Field Experiments

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Roadmap

- What is a field experiment?
- Implementation Partners
- Being in the Field
- Intervention and Evaluation
- Data collection methods
- Running the Show

What is a field experiment?

- An experiment done outside of a lab, with real people who don't know they are part of an experiment
- Lab: show people video, survey those people
- Field: Show a video in a local theatre; survey people who attended
- Researchers assign and administer experimental intervention

- Different than natural/quasi-experiment where intervention is incidentally random or as-if random

Implementation Partners

How to get involved with implementers

- Professor throws you a project
- Meet at a conference
- Pro bono "cold call" from you
- University collaborations
- Sites that connect researchers and implementers: research4impact, egap, others
- Implementers want prior RCT experience, experience in-country
- Bigger NGOs will want established professors

Implementation Partners

How to work with non-academics

- Theoretical vs. practical divide
- Compromise away from perfection
- Avoid jargon
- Explain how long data work can take
- Expect Googledocs

Implementation partners

Priorities and incentives

- Implementing organizations will want you to do a lot of work that is irrelevant for you
- Look our for your own interests
- Implementers *need* to make themselves look good to maintain grant funding

Being in the Field

- You need to go
- You want to go
- Establish personal relationships or you will be in the dark and nothing will get done
- Bring gifts that are identifiably *American*

- Implementer priority is for a successful project, not to evaluate if the project was successful.

Being in the Field

- Learn the language actively
  - Be comfortable with no English unless people are speaking to you
- Learn and follow cultural etiquette
- Calm yourself when you want to start an argument

- Start slow and increase intake of local food each day
- Learn what you can and cannot get in-country
- Get a local phone and simcard
- Get personal wifi connection

Being in the Field

- Learn to get around without help
- Find amenities and activities – gyms, basketball/soccer club, local bars
- Travel when possible – do **not** watch TV in a hotel room
- Hang out with locals
- Bring books to read

- Enjoy it! Make friends!

Interventions and Evaluations

- Don't let the tail wag the dog – don't change the intervention so that it can be evaluated more easily
- Make implementers part of design discussions so it is a *team* design, not *your* design
- Be flexible where things are not imperative
- Be firm where things are necessary

Interventions and Evaluations

- Field experiments are a mess – multiple things will go wrong
- Randomization at multiple levels
- Simple designs are more likely to be implemented faithfully; complex designs are beautiful and fragile
- Feasibility extends to survey questions and implementation, observational monitoring procedures, everything
- Survey experiments are hard on enumerators because the question wording changes every interview

- To NGOs, two-arm RCTs are already complicated.
- Difficult to pitch more complicated things, like multi-arm designs, saturation designs, etc. . .

Interventions and Evaluations

- Everything is clustered
- Everything spills over

- Get the Gerber and Green book.

Data Collection Methods

- Surveys
  - In person
  - Mobile phone "IVR" surveys
- Observational measures
- Naturalistic behavioral games
- Focus groups and "Key Informant" interviews
- Others?

Running the Show

- You are in charge and there is no reset button or second chance
- Putting your money into it
- staying up until 3am every night for two weeks
- Hard deadlines

Running the Show

- Lead by example: get sweaty
- Be SUPER ORGANIZED

Conclusion

- Field experiments are great opportunities for researchers
- Working with implementation partners can be difficult but rewarding
- Enjoy experiencing another country
- Keep your designs simple
- Use multiple methods of data collection
- Lead by example

Conclusion

- Do you really want to do a field experiment/RCT?

- Take a lot of time
- Require a lot of non-academic work
- High fail rate