changes affected the way the research was approached.

Stepwise replication (similar in concept to the principle of split-half test of reliability - see above) and **inquiry audits** are two techniques which can be used by qualitative researchers to assess the dependability of their data.

- **Confirmability**

Qualitative research tends to assume that each researcher brings a unique perspective to the study. Confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed or corroborated by others, relating to the objectivity or neutrality of the data. Inquiry audits can help to establish dependability and confirmability of data. A data audit which examines the data collection and analysis procedures can enable judgements about the potential for bias and distortion to be made

Your reading may highlight a confusing debate about the concept of reliability and validity from the perspective of the two different research approaches. Some proponents appear to argue that correct reading of the quantitative criteria shows they can be equally applied to the qualitative situation. Others counter argue the relevance of these criteria to qualitative studies. There doesn't, however, appear to be a convincing, comprehensive explanation of how to translate these processes between the two different perspectives!

However what is essential is to keep these two concepts in mind when evaluating the findings of others or designing and conducting your own study. We can place little confidence in the outcomes of research studies where data collection procedures result in information which is of poor quality. One must also question the ethics of such a study.