

OBSERVATIONAL RESEARCH DESIGN

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

WHAT IS GOING ON HERE?



OBSERVATIONAL RESEARCH DESIGN

In its simplest form, the researcher observes and systematically records the behavior of individuals to describe the behavior

TWO TYPES OF OBSERVATION

Nonparticipant observation. Researcher is not part of the activity taking place, but simply observes. May be identified as observer/research.

Participant observer. Researcher takes part in community, organization, or activity. Researcher attempts to learn what it is like to be part of the community, organization, or participate in the activity.

ADVANTAGES & DISADVANTAGES

Advantages	Observational Research	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to situations and people where questionnaires and interviews are impossible or are inappropriate to use. • Access to people in real life situations. • Good for explaining meaning and context. • Can be strong on validity and in-depth understanding. • Can be strong on validity and in-depth understanding. 	Observational Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be viewed as too subjective. • Time consuming. • Depends on the role of researcher • Overt: may affect the situation and thus validity of findings. • Covert: ethical principles contravened. • High potential for role conflict for practitioner researchers.

CONTEXT

In both types of observation, the researcher attempts to learn about context in which behavior takes place. Context includes:

- Physical surroundings.
- Other people in the setting.
- The interactions among different people in the setting.
- The social, cultural, political, or economic context in which the behavior occurs and why it occurs.

WHY DO WE OBSERVE:

- To add to our understanding of interview data.
- To identify patterns that may occur in the behavior of people, social interactions, or the setting.
- To see patterns people are unwilling to talk about.
- To provide direct personal experience and knowledge.
- To add to or “move beyond” the perception of both the researcher and participants.

ADDITIONS TO OBSERVATIONS

- Interview participants.
- Interview key informants or people “in the know” about the setting, surroundings, or context.
- Key informants may be viewed as “community guides,” helping you learn about and gain access to a community.

IF SOMEONE WANTED TO LEARN ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITY, WHAT WOULD YOU TELL THEM TO DO? WHAT WOULD YOU TELL THEM ABOUT COMMUNITY CUSTOMS AND BEHAVIORS?

WHAT TYPES OF THINGS DO WE OBSERVE:

Formal and informal patterns of interaction among people.

Ways people organize themselves

Informal or formal rules in operation

Recurring events

“Down time” when things don’t happen

Sequence of events

Differences in what happens at various times

Ritual and Ceremonies

Ritual & Crises

Unplanned activities

STYLES OF OBSERVATION

Unstructured observation – describing what occurs. Researcher usually does not have a preconceived idea about what would occur.

Semi-Structured observation - [using a checklist to record what you have found]. Requires that you have an idea about what will be found.

Structured observation - Starting with an operational definition of what you want to measure and then counting only the behavior or situation that "fits" the definition.

WHAT IS RECORDED?

Researchers record what they see, hear, smell, and taste using

- Field notes - Written record of what is observed, impressions, reactions, and hypotheses about what has happened.
 - Photos of people and setting may be added to analysis.
 - Audio-tape and video-tape are also used to document what researchers find.

HOW TO RECORD FIELD NOTES

Record what one observes during observation.
Expand on notes after the observation.
Complete your sentences – add description.
Write a narrative [several paragraphs] that describes what you saw in detail.
Narratives are also called “thick description” and in most qualitative research also include information on researcher reactions and interpretation.

OTHER THINGS TO HELP WITH OBSERVATION

Tables
Checklists
Diagrams and maps

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN FIELD NOTES

Where you observe
Who was there or not there
What happened
What events happened
What events took place

THE P.O.E.M.S. APPROACH

- **People** – The demographics, roles, behavioral traits, and quantity of people in the environment
- **Objects** – The items the people are interacting with, including furniture, devices, machines, appliances, tools, etc
- **Environments** – Observations about the architecture, lighting, furniture, temperature, atmosphere, etc
- **Messages** – The tone of the language or commonly used phrases in tag lines, social/professional interactions, and/or environmental messages
- **Services** – All services, apps, tools, and frameworks used

THE P.O.E.M.S. APPROACH

PROJECT NAME:	ACTIVITY:	LOCATION:																	
TIME: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12	DATE:																		
DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY:																			
PEOPLE List main groups of people <table border="1"><tr><td>M</td><td>F</td><td>O</td></tr><tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr><tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr><tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr><tr><td> </td><td> </td><td> </td></tr></table>	M	F	O													OBJECTS List objects that are used by the people and that populate the environment	ENVIRONMENT Describe the surroundings. What are the main features?	MESSAGES What are the messages being communicated and how?	SERVICES List services being offered. List services available to the people.
M	F	O																	
COMMENTS ABOUT USER EXPERIENCE:	GENERAL THOUGHTS & COMMENTS:																		
© 2004 Project																			

PROVIDE DETAILS

Use descriptive adjectives
 Use action verbs
 Avoid making judgments about what you see
 Be as specific as you can!

FROM **QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS: A DATA COLLECTOR'S FIELD GUIDE**
PUBLISHED BY FAMILY HEALTH INTERNATIONAL, **WHAT TO OBSERVE, P. 20**

Category	Includes	Researcher should note
Appearance	Clothing, age, gender physical appearance.	Anything that might indicate membership in groups or in sub-populations of interest to the study, such as profession, social status, socioeconomic class, religion, or ethnicity.
Verbal behavior and interactions	Who speaks to whom and for how long; who initiates interaction; language, dialect spoken, tone of voice.	Gender, age, ethnicity, and profession of speakers; dynamics of interaction
Physical behavior and gestures	What people do, who does what, who interacts with whom, who is not interacting	How people use their bodies and voices to communicate different emotions; what individuals' behaviors indicate about their feelings toward one another, their social rank, or their profession
Personal space	How close people stand to one another	What individuals' preferences concerning personal space suggest about their relationships
Human traffic	People who enter, leave, and spend time at the observation site	Where people enter and exit; how long they stay; who they are (ethnicity, age, gender); whether they are alone or accompanied; number of people
People who stand out	Identification of people who receive a lot of attention from others	The characteristics of these individuals; what differentiates them from others; whether people consult them or they approach other people; whether they seem to be strangers or well known by others present

BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATION

Direct observation and systematic recording of behaviors, usually in natural settings

- Unobtrusive observations
 - Subject reactivity
- Subjective interpretation by observer
 - Reliability issues

PROBLEM OF SUBJECTIVITY

Operational definition of behavior

- Behavioral categories

Well trained observers

- List behaviors of interest
- videotape

Multiple observers to assess inter-rater reliability

BEHAVIOR RECORDED

Frequency

- Number of times a behavior is displayed

Duration

- Amount of time spent engaged in the behavior

Interval

- Dividing observation period into interval and noting whether behavior occurred or not

SAMPLING OBSERVATIONS

Take samples of potential observations rather than watch/record everything

Divide observation period into time intervals

- Time sampling: observing for one interval, then pausing during the next interval to record all the observations
- Event sampling: specific behavior recorded and then onto next behavior
- Individual sampling: one participant per interval

CONTENT ANALYSIS AND ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Books, movies

- Jeffres (Mass Media Effects, 1997) study of Saturday morning cartoons found 20 to 25 incidents of violent, aggressive behavior – more than any other television time-frame

Historical records

- Library work
- Internet

EXAMPLE OF OBSERVATION THAT INCLUDES DOCUMENT (WEBSITE ANALYSIS)

<http://www.vimeo.com/986157>

Question: Did the researcher find patterns in the data?
Did the patterns allow her to form a hypotheses about differences in websites preferred by athletes vs. non-athletes?

- Important factor of qualitative observation is that it is a hypothesis generator

CONTENT ANALYSIS:

We also can add to interviews or observation by conducting content analysis on things produced “in the course of everyday events” This is also referred to as studying material culture.

Analyze case records, organization documents, intake records, letters etc. Videos, newspapers, books, movies, etc. can also be analyzed for content.

The researcher looks for reoccurring patterns in the documents.

NARRATIVE RESEARCH

In narrative research, researchers describe the lives of individuals, collect and tell stories about people’s lives, and write narratives of individual experiences.

As a distinct form of qualitative research, a narrative typically focuses on studying a single person, gathering data through the collection of stories, reporting individual experiences, and discussing the meaning of those experiences for the individual.

HOW TO USE NARRATIVE DESIGNS?

- When individuals are willing to tell their stories
- Want to report personal experiences in a particular setting
- Want a close bond with participants
- When participants want to process their stories
- When you have a chronology of events
- When you want to write in a literary way and develop the micro picture

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF NARRATIVE DESIGNS

- Individual experiences
 Chronology of the experiences
 Collecting individual stories
 Re-storying
 Coding for themes
 Context or setting
 Collaboration with participants

NATURALISTIC OBSERVATION

Researcher observes behavior in a natural setting as unobtrusively as possible

- Classroom
- Mall
- Church

High degree of external validity, however no control

Time consuming process

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

Researcher engages in the same activities as people being observed

Rosenhan (Being Sane in Insane Places 1973) investigated experiences of mental patients and patient-staff interactions in psychological hospital

Admittance into hospital by reports of hearing voices

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j6bmZ8cVB4o>

CONTRIVED OBSERVATION

Researcher sets up situation that is likely to produce the behavior

Participants asked to come into laboratory

- Piaget's theories of cognitive development

Natural setting manipulated in field experiments

- Lorenz's field experimenting with imprinting in geese

ETHNOGRAPHY

The systematic study and documentation of human activity

- without imposing a *prior interpretation* on it
- via *immersion* in the environment of it
- and observation of the *routine* tasks that comprise it

"Make the implicit explicit"

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ETHNOGRAPHIC DESIGN

- An exploration of cultural themes drawn from cultural anthropology
- A study of a culture-sharing group
- An examination of shared patterns of behavior, belief and language
- A collection of data through fieldwork experiences

KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ETHNOGRAPHIC DESIGN

- A description and analysis of themes about the culture-sharing group
- A presentation of description, themes, and interpretation within the context or setting of the group
- A reflexivity by the researcher about his or her impact on the research site and cultural group

ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

Graham Gibbs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V8doV3P0us4>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jADIR-J9Ht4>
