Review:

Marilyn Lichtman

Patricia Bazeley & Lyn Richards (2000). The NVivo Qualitative Project Book.
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Abstract: This book is a welcome addition for the reader who wants to learn about the mechanics
of using the specific qualitative software as well as the more advanced user who wants ideas about
conceptualizing and developing theory. The accompanying CD-Rom includes a version of the soft-
ware program and some examples taken from the researchers' experiences. While the version is
operational, it will not permit you to save any new data.

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1. Introduction

The NVivo Qualitative Project Book by Patricia BAZELEY and Lyn RICHARDS
published in 2000 by Sage is a welcome addition to the NVivo manual that
accompanies the software and the Lyn RICHARDS' book entitled "Using NVivo in
Qualitative Research" (RICHARDS, 1999). According to the preface, this book is
designed to introduce the software tools in the context of a real-life project. To
facilitate this aim, a CD with a demonstration version of the software and some
examples accompany the book. The authors say, rightfully so I think, that NVivo
is part of the new generation of qualitative software because the NVivo software
provides the researcher with an opportunity to conduct analyses that are not just
simple coding and looking for emerging themes. Rather, the software enables the
qualitative researcher to conduct complex analyses and theory-building, while
simultaneously letting him or her stay close to the rich thick descriptions that are
a hallmark of qualitative writing. Linking to external documents and visuals are
another strength of the software. Users of NVivo continuously seek instruction on
the mechanics of the program as well as conceptual aspects. [1]

For whom is this book targeted? One group is people who might be interested in using NVivo, but have not yet purchased it. The CD-ROM will enable them to learn about the software. Another group is readers who already own NVivo. This latter group could benefit from the additional demonstrations. The primary difference is that users who do not have NVivo installed on their computers will not be able to save their data. If you choose to use the demonstration in this manner, it is most useful to work with the data provided on the CD rather than your own data. It would certainly be frustrating to use your own data only to discover that you cannot save it. [2]

Both BAZELEY and RICHARDS are particularly well qualified to write this book. Lyn RICHARDS, as one of the original developers (together with Tom RICHARDS) knows the software from its inception. BAZELY provides technical support and training in the use of the software. I also noticed that Ted BARRINGTON served as a reader and critic. BARRINGTON regularly provides useful and effective technical support for users through a help desk. So, we are off to a good start here. [3]

2. General Overview

The book is organized into nine parts that are designed to take you through a typical project. An appendix provides information on how to prepare text documents. It also includes instructions on how to construct attribute tables, a function I found confusing in the NVivo manual. Its format follows the style of software training manuals, with bulleted points, tips, and an ample amount of white space. Two annoying things: I do not like the illustrations at the beginning of each part since they imply that this work is child's play and to some extent trivializes the tasks at hand. Secondly, I could not determine what D.I.Y. (with a shovel) meant. This symbol marks some tasks, but I could not find what the initials meant. [4]

I think I agree with the philosophy that qualitative software is best learned by doing, particularly using the tools as they are needed. It is quite difficult to learn various search tools when you are not faced with a particular problem. While the tool is perhaps nice to have in your shopping bag, it is often difficult to remember what you have learned. So, this book begins with assisting you to "Start a Project" that may not necessarily have a firm theory, hypothesis, or research goal. While this is a philosophical viewpoint with which I agree, many researchers (especially students) are pushed into considerably more structure before embarking on a project. I believe the software is also useful for that purpose as well. After going through the preliminaries of how to get a project operational, the book quickly introduces you to preliminary coding and then takes you through the creation and editing of documents. It moves into complex coding approaches as well as helping you with building trees and sets. [5]

One of the strong features of NVivo is the "Search Tool". I have found that users are fairly quick to catch on to coding, but often run into difficulties with the complex search components of NVivo. The reader is also introduced to

management of nodes into trees, advanced coding features and finally the synthesis of ideas. These tasks are explained in some detail. [6]

3. Some Specifics Regarding Content and Format

In this review, I planned to explore each of the nine parts from the viewpoint of a novice user and work only with the CD provided with the book. That plan did not work, however, since I already have the software on my computer. I was only able to install the researchers' project. I will have to assume that if you use the software provided, that it works the same way as using it with the full program, with the exception that you cannot save your work. I worked through most of the exercises provided in the CD and will comment on those in the remainder of this review. One warning! Be sure to locate "Open a Tutorial Project" to find the relevant files that accompany the text. [7]

3.1 Part 1—"Making a Start"

I will talk about this initial chapter in some detail for that is the place where the reader decides whether or not they can use this material. In a book like this, I think it would be helpful to insure that the initial startup is easy and users feel successful. The structure of each of the sections is that general instructions are given followed by specific instructions for the authors' research project printed in a simulated notebook. That is nice because it is easy to find. I recall new students having difficulty with knowing how to navigate through the system to locate the project they are working on. This manual does not really address the issue. It would be helpful to address the differences between a new and existing project and to tell the user exactly how to do each. Another navigation problem occurs when the authors want you to make a link to an external data bite, but don't really tell you how to find it. [8]

The directions for starting a new project are relatively simple and clear for the new user The first task you are given is to create a project journal. Clear instructions are provided that enable you to format your project journal with headings and subheadings and font alternatives I found the examples quite helpful for this initial document, although I did not see any instructions for opening an existing project. [9]

Any book will not answer all questions. One problem new users have is that they do not know how to save documents. In fact, documents are automatically saved, but that is learned by trial and error or experience. I would have liked it if the writers had included a statement that the content of the documents is automatically saved once the document is closed. So many people get worried that their information will be lost. Of course, the user will quickly find out when going to "Explore Project Documents" that the material is quite safe. [10]

One of the very nice features of NVivo is to make links to external data. These directions are introduced early and fairly easy to follow. A minor annoyance: At times the authors tell you to click on an icon, but do not identify which icon. The

use of the icons in the text would greatly help this. For example, you are told to link to the DataBite symbol. Since I am an experienced user, I know it is <u>DB</u>. It would save some time for the new user to try to determine which symbol this is. Most of the time, the careful reader can figure this out. When you follow the directions, you are led to external databites window. Since there is only one file in the window, you would know to choose this. But in the directions for the research project, it would help to give the file a name, rather than to just say locate the photo file. I believe that new users like specific and detailed information right at the beginning. As directions progress, users will have less of a need for such specifics, but I think the book would be better if these details were taken care of early on. [11]

I really appreciated the explanation about modeling preliminary ideas. I think this is something qualitative researchers need to do quite often and perhaps don't do because they don't really know how. I found the specific directions on how to do this somewhat cumbersome and had to rely on alternate ways to do commands other than those discussed in the book. [12]

My overall thoughts about Part 1 are that it is a very good idea to give someone positive reinforcement by getting them started in a project with real data. The minor glitches did not detract from the overall effectiveness of this getting started section. [13]

3.2 More on using the software

The first part of this book is devoted primarily to mechanics of using the software. One of the major strengths of NVivo is the ability to code and organize material. Part 2 introduces the reader to that task. As with the earlier section, this part combines information about uses of the task and how the program works before it introduces the specific commands needed to complete a function. This section quickly moves you into a coding mode and gives some basic functions on how to code and how to see what you have coded. The tips are quite helpful as well. For example, one tip is to turn off the coding stripes in the browser because they use so much memory. The book does a very nice job of bringing you out of the coding task and into the tasks of creating and exploring models. I like this because often a user might get heavily involved in coding and lose sight of the ultimate goal. [14]

Part 3 involves "Making Data." Several ways to create data are introduced: keying in, importing, and making proxy documents. Detailed descriptions are provided regarding importing a document. Creating proxy documents is a task I had not done before and I found the directions quite helpful. Information on how to make attribute tables is also included. The explanation is good and gives the reader some additional ideas on how to do things. [15]

Part 4 addresses "Working with Data." One of the strengths of NVivo is that you can work with your research project in a variety of ways. You can add your own thoughts and ideas as you are involved in coding. The information in this part gives you a number of ideas on how to work with data. For example, how to

annotate the text using both internal annotations and documents included as data bites is described and some specific examples are included. A distinction is made between annotations and memoing. I think the ideas that are offered in this section will help to see ways of thinking about data that might not have thought about before. The chapter ends with two topics: thinking about coding and reflecting on coding and on a model. The authors move away from specific and concrete examples of how to perform operations using the software into more conceptual ideas about coding. They talk about coding up and coding down, moving from inductive to deductive reasoning. They break coding into four categories: "In Vivo" coding of exact words and phrases, descriptive coding, broad brush coding, and concept coding. This information should help users think much more broadly about coding than they previously had. The mechanics of coding are also addressed and quite easy to follow. [16]

A strength I see in this book is that the authors address ideas and ways to use the software that are not written about in the manual accompanying the software or in other written material. NVivo is a powerful software program, but unless users are challenged to think about it in ways other than just a vehicle for assigning codes to words in a transcript, its strength is quite limited. Reading the material in Part 4 should really stimulate the novice user as well as one with some experience. [17]

3.3 From mechanics to concepts

The latter portion of the book moves the reader into thinking about the underlying concepts of analysis and how to develop theory. Part 5 considers how to organize nodes into trees and to put documents and nodes into sets. Once you have more than a few documents, you need a way to manage and organize the information. The entire structure of tree nodes is explained and examples are provided. Parallels are offered to Window-Explorer. For those familiar with this tool, the comparisons are quite helpful. [18]

Part 6 addresses "Emerging Theory." I agree with the statement that the analyst needs to move beyond description to analytical categories and ultimately to a higher level of abstraction. In this section, the authors describe how to handle project data and move into theorizing. The section is quite long. It addresses thinking about your project to a much greater extent than the mechanics of doing things with your project. I think the material is much more abstract than the previous material presented and would need to be read several times. [19]

In Part 7, the authors provide ways for you to structure the concepts and categories into a logical order. It addresses ideas about how to organize your material and develop an indexing system. Like Part 6, this section offers new ways of thinking about qualitative data analysis. I think the careful reader will benefit considerably from reading this section. By looking at the "Researcher's Project," the reader will see some practical applications of some of the more obtuse issues. [20]

Part 8 offers some specifics about how to automate some of the repetitive work you might need to do. Specifically, it addresses how to work faster to import documents, to code, and to handle sets and cases. In a sense, these are shortcuts that you normally learn about after you learn to do something in a traditional way. Many of us know shortcuts for using our word processing programs. Here the authors present shortcuts for this program. [21]

The final part addresses "Getting There." This last chapter tries to assist the reader, no matter which qualitative approach is used, to move through various levels of analyses and concept development. It considers such topics as ways to review your goals and reporting on what you have learned. [22]

4. A Welcome Addition

How well does the book deliver on using the "Researcher's Project?" I would have liked to see a little more information included in the notebook pages on the mechanics of working with the existing document. Many of the examples were quite brief and somewhat incomplete. If you are using this book as a teaching device, it is a good idea to have students work on the same files. The information in the tutorials provides a good supplement, but I would like to see more information in the place where I need it. [23]

How well does the book deliver on introducing new ideas and ways of thinking about working with data and using the software? To this question, I would have to say very well. It is not really a book on how to work with the software. It assumes that you will learn that someplace else, although it does offer some tips and suggestions along the way. Its main strength is that it makes you think about the process from beginning to end in ways that are much broader than novice researchers consider. [24]

Qualitative researchers continue to be criticized because they rely too much on their own interpretations and avoid analytical and theoretical issues. This book provides ways to integrate the thinking about a project and the data you have with practical ways that the software can facilitate the process. I recommend it for both the new user as well as the experienced one. [25]

Reference

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Author

Marilyn LICHTMAN is a professor of educational research and evaluation at the Northern Virginia Center, Virginia Tech, Falls Church, Virginia. She has taught qualitative research methods for more than ten years. Her research interests involve alternative methods of teaching qualitative research. She has served on the editorial board of The Qualitative Report, an online publication from Nova University. For the past three years she has used NUD*IST and NVivo software, after attending specialized training in London. She has served as a consultant on numerous research projects, studying students at risk for school failure. She is currently a part of an assessment team working for the International Association of Chiefs of Police in their study of adolescents of US military.

Contact:

Marilyn Lichtman

Virginia Tech
7054 Haycock Road
Falls Church, VA 22043
USA

E-mail: mlichtma@vt.edu

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