
Unit 9: Validity and Generalisability in Research

Required Reading

Schneider, C. (2018) Making the case: A Qualitative Approach to Studying Social Media Documents in: Bryman, A. & Buchanan D. (Eds) Unconventional Methodology in Organization and Management Research. Oxford Scholarship Online.

Summary

The chapter explores research methodologies in extreme contexts, which are characterized by high levels of threat and risk, such as corporate crises, mountaineering expeditions, and terrorist incidents. These contexts are challenging to study due to their unpredictability, ethical concerns, and difficulties in gaining access. However, they offer valuable insights into critical organizational behaviors like leadership, decision-making, and teamwork. The authors highlight unconventional research approaches, including the use of secondary sources (e.g., organizational documents, media reports), embedded ethnography (e.g., researchers immersing themselves in extreme settings), and analyses of fictional portrayals (e.g., films and TV series). Examples include studies of the Mann Gulch disaster, the Stockwell shooting, and ethnographic work in high-risk environments like combat zones and urban poverty areas. The chapter also presents four case studies from the authors' own research, examining post-crisis change in hospitals, nuclear facilities, and fire services. The value of extreme context research lies in its potential to generate novel insights and inform theory and practice, despite methodological challenges.

Reflection

The chapter underscores the importance of creativity and adaptability in research methodologies, particularly in extreme contexts where traditional methods may fall short. The use of unconventional data sources, such as media reports or fictional narratives, challenges the boundaries of what constitutes valid empirical evidence, yet these sources can provide rich, nuanced understandings of complex phenomena. The ethical and practical challenges of embedded research, as illustrated by Goffman and Venkatesh, highlight the profound personal and professional risks involved, but also the unparalleled depth of insight such immersion can yield. The authors' emphasis on generalization through theory development rather than statistical representation is compelling, offering a robust defense of single-case studies. This approach encourages researchers to think beyond conventional paradigms and consider how extreme contexts can illuminate broader organizational dynamics, even in less turbulent settings.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. & Thornhill, A. (2023) Research Methods for Business Students. 9th ed. Pearson Education Limited.

- Chapter 11.4

Summary

Chapter 11.4 of Research Methods for Business Students discusses the concepts of questionnaire validity and reliability. Validity refers to the extent to which a questionnaire accurately measures what it intends to measure. The chapter explains different types of validity, including content validity, which ensures the questionnaire covers all relevant investigative questions; criterion-related validity, which assesses whether responses can predict future behaviors; and construct validity, which determines how well questions measure a theoretical construct. Reliability, on the other hand, refers to the consistency of responses. Even if a questionnaire is reliable, it may not necessarily be valid if respondents consistently misinterpret questions. The chapter highlights common comprehension issues, such as instructional, sentinel, and lexical misunderstandings, which can impact data accuracy. It stresses the importance of careful questionnaire design, pilot testing, and statistical methods to assess both validity and reliability.

Reflection

Reflecting on this chapter, it becomes clear that designing an effective questionnaire is a meticulous process that goes beyond just formulating questions. The discussion on miscomprehension is particularly insightful, as it highlights how seemingly simple wording choices can lead to unintended interpretations. This emphasizes the need for rigorous testing and revision before deploying a questionnaire for data collection. Additionally, the distinction between different types of validity and reliability underscores the complexity of ensuring high-quality research findings. The chapter serves as a reminder that even well-structured questions can lead to inaccurate conclusions if researchers fail to account for interpretation biases. This reinforces the idea that research design is not just about gathering data but about ensuring that the data truly reflect the intended concepts.