

## **Rapid Qualitative Analysis for Fast-Cycle Decisions in Agricultural Education**

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### **Introduction/Need for Innovation**

Agricultural and extension education programs often need timely, trustworthy qualitative insights to inform program development, evaluation, dissemination of findings, and stakeholder engagement (Guion et al., 2011). However, traditional qualitative analysis methods—reliant on full transcription and line-by-line coding—are often too time- and cost-intensive to support fast-cycle decision-making, resulting in missed opportunities for timely program adjustments (Hamilton & Finley, 2019). This challenge is common across agricultural education, extension programming, leadership development, and evaluation contexts, where practitioners must balance methodological rigor with real-world constraints.

Rapid Qualitative Analysis addresses the above gap by offering an innovative, scalable approach that produces trustworthy findings within compressed timelines (Brown et al., 2025; Nevedal et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2018). Nevedal et al. (2021) analyzed approximately 50 hours of interview data, comprising 57–72 interviews across 16 facilities, and reduced analyst time from 683 to 409.5 hours while eliminating \$7,250 in associated transcription costs. Similarly, Taylor et al. (2018) found that rapid analysis required only 43 hours of data management compared to 116.5 hours for traditional thematic analysis, when applied to the same dataset of 33 interviews and focus group transcripts.

This innovative idea shares RQA methodology as a potential qualitative data analysis method for researchers in agricultural and extension education contexts. The quick turnaround of qualitative insights to inform decision-making is common across agricultural education, extension, leadership development, and evaluation contexts. RQA addresses this gap by offering an innovative, scalable approach that produces trustworthy findings within compressed timelines.

Rapid Qualitative Analysis leverages structured summaries, analytic matrices, and team-based sense-making to generate actionable insights without full transcription, significantly reducing analytic burden while maintaining credibility (Taylor et al., 2018). Because RQA relies on commonly available tools and adaptable workflows, it can be implemented by faculty, extension educators, evaluators, graduate students, and program teams across diverse institutional and programmatic settings.

### **How Does Rapid Qualitative Analysis (RQA) Work?**

Rapid Qualitative Analysis (RQA) is a structured, cost-effective, and reproducible workflow designed for team-based qualitative analysis using commonly available office tools (e.g., Google Docs, Sheets, or Excel). The RQA process typically involves four key steps:

1. Defining domains of inquiry aligned with stakeholder decision needs;
2. Collecting structured field notes from semi-structured interviews, focus groups, or reflective prompts;
3. Populating cross-case matrices that organize summarized data by participant and domain;
4. Engaging in collaborative sense-making through iterative memoing and team discussion.

Domains of inquiry can be developed inductively from project goals or deductively informed by implementation frameworks, such as the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR), to ensure systematic attention to contextual, organizational, and process-related factors (Averill, 2002). Data collection emphasizes structured field notes, supplemented by selective

review of audio recordings to verify accuracy and capture illustrative quotations, eliminating the need for full transcription (Watkins, 2017).

Analysis is conducted collaboratively using cross-case matrices that enable rapid identification of patterns, similarities, and contrasts across participants and settings. Teams apply the *Sort and Sift, Think and Shift* approach to support analytic rigor while remaining responsive to emergent insights (Maietta et al., 2021). Trustworthiness is enhanced through brief team debriefs, matrix comparisons, selective source or member checks when feasible, and documentation of analytic decisions through an audit trail (Schexnayder et al., 2023). This structured yet flexible process allows RQA to be easily replicated across programs and institutions.

### **Results To Date and Implications**

To date, Rapid Qualitative Analysis (RQA) has been applied in pilot evaluation and training contexts within agricultural and extension education to support rapid feedback and decision-making. Findings from these applications align with prior research demonstrating that RQA substantially reduces analytic time and costs while yielding results comparable to traditional qualitative analysis (Brown et al., 2025; Nevedal et al., 2021; Taylor et al., 2018). RQA is best suited for research and evaluation in applied settings that require quick turnaround of findings and timely reporting to stakeholders to inform program improvement, curriculum development, and outreach planning.

Rapid Qualitative Analysis reduces analyst hours and eliminates transcription costs while yielding similar findings that are produced through traditional qualitative analysis. RQA also supports the delivery of actionable outputs aligned with programmatic decision-making and promotes ongoing stakeholder engagement through rapid feedback loops, enabling organizations or institutions to respond efficiently to emerging needs.

### **Future Plans and Advice to Others**

Future work will focus on developing a methodological journal article detailing the process, utility, and application of Rapid Qualitative Analysis in agricultural and extension education settings with examples. Practitioner feedback gathered at the national American Association for Agricultural Education conference during the presentation will be incorporated in the article to inform refinements related to field-level applicability, adaptations, and implementation challenges. Educators and evaluators interested in adopting RQA are encouraged to begin with small pilot applications, clearly define decision-focused domains of inquiry, and engage multidisciplinary teams to support collaborative sense-making. Starting with existing tools and limited datasets can facilitate rapid adoption while building internal capacity for broader implementation.

### **Cost/Resources**

Rapid Qualitative Analysis (RQA) requires minimal direct costs beyond staff time and access to commonly available Office software (e.g., Google Docs or Excel). By eliminating transcription expenses and reducing analyst hours, RQA can save several thousand dollars per project, depending on interview volume and scope. Indirect costs, such as staff training and coordination time, are modest and can be integrated into existing program workflows. Overall, RQA represents a low-cost, high-impact qualitative analysis approach well-suited for resource-constrained educational and extension environments.

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