ATLAS.ti 5.5: A Qualitative Data Analysis Tool

Part II: Design logic

Atlas.ti is designed to be flexible and allow you to record your thoughts at any time in the analysis process. Therefore, the workspace of the program has many functions and tools that can seem overwhelming to the novice. However, the program is almost limitless in its qualitative analysis capabilities. In fact, the design of the program reflects the non-linear approach to qualitative research.

There is a basic work procedure that can help the novice user approach their first use. It is as follows:

A typical work-procedure:

1. Ready your data for use in the program. Transcribe all written notes into a word-processing program and then proofread, edit and format them (covered later in this document) for use in the program.

2. Create the initial project: a hermeneutic unit. The HU's main purpose is to act as an organizational container for findings, codes, memos, structures and data.

3. Create primary documents (PDs) from anywhere on your computer. The HU ties all of these PDs together in a single unit.

    Note: The HU only stores links to these documents on your computer. It is a good idea to store all PDs within an overall project folder, where you also store the HU. If you move your PDs, the HU may not be able to call them up later.

4. Begin reviewing your PDs. This is the beginning of the analytical process. You would begin marking your data with quotations, creating codes and memos, and recording your developing thoughts. This is obviously not a single step but an evolving process.

5. A comparative analysis of coded texts may follow, linking other PDs to the HU.

6. Families may be created at this point, further linking PDs in groups according to data type (observations, interviews, video, etc.). Families can also be the foundation for concept or semantic development from codes.

7. If families are created, queries may be used to link different PDs and continue the recursive nature of qualitative analysis.

8. Creating the final report from the HU and its many components.

    Note: ATLAS.ti is flexible and allows you to take less of a linear approach. At the same time, you cannot begin to develop a conceptual theory without some analysis and coding.