Qualitative methods are especially useful in the context of discovery, particularly with regard to the exploration of phenomena that are not well understood. Although underutilized and sometimes misunderstood, qualitative research can complement quantitatively organized research. I mainly show the utility of qualitative methods in the context of research in occupational health psychology (OHP); however, I also underline some applications to clinical research. Qualitative methods can also underline for the researcher deeply engaged in statistical analyses what those analyses mean for the real-life health and well-being of the vulnerable human beings behind the quantitative results.

I will present in some detail the strengths qualitative methods afford researchers and practitioners, followed by a forthright discussion of the limitations of qualitative research. We will provide examples from the OHP research literature on these strengths and limitations and how these strengths and limitations can inform the application of qualitative methods.