

# Qualitative Comparative Analysis – A Rigorous Qualitative Method for Assessing Impact

## Description

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A Coffey How-To note, June 2015, by Carrie Baptist and Barbara Befani. [Available as pdf](#)

### Summary

- QCA is a case based method which allows evaluators to identify different combinations of factors that are critical to a given outcome, in a given context. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of how different combinations of factors can lead to success, and the influence context can have on success.
- QCA allows evaluators to test theories of change and answer the question “what works best, why and under what circumstances” in a way that emerges directly from the empirical analysis, that can be replicated by other researchers, and is generalizable to other contexts.
- While it isn’t appropriate for use in all circumstances and has limitations, QCA also has certain unique strengths – including qualitatively assessing impact and identifying multiple pathways to achieving change which make it a valuable addition to the evaluation toolkit.

**Rick Davies comment:** The availability of this sort of explanatory and introductory note is very timely, given the increased use of QCA for evaluation purposes. My only quibble with this how-to note is that the heart of the QCA process seems to have been left undescribed (see step 10, page 6), like the proverbial black box. For those looking for a more detailed exposition, keep an eye out for the extensive guide now being prepared by Barbara Befani, with support from the Expert Group for Aid Studies in Sweden ([More details here](#)). There is also an introductory posting on QCA [on the Better Evaluation website](#)

**See also:** This new listing of use of QCA for evaluation purposes  
<http://www.compass.org/bibliography/evalua.htm>

### Category

1. Uncategorized

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