

Collecting data through observations and interviews

Prepared by Associate Professor:
Ahmed Rageh Ismail

ENT 636
Research Project

Lecture 6



Chapter

06

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should:

- appreciate the scope of observation as a data collection method;
- develop an understanding of participant observation, structured observation and Internet-mediated observation and appreciate how these methods may overlap in practice;
- identify ethical concerns and quality issues related to the collection of observation data and consider how to avoid or reduce these.
- able to classify research interviews in order to help you understand the purpose of each type;

Learning outcomes

- aware of the advantages and disadvantages of using one-to-one and group research interviews, including focus groups, in particular contexts;
- aware of the advantages, disadvantages and mode implications of telephone interviews;
- aware of types of Internet-mediated research interview to be able to evaluate their use;
- aware of the nature of visual interviews and ways to use these;

Introduction

Observation has traditionally been a somewhat neglected method for business and management research. Yet it can be rewarding and enlightening to pursue and, what is more, add considerably to the richness of your research data. Technological changes have helped to facilitate new forms of observation, helping it to become a more popular research method.

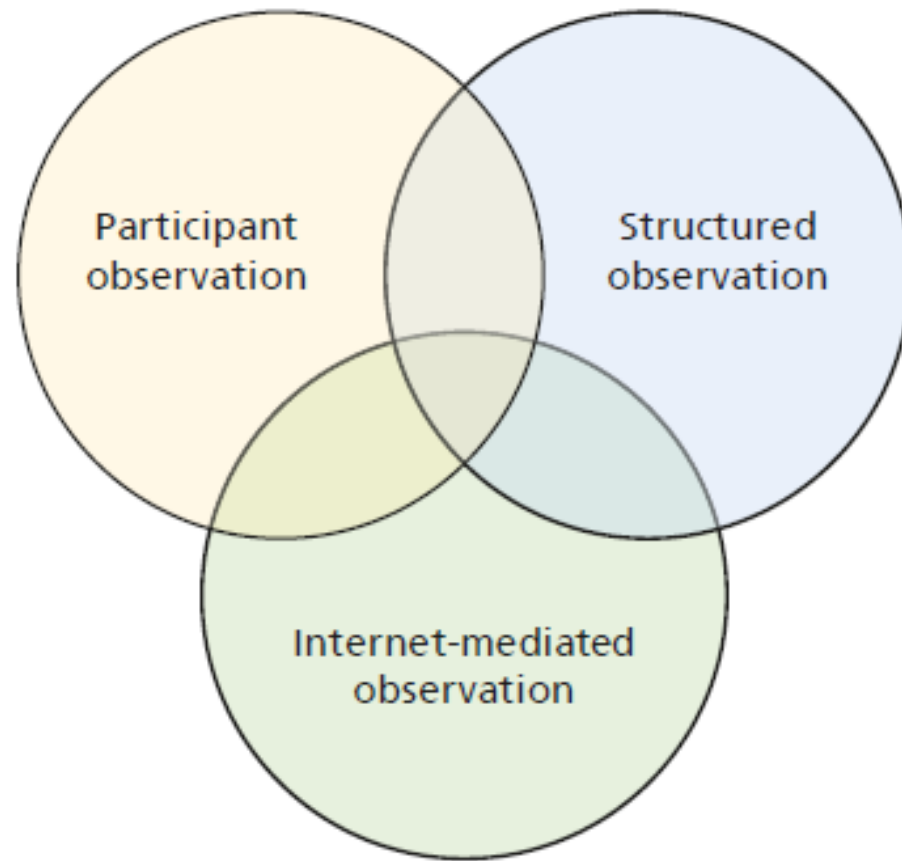
Three observation methods are discussed in this chapter: **participant observation**; **structured observation** and **Internet-mediated observation**

Introduction

Participant observation is qualitative and derives from the work of social anthropology early in the twentieth century. Its emphasis is on discovering the meanings that people attach to their actions and social interactions.

In contrast, **structured observation** is quantitative and is more concerned with the frequency of actions (‘what’ rather than ‘why’).

Internetmediated observation involves the collection of data from online communities. This approach adapts traditional observation by changing its mode of observing from oral/visual/near to textual/digital/virtual to allow researchers purely to observe or to participate with members of an online community to collect data.



Overlap between types of observation

Dimensions of observation

In practice, there can be overlap between these methods. A researcher who wants to use observation will need to make a number of choices.

He or she will need to choose whether to enter an observational setting with an open mind about what to observe, or, alternatively, with a pre-determined and specific list of aspects on which to focus observation.

She or he will need to choose whether to participate in the event to be observed, or observe it without taking an active part.

Dimensions of observation

Related to this, he or she will need to choose whether or not to tell those involved in an observation setting that they are being observed.

He or she will also need to choose whether to conduct observation in a naturalistic setting, taking advantage of the opportunity to observe an event or activity that occurs irrespective of the researcher's interest, or whether to set up some activity in which the specified event can be observed.

Dimensions of observation

These choices relate to the following dimensions of observation:

- the structure and formality that the researcher uses in designing observation, ranging from unstructured and informal to structured and formal;
- the role of the researcher during observation comprising:
- their participation in the observation setting, ranging from full participation in the activity or event being observed, through passive observation at the margin of this activity or event, to observation in a detached location as a non-participant;
- their decision to reveal they wish to observe the event or activity for a research purpose; or to conceal this from those being observed, involving ethical issues that focus on informed consent;
- the nature of the observational setting, involving conducting observation in either a naturalistic setting or in a contrived situation.

Structure and formality in observation

Observation may be structured and highly formalized based on the use of a pre-determined and standardized observation instrument that is generally referred to as a coding schedule. This may be designed to observe the activities or behavior of an individual person, such as a consumer or a worker, or the interactions between members of a group, such as in a workplace meeting, or the prevalence of particular events, such as in a production study.

Standardization is of course important where structured observation is to be repeated and a researcher wishes to produce data that are comparable between individuals or groups, and across events or different times.



Box 9.6 Focus on student research

Structured observation schedule of categories and codes

Adam undertook a project examining the effectiveness of team meetings in his employing organisation. As part of this he planned to undertake structured

observation of a number of team meetings in different parts of the organisation. He developed a schedule of categories and codes for his structured observation that included the following extract.

Adam produced an observation sheet from the full schedule to record the frequencies of these behaviours at each team meeting he observed. He attended the equivalent meeting held by three different teams and produced a summary sheet of his structured observations from these meetings.

Category	Definition	Observable action	Code
Providing Information	Provision of facts or information to others	Team Leader provides information to team members	TLPI
		Team member provides information to others	TMPI
Seeking Information	Seeking facts or clarification of information from another person	Team Leader seeks information from team members	TLSI
		Team member seeks information from Team Leader	TMSI
Checking understanding of others	Seeking to establish whether earlier facts or information has been understood by others	Team Leader checks understanding of team members	TLCU
		Team member checks understanding of others	TMCU

Offering clarification	Offer of clarification of earlier information to others	Team Leader offers clarification to team members Team member offers clarification to others	TLOC TMOC
Giving viewpoint	Expression of opinions on facts and information provided or on a point of discussion	Team Leader expresses viewpoint to team members Team member expresses viewpoint to others	TLGV TMGV
Summarising	Sum up or go over the main points of earlier information or a recent discussion	Team Leader summarises information for team members Team member summarises information for others	TLSUM TMSUM

Meeting	Summary of structured observations from team meetings in Week 6											
	Providing Information		Seeking Information		Checking Understanding		Offering Clarification		Giving Viewpoint		Summarising	
	TLPI	TMPI	TLSI	TMSI	TLCU	TMCU	TLOC	TMOC	TLGV	TMGV	TLSUM	TMSUM
1	15	2	5	4	4	1	5	0	7	1	5	0
2	11	4	3	7	6	1	6	2	4	5	7	3
3	7	6	4	6	4	4	3	4	3	8	2	4
TOTALS	33	12	12	17	14	6	14	6	14	14	14	7





Box 9.6 **Focus on student** **research (*continued*)**

He arranged to conduct a semi-structured interview with each team leader and with a sample of the members from each team. He also undertook a theoretical review of the literature (Chapter 3) to help to analyse and interpret his data to explain it and to evaluate the effectiveness of team meetings in his employing organisation.

Structure and formality in observation

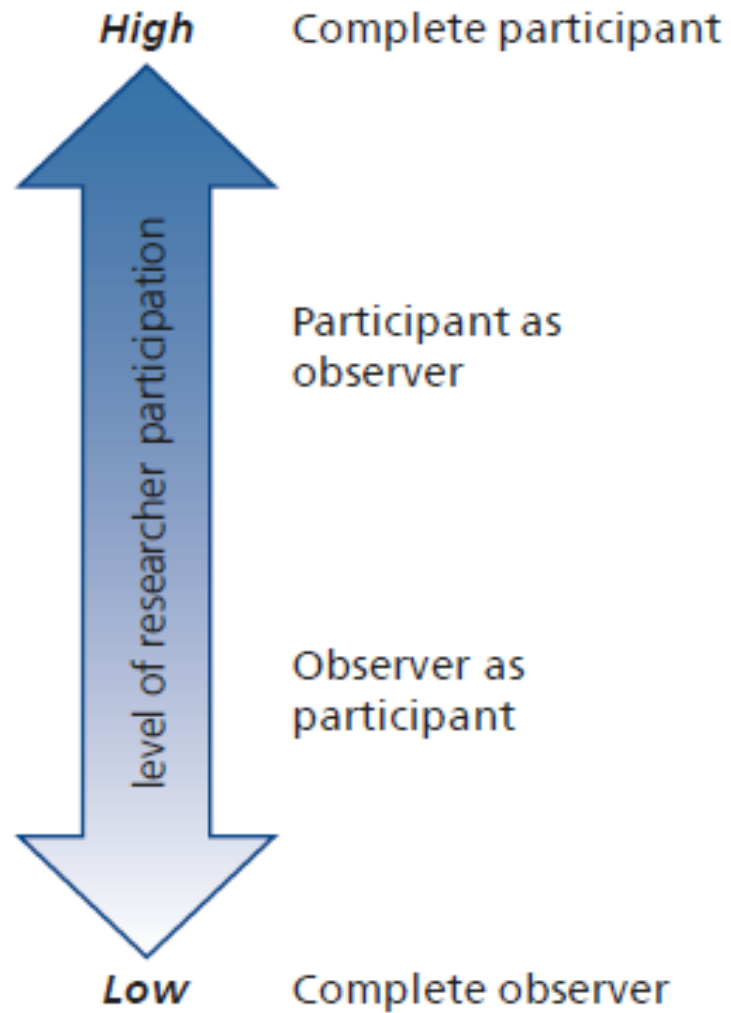
Observation may also be unstructured and informal. In this way, the researcher does not start with a predetermined list of attributes, behaviors or responses to observe. Instead the focus of the observation is broadly flexible and open, with the observer recording the flow of events or behaviors being observed.

The use of such an unstructured and informal approach to observation is likely to be exploratory in nature to understand the setting within which it occurs, and to describe who is involved, what they each do, how they interact together, the sequence of events, their aim in undertaking this activity and how they respond to one another emotionally. Observation studies that commence with an unstructured and informal approach are likely to become more structured as they progress.

Role of the researcher during observation

The role of the researcher comprises two dimensions. One of these relates to the researcher's level of participation in the activity or event being observed. In the classic approach to observation roles, it is described as a continuum ranging from complete participation at one extreme to complete observation at the other.

In between these two extremes he reported two further possible roles: nearer to the complete participant is the participant-as-observer and closer to the complete observer is the observer-as-participant.



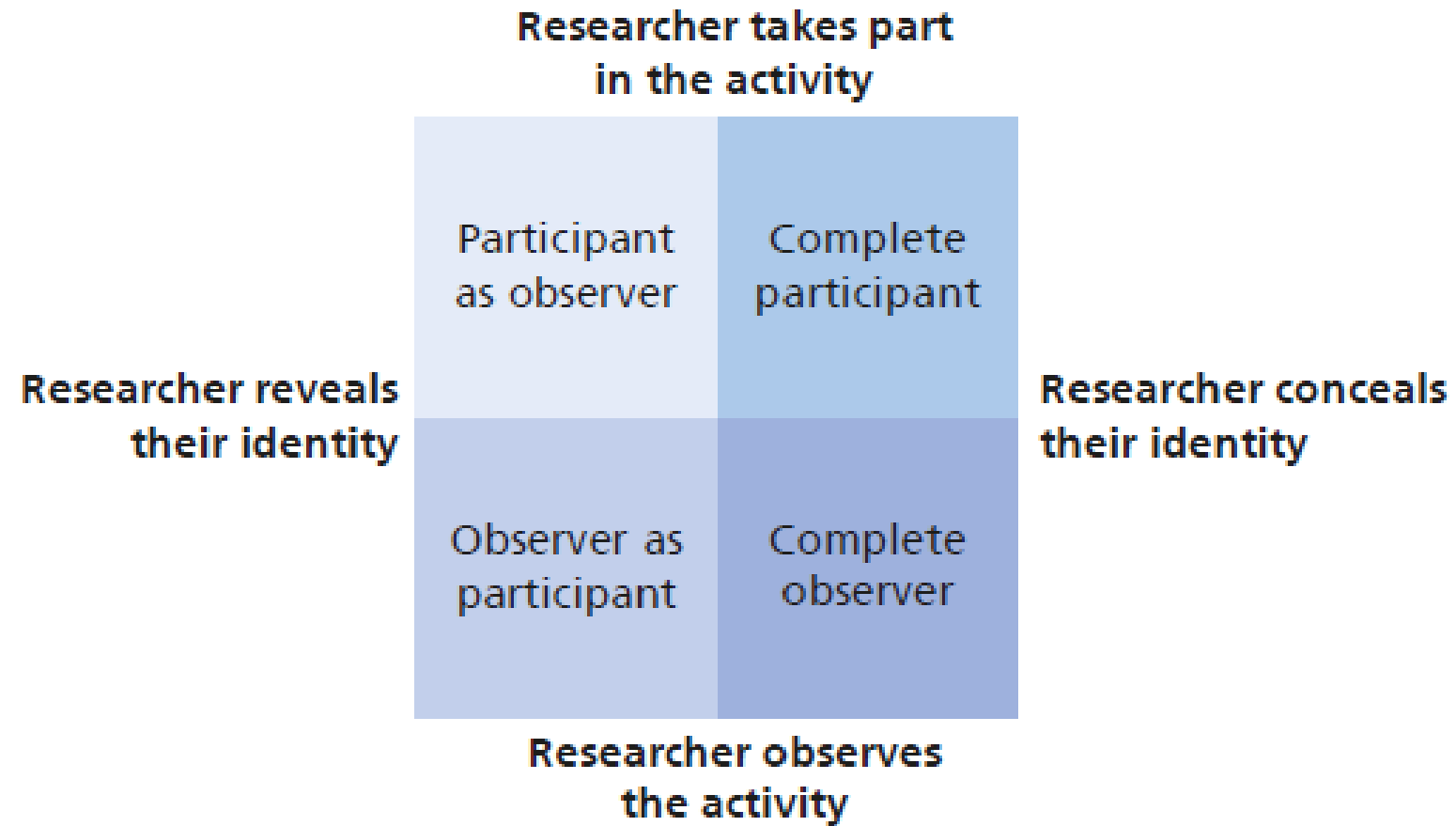
Level of participation in classic observation

Role of the researcher during observation

The **complete participant** role sees you deciding to conduct observation in an organizational or social setting in which you already fully participate. Your position as an 'insider' will allow you to select a particular situation to observe related to your membership of the organization or group.

Since you are already accepted as a member of the group or organization in which you chose to conduct observational research you do not reveal this purpose to other members.

For example, studying the behavior and social interactions of a particular subculture at your workplace.



Classic observation roles

Role of the researcher during observation

Participant-as-observer

In the role of **participant-as-observer** you would both take part and reveal your research purpose. You may adopt this role as an 'insider' related to your existing membership of a group or organization, but unlike the complete participant role decide to reveal your intention to use this setting to conduct observation if you can gain the consent of other members to do so. Alternatively, you may join a group or enter an organization as an employee to become a fully accredited participant while making your research purpose known to those you wish to observe

Role of the researcher during observation

Observer-as-participant

Acting in the role of **observer-as-participant** will primarily involve you in observing, although your purpose will be known to those whom you are studying.

Participation in this role will only be low level and will mostly be restricted to being present at an event or activity in order to be able to observe it.

‘Being present’ means that you might sit in a meeting while it takes place, act as a spectator or onlooker while some event occurs, or watch an activity from the margins.

Role of the researcher during observation

In some cases in this role it may become necessary to engage in a slightly greater but still limited level of participation in order to be able to continue observation.

In this case it will become necessary to have some limited interaction with informants.



Box 9.1 Focus on management research

Observation to explore the impact of communication practices on hedge fund decision making

Kellard, Millo, Simon and Engel (2017) undertook research to evaluate whether communication and working practices in the hedge fund industry leads to 'herding', or group, behaviour. 'Herding' involves a group of participants deciding to do the same thing at the same time. In the case of hedge funds, herding may lead participants to make the same investment decisions, with potential consequences for trading risk and market prices (unduly pushing these up or down).

Their study, published in the *British Journal of Management*, involved qualitative interviews with and observations of those who work in the hedge fund industry in Europe, Asia and the United States of America. In their research they used purposive and snowball sampling to

generate a sample of sixty informants to undertake this study. This sample was partly made up of those who work for hedge funds and partly of those who work for brokerage firms. The research focused on the nature of working practices between those involved in the hedge fund industry to understand its possible implications.

Observational fieldwork was undertaken in eight hedge fund firms and two brokerage firms. Observation was conducted in each firm over a number of days. A number of different professionals in each firm was observed by a researcher, with each being observed for between half of a day and two days. They refer to this as observational 'rotation'. Observations were also conducted at different times through the working day. These observations allowed them to gain an in-depth understanding of the context they were researching; to observe the working practices of and communications between participants in this industry; and to triangulate their understanding. To follow up questions raised during observations, some informants agreed to meet the observer informally after the observation session to discuss what had been observed. Overall, 60 informants were interviewed and observed across the firms involved in this research.

Role of the researcher during observation

Complete observer

In the role of **complete observer** you would not reveal the purpose of your activity to those you were observing, nor take part in the activity or event being observed. Like the role of observer-as-participant you would be present at the activity or event in order to observe it, either by being able to sit in, acting as a spectator or onlooker, or watching from the margins.

For example, the complete observer role may be used to study consumer behavior in supermarkets.

Role of the researcher during observation

Your research question may concern your wish to observe consumers at the checkout. Which checkouts do they choose? How much interaction is there with fellow shoppers and the cashier? How do they appear to be influenced by the attitude of the cashier? What level of impatience is displayed when delays are experienced?

This behavior may be observed by the researcher being located near the checkout in an unobtrusive way. The patterns of behavior displayed may be the precursor to further observational research, involving a higher level of participation by the researcher, in which case this would be the exploratory stage of such a research project.

Role of the researcher during observation

Nonparticipant observer

In addition to the four roles we have discussed in which the researcher attends the setting being observed, even if this is only passively where she or he merely sits in or watches from the margin, or if online lurks, there is a further role possible in which the act of observation is detached from the event being observed.

In the nonparticipant observer role the researcher does not share any physical or virtual proximity to those whom they observe. This role is made possible by technology allowing the researcher not to be present in the place where, or at the time when, the event or activity occurs.

Role of the researcher during observation

This may involve the use of the Internet where a researcher observes material online in order to conduct observation. Such material would have been produced and uploaded for another reason, without considering that it may subsequently be used for a research purpose.

Using this type of observation is likely to raise a number of ethical issues including those related to consent and use of the data observed, not least because this may involve observing ‘informants’ in distant locations, whom it would be impossible to contact to negotiate any level of consent.

Role of the researcher during observation

Collaborative observer

Collaborative observation seeks to overcome potential ethical concerns, data quality issues and epistemological questions associated with the classic approach to observation.

It is noted that covert observation leads to ethical concerns because of lack of informed consent and use of data gathered without this. Even overt observation that is not collaborative may lead to similar ethical concerns.

Role of the researcher during observation

Likewise, data quality issues and epistemological questions may result from the dominant role of the researcher in the classic approach to observation. Claims about the objectivity of the researcher have been challenged by the need to recognize how her or his background (social, cultural, political, gender and so forth) may affect data collection, analysis and interpretation.

This raises an important question about relying on the single perspective of the researcher's interpretation to make sense of what is observed and casts doubt on the idea that the researcher is able to reveal an objective reality or absolute truth in the account produced of these observations.

Informants actively
collaborate in research

Collaborative
observer

Researcher takes part
in the activity

Participant
as observer

Complete
participant

Researcher reveals
their identity

Observer as
participant

Complete
observer

Researcher conceals
their identity

Researcher observes
the activity

Nonparticipant
observer

Researcher is detached
from the activities

Nature of the observational setting

Choosing an appropriate observational setting is crucial to the success of this research method. The nature of any observational setting will need to enable you to answer your research question and meet your research objectives.

For example, your research question and objectives may require you to observe a particular activity in a single location. Alternatively, your research question may require you to observe multiple events across a range of settings. As the former scenario is likely to be easier to accomplish than the latter, you will need to consider this implication and choose a research question that is feasible in relation to finding an appropriate observational setting or settings.

Nature of the observational setting

Observational settings may be broadly placed into a small number of categories. Observation may be conducted in a real world setting.

Naturalistic observation is conducted in a 'real world' location where the intention is to conduct observation without influencing the setting being observed.

In a traditional ethnographic research strategy this involves the researcher physically going to the place where intended informants live, work or otherwise socially interact, to conduct observation.

Nature of the observational setting

This is referred to as going into the field and is known as doing **fieldwork**.

Alternatively, observation may be conducted in a contrived or artificially created setting, such as where the researcher sets up a laboratory-based experiment, in order to observe those taking part in this research activity.

Observation may also be conducted in a virtual setting, involving Internet-mediated observation, will be discussed later. Non-participatory observation also leads to the possibility of a researcher conducting observation in a detached setting, as we noted earlier.

Participant observation

What is participant observation?

Earlier we referred to fieldwork, where an ethnographer physically goes to the location where intended informants live or work to study them; the research process she or he engages in during field work is participant observation.

In participant observation, the researcher enters into the social world of those to be observed and attempts to participate in their activities by becoming a member of their workgroup, organization or community.

Participant observation

This term sums up the dual purpose of this research method: to take part in the activity or event being studied and to observe those whose lives shape and are shaped by this social world.

Six aspects that characterize participant observation. These are shown in the table below

Table 9.2 Characteristics of participant observation

Characteristic	The participant observer . . .
Engaging in a dual purpose	. . . participates in the observational setting as well as observing those within it
Experiencing as both 'insider' and 'outsider'	. . . experiences the observational setting from the perspective of both insider as participant and outsider as observer
Developing an explicit awareness	. . . needs to develop an explicit awareness of all aspects of the observational setting including the people within it
Using a wide angle lens to observe	. . . needs to see, hear and record everything that may be relevant in the observational setting
Being reflective	. . . engages in reflection to learn from the experiences gained in the observational setting
Carefully recording all observations	. . . needs to record carefully what is observed and how this has been experienced

Participant observation

Because the researcher becomes a member of the group within which participant observation is conducted, she or he comes to understand the symbolic world of the informants and their perceptions about their social situation.

This allows the participant observer to develop a deep and nuanced understanding of the meanings of informants' interactions, and how they respond to their social situation and changes to it. This is quite different from using a questionnaire to collect data, where ability to understand individual interactions and relationship to social context is likely to be less.



Box 9.2 Focus on student research

Managers and their use of power: a cross-cultural approach

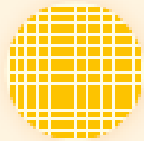
Mong was a young Chinese business graduate who had recently been working in a Chinese/German joint venture in the automotive industry. She was located in the supply chain department. As part of her MBA she had to submit a research project on a management topic of her choice.

Mong was interested in the international management part of her course that dealt with cross-cultural matters. This was particularly significant in her case as she worked at a company site that comprised both Chinese and German managers.

Mong felt that a body of theory, which she could usefully link to the issue of cross-cultural integration, was that of power. With help from her project tutor she developed a research question that allowed her to explore the way in which Chinese and German managers used power to 'negotiate' their relationships in a situation which was unfamiliar to both sets of managers. Mong's question was: 'What strategies are used by different groups of national managers collaborating in an international joint venture to negotiate their transnational relationships and how effective are these?'

Mong was fortunate that one of her duties was to take minutes at the twice-weekly management meetings in the department. She obtained permission to observe these meetings to collect her data. She developed a semi-structured observation schedule, which related to her research objectives, and used this during each meeting.





Box 9.2 Focus on student research (*continued*)

Managers and their use of power: a cross-cultural approach

Data collection was not easy for Mong as she had to take minutes in addition to noting the type and frequency of responses of managers. However, as time progressed she became skilled at fulfilling both her minute-taking and data collection roles. She also

obtained permission to audio-record the meetings. At the end of four months, when she had attended over 30 meetings, she had collected a considerable amount of data and was in a good position to analyse these and draw some insightful conclusions.

Mong's observation role raised ethical questions as she did not reveal her researcher role to the meeting delegates. She discussed these questions with her senior manager in the company and project tutor and completed the necessary university ethics committee documentation. It was agreed by all concerned that Mong's research objectives justified the data collection approach chosen and met the university's ethical code.

Table 9.4 Advantages and disadvantages of participant observation

Advantages	Disadvantages
• It is good at explaining 'what is going on' in particular social situations • It heightens the researcher's awareness of significant social processes • It is particularly useful for researchers working within their own organisations • Some participant observation affords the opportunity for the researcher to experience 'for real' the emotions of those who are being researched • Virtually all data collected are useful	• It can be very time consuming • It can pose difficult ethical dilemmas for the researcher • There can be high levels of role conflict for the researcher (e.g. 'colleague' versus researcher) • The closeness of the researcher to the situation being observed can lead to significant observer bias • The participant observer role is a very demanding one, to which not all researchers will be suited • Access to organisations may be difficult • Data recording is often very difficult for the researcher

Structured observation

What is structured observation?

Structured observation uses a high level of predetermined structure. If you use this method your purpose will be to observe the incidence of particular behaviors, interactions or events and record these systematically.

Structured observation is particularly effective at revealing “the mundane, routine activities that collectively make up those practices of everyday life”. As such, structured observation may form only a part of your data collection approach because its function is to tell you which things happen, how often and possibly when and in what sequence rather than why they happen.

Structured observation

Structured observation as a method of collecting and analyzing data in entrepreneurship may be more prevalent than you think. It has a long history that extends into the present and was used over many decades to analyze how factory workers carried out their tasks and to measure the times that it took to complete these.

Digital or video-recording adds another layer of observation to monitor those in particular types of workplace as well as within areas covered by CCTV, such as in city and town centers, shopping centers and within retail outlets. We live in a world where in many situations our movements are routinely observed while we go about our daily lives, often without being aware that this is happening.

Structured observation

Structured observation by itself may be little more than surveillance or fact finding. It is the ways in which such data are analyzed that can transform this activity into valuable research findings. One of the best-known examples of managerial research that used structured observation as part of its data collection approach was the study of the work of senior managers by Mintzberg (1973).

This led Mintzberg to cast doubt on the long-held theory that managerial work was a rational process of planning, controlling and directing. Mintzberg studied what five chief executives actually did during one of each of the executives' working weeks. He did this by direct observation and the recording of events on three predetermined coding schedules.

Structured observation

This followed a period of ‘unstructured’ observation in which the categories of activity that formed the basis of the coding schedules he used were developed. In this way Mintzberg ‘grounded’ his structured observation on data collected in an initial period of participant observation (Grounded Theory is explained earlier).

Modern uses of structured observation do not have to rely on computer technologies. Structured observation is still used as a tool to assess the way in which workers in modern workplaces carry out their tasks.



Box 9.5

Focus on student research

Observing staff behaviours at Fastfoodchain

Sangeeta worked at Fastfoodchain for her holiday job. She became interested in measuring service quality in

her course and decided to do a preliminary study of customer interaction at Fastfoodchain.

Fastfoodchain has restaurants all over the world. Central to its marketing strategy is that the customer experience should be the same in every restaurant in every country of the world. An important part of this strategy is ensuring that customer-facing staff observe the same behavioural standards in every restaurant. This is achieved by defining precise standards of





Box 9.5 Focus on student research (*continued*)

Observing staff behaviours at Fastfoodchain

behaviour that customers should experience in every transaction undertaken. These standards are used in the training of staff and assessment of their performance. Reproduced below is part of the section of the

standards schedule concerned with dealing with the customer. (There are also sections which deal with the behaviours needed to prepare for work, e.g. till readiness, and general issues, e.g. hygiene.)

The standards schedule is an observation document used by trainers in order to evaluate the degree to which their training is effective with individual employees. It is also used by managers in their assessment of the performance of employees. Sangeeta was very impressed with the level of precision contained in this schedule and wondered whether it could form the basis of her research project.

Section 2: Delighting the customer

Staff member:		
Behaviour	Was the behaviour observed?	Comments
Smiles and makes eye contact with the customer		
Greets the customer in a friendly manner		
Gives the customer undivided attention throughout the transaction		
Suggests extra items that have not been ordered by the customer		
Places items on clean tray with tray liner facing customer		
Ensures that customer is told where all relevant extras (e.g. cream, sugar) are located		
Explains to customer reasons for any delays and indicates likely duration of delay		
Neatly double-folds bags containing items with the Fastfoodchain logo facing the customer		
Price of order is stated and customer offered choice of payment method		
For card payments, customer offered POS terminal for chip and pin or contactless payment. Completes payment and presents receipt		
For cash payments, lays all money notes across till drawer until change is given and clearly states the appropriate amount of change. Completes payment and presents receipt		
Customer is finally thanked for transaction, hope expressed that the meal will be enjoyed, and an invitation to return to the restaurant issued		

Table 9.5 Advantages and disadvantages of structured observation

Advantages	Disadvantages
• It can be used by anyone after suitable training in the use of the measuring instrument. Therefore, you could delegate this extremely time-consuming task. In addition, structured observation may be carried out simultaneously in different locations. This would present the opportunity of comparison between locations • It should yield reliable results by virtue of its replicability. The easier the observation instrument is to use and understand, the more reliable the results will be • Structured observation is capable of more than simply observing the frequency of events. It is also possible to record the relationship between events. For example, does a visit to a website lead to the exploration of related pages and video-recordings; does this lead to a decision to purchase? • The method allows the collection of data at the time they occur in their natural setting. Therefore, there is no need to depend on 'second-hand' accounts of phenomena from informants who put their own interpretation on events • Structured observation secures data that most informants would ignore because to them these are too mundane or irrelevant	• Unless virtual observation is used, the observer must be in the research setting when the phenomena under study are taking place • Behaviours, interactions and events being observed may occur simultaneously or in complex ways, making coding difficult and potentially unreliable (discussed later in 'Data quality issues arising from structured observation') • While structured observation is helpful in recording the incidence of behaviours, interactions or events, these observations are limited to overt actions or surface indicators. This may be inadequate to explore the impact or effectiveness of the behaviours, interactions or events being observed, leaving the observer to make inferences • Without the prior specification or development of theory, structured observations will be of only limited value for research. Analysis needs to look for patterns of behaviours, interactions or events to explain the data collected and to understand their impact in the observed situation. Such analysis may show how behaviours are linked, which are effective or ineffective and how they affect outcomes • Not recognising environmental variability within a research setting may invalidate conclusions drawn from structured observation. Behaviours, interactions and events are likely to be contingent on (shaped by) the environment and ignoring this variable is likely to cast doubt on the conclusions. Conversely, controlling for or taking environmental variables into account is likely to enhance the validity of the conclusions drawn • Data may be slow (and expensive) to collect, although this is not always the case



Box 9.7 Checklist

To evaluate or develop a coding schedule

- ✓ Is the coding schedule suitable to answer your research question and address your objectives?
- ✓ Does the coding schedule cover all of the specific behaviours, interactions or events in which you are interested and exclude others outside the scope of your research?
- ✓ Are these categories of behaviour, interaction or events clearly defined and written down, observable in action and exclusive (not overlapping)?
- ✓ Are the categories in the coding schedule flexible enough to be applied across the different settings of your research?
- ✓ Are the codes being used indicated on the observation sheet, simple to understand and undemanding to apply so that you will not need to memorise or check their meanings?

What is Internet-mediated observation?

Internet researchers adopt an ethnographic approach and use participant observation to conduct research where data are derived from archived and current online social interactions.

This approach involves some adaptation from traditional, 'offline' ethnographic research and emphasizes its own ethical concerns. This has led to various general and more specific terms to describe this research approach, including online ethnography, netnography, virtual ethnography, webethnography and mobile ethnography.

What is Internet-mediated observation?

Online ethnography studies people in online or virtual communities, whose participation is motivated by their shared interest and/or some level of social attachment. Many online communities organize themselves around a shared interest or activity; for example in relation to a particular brand, product, service, business focus, occupation, lifestyle or set of beliefs.

These online communities produce large amounts of qualitative material, in the form of text and audio-visual material from the social interactions that occur between members over time.

What is Internet-mediated observation?

The purpose of online ethnography or netnography is to obtain “cultural understandings of the experiences of people and groups from online social interaction and content” (Kozinets 2015: 76).

This type of Internet-mediated observation will broadly follow the approach to participant observation that is termed **Internet-mediated participant observation**. Such observation is likely to be exploratory as it commences and to become explanatory as it progresses. It is also likely to work through the phases of participant observation, emphasizing descriptive observation in its early phase, developing more focused observation in its middle phase and highlighting selective observation in its final phase.

What is Internet-mediated observation?

However, it is also important to recognize that online observation may commence as and focus on structured observation. Such **Internet-mediated structured observation** may use quantitative as well as qualitative data and analysis.

The very nature of the Internet means that huge amounts of quantitative data are recorded every day from the billions of clicks and taps that we all collectively make on all of our Internet connected devices. The vast majority of these potential data are not accessible to researchers and will remain unanalyzed unless subjected to advanced big data analytical techniques.

What is Internet-mediated observation?

However, some of these data will become available to researchers and in addition the huge amount of qualitative Internet data available may be analyzed in part using quantitative techniques.

Box 9.8 provides an example of Internet-mediated structured observation that examined relationships between use of social networks and the incidence of online shopping.



Box 9.8 **Focus on** **management** **research**

Internet-mediated structured observation to examine relationships between use of social networks and online shopping

In an article published in the *Journal of Marketing*, Zhang, Trusov, Stephen and Jamal (2017) examine whether the use of social networks and the incidence of online shopping are related and, if so, how. They commenced their research by recognising two broad possibilities. One possibility is that time spent on social networks may expose participants to information about products, where this may come from social interactions with friends on social media or from online brand advertising. This possibility may be positively

associated with purchasing decisions. Another possibility is that time spent on social networks may distract participants from using shopping websites and therefore be negatively associated with online shopping.

During their study to explore these possible relationships, the researchers were given access to structured observation data collected from over ten thousand Internet users whose online activities had been observed over one calendar year. These data were made available to the researchers by a global market data management company and consist of three types related to this panel of Internet users. The first type consists of detailed records of their online purchases. The second type consists of a detailed history of their web-browsing activities. The third type consists of their demographic details including age, gender, employment status, income, number of people and presence of children in the household. These highly structured data allowed the researchers to examine for associations between use of social networks and incidence of online shopping using empirical modelling and statistical analysis.

Observation using videography, audio recordings and visual images

Observation, particularly in its traditional approach, is an audio-visual method: it involves listening and seeing. Use of video, audio recordings and visual images therefore provide us with ways to collect observational data in conjunction with any of the three methods we have discussed.

Use of these techniques also means that observational research may become more collaborative, where informants participate in the collection of data and in analyzing these through informant interpretations.

Chapter

06

Observation using videography, audio recordings and visual images

Participatory approaches in this context include the use of participatory video, participatory audio and participant photography.

Participatory video involves providing informants with video cameras to let them record their experiences or perspectives, including the freedom to choose what to record.

This approach may involve informants being given video cameras to use on an individual basis or it may involve a group activity within a community.

Observation using videography, audio recordings and visual images

The video produced is often referred to as a **video diary** and the informants involved are sometimes called **video diarists**. In a similar way, **participatory audio** involves providing informants with audio recorders to let them record their experiences or perspectives, again with the freedom to choose what to record.

Participant photography involves providing informants with digital cameras or asking them to use their mobile phones as cameras to record their experiences or perspectives, including the freedom to choose the subject of each image they take



Box 9.9 Focus on management research

Using video to collect observational data in market research

In Box 5.8 we describe a study by Arnould and Cayla (2015) published in *Organization Studies* that explores how companies use ethnography and videography in their market research. They state that market research is the most important way in which organisations gain information about their consumers and that commercial ethnography is increasingly being used by companies to allow them to learn about their customers.

This article focuses on the way in which commercial ethnography is used to research profiles of

actual consumers, who are seen to represent a market segment. This approach involves accompanying a consumer and often video recording their actions and comments. This enables a commercial ethnographer to get to know the consumer by spending time with them, observing them, and talking and listening to them to understand how they feel about and use the product(s) being researched. Alternatively it may involve providing consumers with video cameras to allow them to record their own experiences.

Using video as part of this process of observing and recording is seen as important and powerful. The use of video recording is widespread because it provides a powerful means to present “real consumers” and to bring these “to life” in the edited accounts that are produced from these recorded observations (Arnould and Cayla 2015: 1367).

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

Types of research interview

Research interviews may be classified into different types. These types are more than just labels as they help you to choose the most appropriate sort of interview for your research purpose. These relate to the:

- level of standardization or structure in the research interview;
- number of participants and interview modes.

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

Level of standardization or structure in the research interview

One commonly used typology differentiates between **standardized interviews** and **nonstandardized interviews**.

Another commonly used typology differentiates between **structured interviews**, **semi-structured interviews** and **unstructured interviews**. These typologies overlap. Three-fold typology of structured, semi-structured and unstructured to describe the nature of, and differences between, research interviews.

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

Structured interviews

Structured interviews are conducted using researcher-completed questionnaires. questionnaires are ‘standardized’ because they are based on a predetermined set of identical questions. If you use a structured interview, you read out each question from the questionnaire exactly as it is written and in the same tone of voice so that you do not indicate any bias. Then you record the response on a standardized schedule, usually with pre-coded answers. As structured interviews are used to collect quantifiable data they are also referred to as ‘**quantitative research interviews**’.

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

Semi-structured interviews

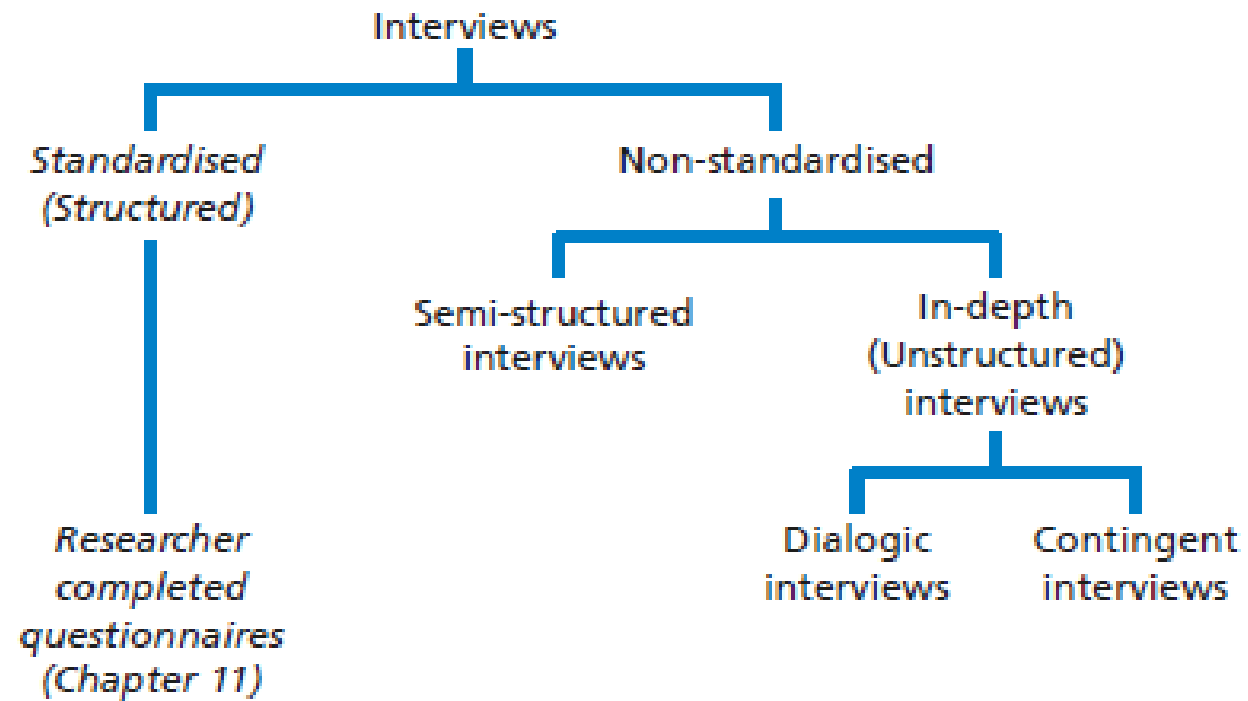
By comparison, **semi-structured and unstructured interviews** are ‘non-standardised’. These are often referred to as ‘**qualitative research interviews**’. In semi-structured interviews you start with a predetermined list of themes, and possibly some key questions related to these themes, to guide the conduct of each interview.

How you use this predetermined list of themes will depend on your philosophical assumptions. Where you adopt the stance of the realist you will believe that there is a truth waiting to be discovered that is external to the interpretations of your participants.

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

In this case, you will use a more structured and consistent approach to conduct semi-structured interviews in which you systematically explore each theme with every participant. This will allow you to compare your participants' responses to each theme to identify the underpinning reality that you seek to reveal.

Where you adopt an interpretivist approach, the way in which you deal with your list of predetermined themes is likely to be more flexible and contingent on what each participant says. In this case, the order in which you ask each participant to address these themes will vary depending on the flow of the conversation and the data shared with you. You may omit a theme or modify your questions about a theme in a particular interview, given the context or some other characteristic that you encounter.



Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

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Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

If the themes used in your semi-structured interviews are derived from existing theory you will be commencing your data collection deductively, and your intention will be to test this theory in the context of your own research. In this case, these theoretically-deduced themes will need to be used consistently in each interview, in order to be able to produce comparable and valid data to test the applicability of this theory in your research context. Such theoretically-based semi-structured interviews may be used in conjunction with a theory testing approach to thematic analysis, template analysis or deductive explanation building (will be explained later).

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

Where your research commences inductively and you then wish to test a theory or explore a surprising fact that emerges from the data you have already collected and analyzed, you will be switching to use a deductive approach. The use of both induction and deduction in your research is associated with an abductive approach.

In this case, you will also need to apply these theoretically-deduced themes in a consistent way in the semi-structured interviews that you subsequently conduct to be able to test the applicability of this emerging theory in the context of these interview settings.

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

Apart from containing the list of themes and questions to be covered, the interview guide for this type of interview will also be likely to contain some comments to open the discussion, a possible list of prompts to promote and further discussion, and some comments to close it. These are discussed in more detail later.

Data from a semi-structured or in-depth interview may be audio-recorded with the consent of the participant or recorded by making notes.

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews are informal. They are used to explore in depth a general area in which you are interested. This means that they do not use predetermined and written down themes or questions to structure or guide the course of the interview. Instead, this type of interview is entirely exploratory and emergent. We therefore can also refer to these as **unstructured interviews**.

Instead of commencing with predetermined themes or questions, you will be interested to find out which themes emerge from the data you collect from your participants.

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Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

While you do not commence with predetermined themes or questions to ask in an in-depth interview, you will need to have at least some idea about the topic, event, experience or aspect that you want to explore with a participant. Where necessary you will need to ask questions and use prompts during the course of an in-depth interview but these should emerge from what your interviewee tells you rather than be determined beforehand.

You need to ensure that any questions or prompts only emerge from what your interviewee tells you, in order to clarify, probe and explore meanings, not from your own pre-conceived ideas. Use of your pre-conceived ideas to formulate questions risks altering the course of this type of interview and therefore contaminating potential data.

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

In an in-depth interview, the interviewee is given the opportunity to talk freely about the topic or event being explored or about their experiences, behaviors and beliefs, so this type of interaction is sometimes called non-directive. An in-depth interview may be used for a number of different purposes. It may be used to explore a topic or event, to deconstruct and understand meanings, to generate stories as in a **narrative interview**, to record a life history as in a **biographical interview**, to focus on participants' perceptions by recording their experiences, or some combination of these. It has also been labelled as an **informant interview** since it is the interviewee's perceptions that guide the conduct of the interview and related discussion. In comparison, a **respondent interview** is one where the interviewer exercises greater direction over the interview while allowing the interviewee's opinions to emerge as he or she responds to the questions of the researcher.

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

Dialogic interviews

The term '**dialogic**' relates to dialogue. In our context a dialogue refers to discussion. In a dialogic interview the interviewer works to establish rapport with the interviewee and to gain her or his trust. If this is achieved the hope is that the interviewee will be willing to engage reflexively to allow a more open discussion to occur in which pre-conceived ideas and beliefs may be evaluated.

At first glance this might read like another way to define a conventional in-depth interview – with its emphasis on achieving depth of understanding. However, the purpose of a dialogic interview may be philosophically different.

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

Many interviewers simply focus on what their interviewees are telling them. This stance assumes that there is a truth waiting to be discovered and reported. This is the objective assumption of the positivist or realist. Attention in this approach is likely to be focused on the empirical – what has been observed or experienced. The positivist or realist interviewer simply focuses on recording events and how these were experienced by participants. However, if you are interested in understanding how meanings are socially constructed, a dialogic interview possibly offers a more appropriate approach. Reflexive engagement by the interviewee may help you explore his or her underlying assumptions and beliefs. If achieved, this should help you explore how meanings are socially constructed and understood.

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

Convergent interviews

In comparison, the purpose and process of a **convergent interview** is materially different. This commences as an unstructured, in-depth interview, with the interviewer also seeking to develop rapport. At this point, the interviewee is given the opportunity to talk freely in relation to the topic area being explored. This is an informant interview, where its conduct is directed by the interviewee talking, with the researcher asking few questions or providing hardly any prompts. However, later in the interview, or more likely, in a subsequent interview(s), more specific and focused probing questions are used.

Types of research interview and their link to the purpose of research and research strategy

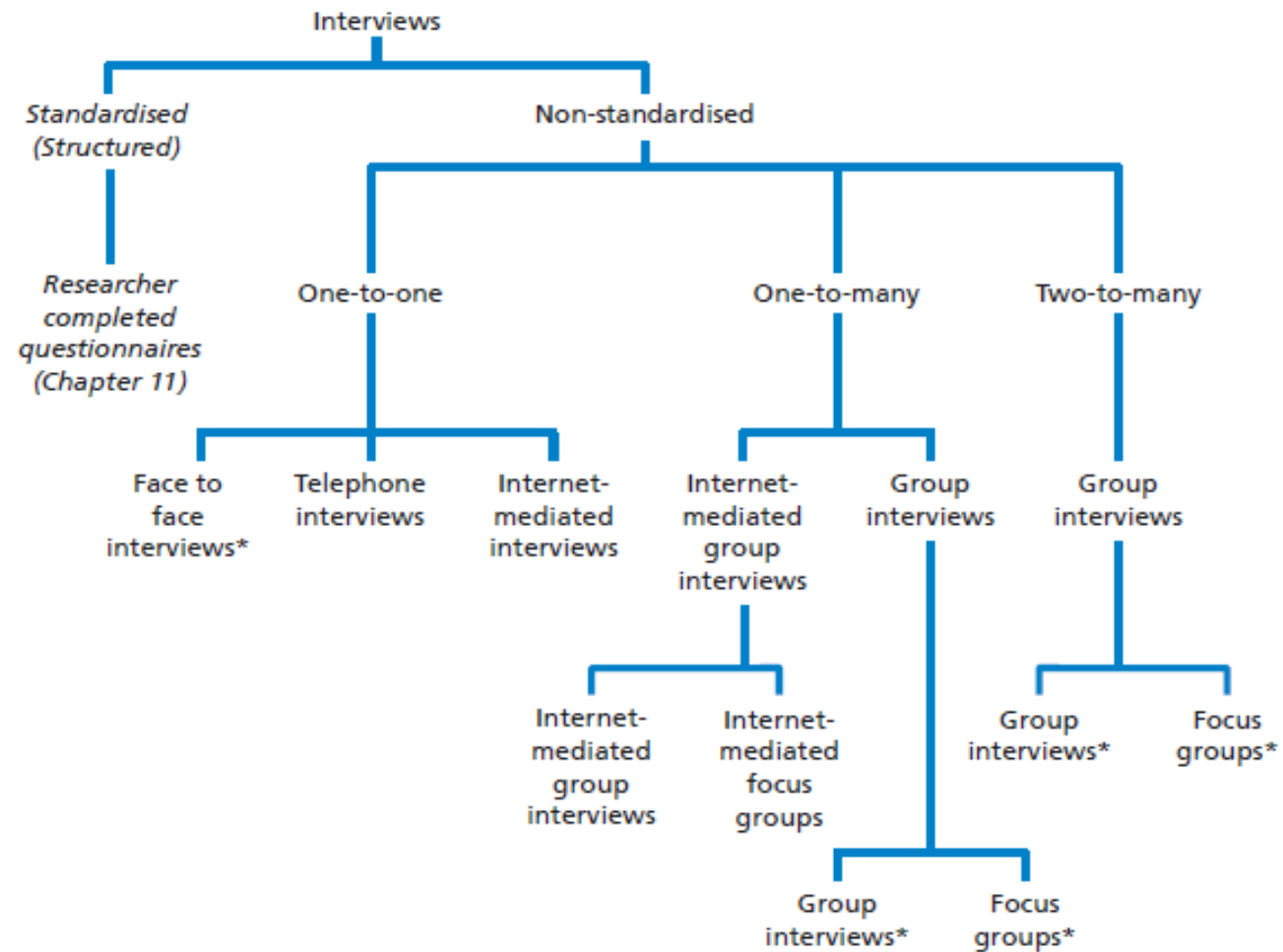
At this stage, the interview becomes more like a respondent one. These more specific and focused probing questions are used to test an emerging theory or refine a developing explanation that is grounded in the data generated through the initial exploratory interview stage.

This is the notion of convergence in this approach, where the interviewing process is used to converge on an explanation or grounded theory.

Scope for informal and unstructured interviews in participatory research designs

While unstructured interviews are informal in the sense that questions emerge rather than being predetermined and written down beforehand, in most research designs these interviews will nevertheless be pre-arranged so that the interviewer and interviewee agree to meet in a particular place at the specific time for an agreed period.

This suggests a formal arrangement to an informal process. In other research designs, such as those where you participate in the research setting rather than just enter it to conduct a pre-arranged interview or number of interviews, your scope to conduct interviews more spontaneously will be increased. Your scope to conduct interviews more spontaneously may also be related to your role as an internal or practitioner researcher.



*Visual images may be used in these modes of interviewing, such interviews being known collectively as 'visual interviews'

Links to the purpose of research and research strategy

Each type of research interview outlined above has a distinct purpose.

Structured, standardized interviews are normally used to gather data which will then be the subject of quantitative analysis, for example as part of a survey strategy.

Semi-structured and in-depth interviews are used to gather data which are normally analyzed qualitatively, for example as part of a case study or Grounded Theory strategy.

These data are likely to be used not only to understand the ‘what’ and the ‘how’, but also to place more emphasis on ‘why’.

Table 10.1 Uses of different types of interview for each research purpose

	Exploratory	Descriptive	Explanatory	Evaluative
Structured		✓✓	✓	✓
Semi-structured	✓		✓✓	✓✓
Unstructured	✓✓			✓

✓✓ = more frequent, ✓ = less frequent

When to use semi-structured and in-depth interviews

There are many situations in which collecting data using a semi-structured or in-depth research interview may be advantageous. These situations can be grouped into four categories:

- the purpose of the research;
- the importance of establishing personal contact;
- the nature of the data collection questions;
- length of time required and completeness of the process.



Box 10.2 Checklist

To help you decide whether to use in-depth or semi-structured interviews

- ✓ Is your research exploratory or explanatory?
- ✓ Will it help to be able to probe interviewees' responses to build on or seek explanation of their answers and meanings?
- ✓ Will it help to seek personal contact in terms of gaining access to participants and their data?
- ✓ Are your data collection questions large in number, complex or open-ended?
- ✓ Will there be a need to vary the order and logic of questioning?
- ✓ Will the data collection process with each individual involve a relatively lengthy period?
- ✓ Will interviews allow you to reveal and explore social phenomena that you would not be able to observe in action?

Data quality issues associated with semistructured and in-depth interviews

Data quality issues

Your preparation for and conduct of these interviews will be influenced by the need to ensure data quality.

- reliability/dependability;
- forms of bias;
- cultural differences;
- generalisability/transferability;
- validity/credibility.

Data quality issues associated with semistructured and in-depth interviews

The lack of standardization in semi-structured and in-depth interviews can lead to concerns about reliability/dependability. In relation to qualitative research, this is concerned with whether alternative researchers would reveal similar information.

The concern about reliability/dependability in these types of interview is also related to issues of bias. There are three types of potential bias to consider. The first of these is related to **interviewer bias**. This is where the comments, tone or non-verbal behavior of the interviewer creates bias in the way that interviewees respond to the questions being asked.

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Data quality issues associated with semistructured and in-depth interviews

This may be because you attempt to impose your own beliefs and frame of reference through the questions that you ask.

It is also possible that you will demonstrate bias in the way you interpret responses. Where you are unable to gain interviewees' trust, or perhaps where your personal credibility is seen to be lacking, the value of the data given may also be limited, raising doubts about its validity and reliability.

Related to this is **interviewee or response bias**. This type of bias can be caused by interviewees' perceptions about the interviewer, or perceived interviewer bias. However, the cause of this type of bias may not be linked to perceptions of the interviewer. Taking part in an interview is an intrusive process. This is especially true in the case of in-depth

Data quality issues associated with semistructured and in-depth interviews

However, the cause of this type of bias may not be linked to perceptions of the interviewer. Taking part in an interview is an intrusive process. This is especially true in the case of in-depth or semi-structured interviews, where your aim will be to explore events or to seek explanations.

An interviewee may, in principle, be willing to participate but still be sensitive to the unstructured exploration of certain themes. Interviewees may therefore choose not to reveal and discuss an aspect of a topic that you wish to explore, because this would lead to probing questions that would intrude on sensitive information that they do not wish, or are not empowered, to discuss with you. The outcome of this may be that the interviewee provides only a partial ‘picture’ of the situation that casts himself or herself in a ‘socially desirable’ role, or the organization for which they work in a positive or even negative fashion...

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Data quality issues associated with semi-structured and in-depth interviews

Bias may also result from the nature of the individuals or organizational participants who agree to be interviewed. This is called **participation bias**. The amount of time required for an interview may result in a reduction in willingness to take part by some. This may bias your sample from whom data are collected. This is an issue that you will need to consider carefully and attempt to overcome through the approach taken to sampling.

Further concerns may arise from cultural differences between the interviewer and intended interviewees. The research interview as the product of individualistic societies, which may not be so well suited to societies and participants with a different cultural orientation.

Data quality issues associated with semi-structured and in-depth interviews

The research interview makes certain assumptions:

- that it is acceptable to discuss issues with outsiders;
- that issues may be considered public and able to be discussed rather than being kept private and restricted;
- that it is permissible for a person to hold independent views and to speak as an individual.

Data quality issues associated with semi-structured and in-depth interviews

Generalizability/transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of a research study are applicable to other settings. This may be questioned in relation to the statistical generalizability of qualitative research studies where these are based on a small sample.

However, this should not be interpreted as meaning that a qualitative study is intrinsically less valuable than a quantitative study. Such studies are more likely to be used to explore and explain and provide insights that can be used to develop theory, rather than to provide statistical generalizations.

Data quality issues associated with semi-structured and in-depth interviews

Validity/credibility refers to the extent to which the researcher has gained access to a participant's knowledge and experience, and is able to infer meanings that the participant intends from the language used by that person.

The scope to explore meanings during a semi-structured or in-depth interview may help to enhance the validity/credibility of the data collected, although forms of bias and cultural differences may impair this outcome.

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Preparing for semi-structured or in-depth interviews

Like all research methods, the key to a successful interview is careful preparation. When using in-depth or semi-structured interviews, remember the ‘five Ps’: prior planning prevents poor performance. In particular, it is crucial that you plan precisely how you are going to demonstrate your competence and credibility to obtain the confidence of your interviewees and collect quality data.

In order to ensure data quality, we now consider some key measures that your preparations will need to include. These are:

- your level of knowledge;
- developing interview themes and supplying information to the interviewee before the interview;
- the appropriateness of the intended interview location.



Box 10.4

Focus on student research

Developing interview themes

Karl was interested in understanding why some employees in his organisation used the IT Help Desk while others did not. This subject was felt to be important in relation to perceptions about service-level agreements, service relationships and service quality. He decided to provide his interviewees with a list of themes that he wished to explore during interviews. After some deliberation and reading of

the academic literature he came up with the following list of themes:

- the extent to which employees feel they know when and how to use the IT Help Desk;
- the nature of support employees feel they are receiving;
- the services employees feel the IT Help Desk should be providing;
- the nature of employees' knowledge of service-level agreements;
- the extent to which the IT Help Desk is meeting employees' needs.

He subsequently used this list of themes to develop his interview guide (Box 10.5).



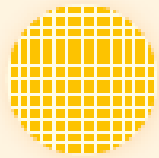
Box 10.5 Focus on student research

Extract from an interview guide

Karl was interested in understanding why some employees in his organisation used the IT Help Desk while others did not. Using his interview themes (Box 10.4), he began to develop his guide:

Help Desk Support

- 1 To what extent does the IT Help Desk meet your needs?
 - a *Probe:* In what ways? [ask for real-life examples]
 - b *Probe:* Can you give me an example (if possible) of when you received good support from the IT Help Desk?
 - c *Probe:* Can you give me an example (if possible) of when you received insufficient support from the IT Help Desk?
- 2 Do you consider you have enough support from the IT Help Desk?
 - a *Probe:* How is this support provided (e.g. telephone, face-to-face)?
 - b *Probe:* What else (if anything) could usefully be done?



Box 10.6

Focus on student research

Choosing an appropriate location

Anne was pleased that the manufacturing company in which she was undertaking her research had arranged for her to use a room in the Human Resources Department. The room contained a low table and chairs, and she had been provided with bottled water and glasses as well. However, after her

third interview she was beginning to doubt her own interviewing skills. Her participants, the company's production line workers, seemed unwilling to be open in their responses. She began to wonder if something was wrong with the interview location and decided to ask the next participant about this. At the end of that interview she had her answer. Her participants were unhappy with the interview location. Prior to being interviewed by Anne, the only time they or their colleagues had visited the Human Resources Department was to receive a reprimand. The location was, therefore, inappropriate!



Box 10.7 Checklist

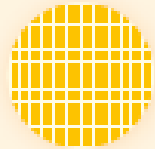
To help you prepare for your semi-structured or in-depth interview

- ✓ What level of knowledge about your research topic will be required in order to demonstrate your competence and credibility to gain the confidence of your participants?
- ✓ What level of knowledge about the research context will be required in order to demonstrate your competence and credibility to gain the confidence of your participants?
- ✓ What level of knowledge about the culture of your participants will be required in order to gain their confidence before they are willing to share data?
- ✓ What will be the broad focus of your in-depth interview, or what are the themes that you wish to explore or seek explanations for during a semi-structured interview?
- ✓ What type of information, if any, will it be useful to send to each participant prior to the interview?
- ✓ What did you agree to supply to your participant when you arranged the interview? Has this been supplied?
- ✓ Have you considered the impact that your interview location may have on participants' responses and for your own personal safety (Box 6.17)?

Conducting semi-structured or in-depth interviews

These aspects relate to the:

- appropriateness of your appearance at the interview;
- nature of your comments to open the interview;
- approach to questioning;
- appropriate use of different types of questions;
- nature and impact of your behavior during the interview;
- demonstration of attentive listening skills;
- scope to summarize and test understanding;
- dealing with difficult participants;
- approach to recording data.



Box 10.8 Focus on student research

Checking out the dress code

Mal arranged to visit the administration centre of a large insurance company on a Friday to conduct a group interview with staff drawn from one of its telephone sales divisions and two one-to-one interviews with senior managers. He felt that it was appropriate to wear fairly 'formal' clothes to match what he thought would be the dress code of the organisation. Indeed, for four days of the working week this

assumption would have been appropriate. However, the organisation had recently introduced the practice of not wearing such formal work clothes on Fridays. Thus he found himself the only one dressed formally in the organisation on the day of his visit. Taking lunch proved to be a memorable experience, as he mingled with everyone else dressed in jeans and tee shirts, etc. His 'mistake' proved to be an amusing opening at the start of each interview rather than a barrier to gaining access to participants' data. Indeed, it might not have been appropriate for him to match the 'dress-down' style of participants too closely. Nevertheless, it does provide a useful example of the way in which expectations about appearance are likely to be noticed.



Box 10.9

Focus on student research

Opening a semi-structured interview

As part of her research project, Beth undertook a series of semi-structured interviews with freelance consultants working for a range of organisations. She covered the following points at the start of each interview:

- The participant was thanked for considering the request for access and for agreeing to the meeting.
- The purpose of the research and its progress to date were outlined briefly. As part of this, the participant was given an information sheet to keep.
- The previously agreed right to confidentiality and anonymity was reiterated by stating that nothing said by the participant would be attributed to him/her without first seeking and obtaining permission.
- The participant's right not to answer any question was emphasised and that the interview would be stopped if the participant wished.
- The participant was told about the nature of the outputs to which the research was intended to lead and what would happen to the data collected during and after the project.
- The offer to provide a summary of the research findings to the interviewee was also restated and the participant was told when this would happen.
- The request to audio-record the interview was restated and, where agreed, this was used subsequently.
- Before the substantive discussion started, Beth again requested permission to undertake the interview, summarised the themes to be covered, confirmed the amount of time available and requested that the participant read and signed the informed consent form.

All of these points were dealt with within the first few minutes of the interview.

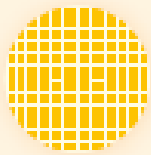


Box 10.10 **Focus on student research**

(Mis)understanding terminology

Sven was conducting an interview with the European sales manager of a large multinational corporation. Throughout the interview the sales manager referred

to the European Division. Sven assumed that the sales manager meant continental Europe. However, by chance, later questions revealed that, for this organisation, Europe extended into parts of Asia, including Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Israel. Until this point in the interview, Sven had assumed that these countries were the responsibility of another sales manager!



Box 10.11

Focus on student research

Establishing trust and asking sensitive questions

Sam recalls an occasion when her treatment by her participants altered as her group interview progressed. For the first hour of a two-hour interview it appeared

to her that the participants were convinced that she was really there to sell them a consultancy service. When they accepted that she was not going to try to sell them something, the mood of the interview changed and they became much more relaxed and responsive to the questions that Sam wished to ask. It was at this point that she was able to ask and pursue more sensitive questions that could have led to the interview being terminated during the period when the participants mistrusted her motives.

Table 10.2 Difficult interview participants and suggestions on how to address them

Recognised difficulty	Suggestion
Participant appears willing only to give monosyllabic answers, these being little more than 'yes' or 'no'	Reasons for this are varied If it is due to limited time, or worries about anonymity, then this can be minimised by careful opening of the interview (Box 10.9) If the participant gives these answers despite such precautions, try phrasing your questions in as open a way as possible; also use long pauses to signify that you want to hear more
Participant repeatedly provides long answers which digress from the focus of your interview	Although some digression should be tolerated, as it can lead to aspects in which you are interested, you will need to impose more direction This must be done subtly so as not to cause offence, such as by referring back to an earlier relevant point and asking them to tell you more, or requesting that they pause so you can note down what they have just said
Participant starts interviewing you	This can suggest that you have created rapport. However, you need to stress that you are interested in their opinions and that, if they wish, they can ask you questions at the end
Participant is proud of their status relative to you and wants to show off their knowledge, criticising what you do	This is extremely difficult and at times like this you will have to listen attentively and be respectful Remember that you are also likely to be knowledgeable about the research topic, so be confident and prepared to justify your research and the research design you have chosen
Participant becomes noticeably upset during the interview and, perhaps, starts to cry	Another difficult one for you You need to give your participant time to answer your question and, in particular, do not do anything to suggest that you are feeling impatient If your participant starts crying or is obviously very distressed, it is probably a good idea to explain that the question does not have to be answered Do not end the interview straight away as this is likely to make the participant even more upset

Table 10.3 Advantages and disadvantages of audio-recording the interview

Advantages	Disadvantages
Allows the interviewer to concentrate on questioning and listening	May adversely affect the relationship between interviewee and interviewer (possibility of 'focusing' on the audio-recorder rather than the interview process)
Allows questions formulated at an interview to be accurately recorded for use in later interviews where appropriate	May inhibit some interviewee responses and reduce reliability
Can re-listen to the interview, especially during data analysis	Possibility of a technical problem
Accurate and unbiased record provided	Time required to transcribe the audio-recording (Section 13.4)
Allows direct quotes to be used	
Permanent record for others to use	



Box 10.12 Checklist

To help you conduct your semi-structured or in-depth interview

Appearance at the interview

- ✓ How will your appearance at the interview affect the willingness of the participant to share data?

Opening the interview

- ✓ How will you open the interview to gain the confidence of your participant?
- ✓ What will you tell your participant about yourself, the purpose of your research, its funding and your progress?
- ✓ What concerns, or need for clarification, may your participant have?
- ✓ How will you seek to overcome these concerns or provide this clarification?
- ✓ In particular, how do you intend to use the data to which you are given access, ensuring, where appropriate, its confidentiality and your participant's anonymity?
- ✓ What will you tell your participant about their right not to answer particular questions and to end the interview should they wish?
- ✓ How will you explain the structure of the interview?

Asking questions and behaviour during the interview

- ✓ How will you use appropriate language and tone of voice, and avoid jargon when asking questions or discussing themes?
- ✓ How will you word open questions appropriately to obtain relevant data?
- ✓ How will you word probing questions to build on, clarify or explain your participant's responses?
- ✓ How will you avoid asking leading questions that may introduce forms of bias?

- ✓ Have you devised an appropriate order for your questions to avoid asking sensitive questions too early where this may introduce participant bias?
- ✓ How will you maintain a check on the interview themes that you intend to cover and to steer the discussion where appropriate to raise and explore these aspects?
- ✓ How will you avoid overzealously asking questions and pressing your participant for a response where it should be clear that they do not wish to provide one?
- ✓ How will you avoid projecting your own views or feelings through your actions or comments?
- ✓ How might you identify actions and comments made by your participant that indicate an aspect of the discussion that should be explored in order to reveal the reason for the response?
- ✓ How will you listen attentively and demonstrate this to your participant?
- ✓ How will you summarise and test your understanding of the data that are shared with you in order to ensure accuracy in your interpretation?
- ✓ Where appropriate, how will you deal with difficult participants while remaining polite?

Recording data during the interview

- ✓ How will you record the data that are revealed to you during the interview? Where this involves using an audio-recorder, have you requested this and provided a reason why it would help you to use this technique?
- ✓ How will you allow your participant to maintain control over the use of an audio-recorder, where used, if they wish to do this?
- ✓ Have you practised to ensure you can carry out a number of tasks at the same time, including listening, note taking and identifying where you need to probe further?

Closing the interview

- ✓ How will you draw the interview to a close within the agreed time limit and thank the participant for their time and the data they have shared with you?

Focus groups

Focus groups are well known because of the way they have been used by political parties to test voter reactions to particular policies and election strategies, and in market research to test reactions to products, as well as being used in academic research.

A focus group, sometimes called a ‘focus group interview’, is a group interview that focuses upon a particular issue, product, service or topic by encouraging discussion among participants and the sharing of perceptions in an open and tolerant environment. Participant interaction is a key feature of focus group design, although this focus on enabling interactive discussion is used for two distinct purposes.

Focus groups

Positivist or critical realist researchers use the focus group to encourage interactions between participants as an effective means to articulate pre-held views about a particular issue or topic. The aim of using focus groups in this way is to reveal these pre-held views.

Interpretivist researchers use focus groups as a means to construct meanings through social interactions and sense making about a topic. The aim of using focus groups for this purpose relates to the ability to analyze how participant interactions and group dynamics lead to the construction of shared meanings.

Focus groups

If you are running a focus group, you will probably be referred to as the moderator or 'facilitator'. These two labels emphasize the dual purpose involved in running a focus group, namely to:

- keep the group within the boundaries of the topic being discussed;
- generate interest in the topic and encourage discussion, while at the same time not leading the group towards any particular opinion.



Box 10.14

Focus on management research

Using a focus group in research about antibribery compliance

David-Barrett, Yakis-Douglas, Moss-Cowan and Nguyen (2017: 326) investigated “Why top-down directives aimed at eradicating corruption are ineffective at altering on-the-ground practices for organizations that have adopted industry-wide ‘gold standards’ to prevent bribery and corruption.” This research, published in the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, is based on the use of in-depth, semi-structured and focus group interviews conducted over three phases with

senior managers and managers of companies in the pharmaceutical industry.

Following the conduct of the first phase of one-to-one, face-to-face research interviews and analysis of the data, a focus group composed of fifteen compliance directors from a range of pharmaceutical companies was held. The discussion at this focus group was defined by the initial presentation of the preliminary findings from the first phase of research interviews and by the perspective of these compliance directors who were responsible for the conduct of operations in emerging markets.

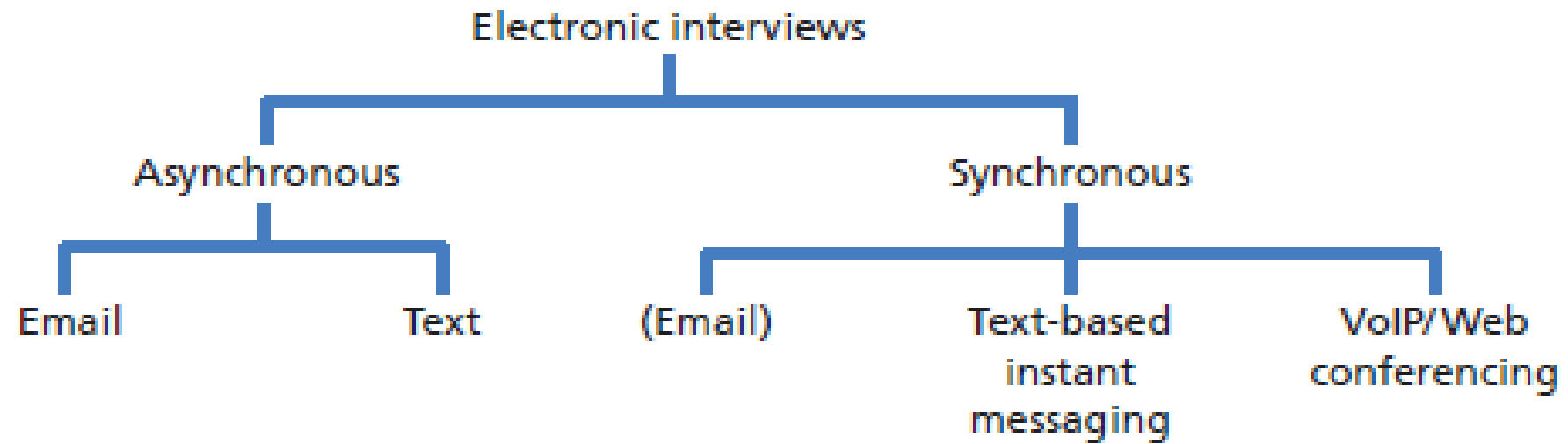
The focus group was moderated by the first named author following the presentation of the preliminary findings. This process resulted in the collection of detailed data from the perspectives expressed by these informed participants who were drawn from very similar and highly relevant backgrounds.

Internet-mediated interviews

Interviews may also be conducted electronically via the Internet using mobile or computing technologies. These are collectively referred to as electronic interviews. A distinction is made between electronic interviews conducted in real time (synchronous) and those not conducted in real time (asynchronous).

An asynchronous electronic interview will be conducted through exchanges of text. This will use email or text messaging but will involve gaps in time or delays between the interviewer asking a question and the participant providing an answer.

In this way it is sometimes partly undertaken offline. A synchronous electronic interview will be conducted in real time using email, instant messaging or web conferencing.



Visual interviews

Most interviews are based on people talking and listening, even though face-to-face interviews also contain a visual dimension, where visual cues are used to guide their conduct and aid understanding.

In a **visual interview**, visual images are used to elicit interviewee accounts and interpretations and stimulate dialogue. The use of images in these interviews means that the visual becomes fully integrated with the oral and aural in the production of participant meanings.

One approach used in visual interviews is **photo-elicitation**. In this technique a participant will be given one or more photographic or digital images to interpret. The participant will be likely to focus on the objects or activity in the image to explain these or this from her or his perspective, constructing meanings related to the image



Box 10.17

Focus on management research

Use of photo-elicitation based on participant photography

In a study published in the *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, Vermaak and de Klerk (2017) used a photo-elicitation technique in visual interviews based on participant photographs. The focus of their study was to explore millennial consumers' experiences of using retail dressing rooms. The researchers conducted two sets of research interviews with a purposive sample of female consumers aged between 18 and 25

years, who were given the task of shopping for clothes.

The first set of interviews explored consumer expectations about using retail dressing rooms. At the end of this first interview, each participant was provided with a digital camera to take photographs of any feature of a dressing room that positively or negatively impressed her in a retail store she visited.

Each participant's photographs were then used by the researchers during a second interview to elicit responses about this experience. Vermaak and de Klerk (2017: 13) report that they used questions to elicit responses from participants, like: "Why did you take this photo?" or "What did you think about this dressing room?" Responses to these questions were explored by using probing questions such as, "Why do you say so?"



Box 10.18 Focus on student research

Using participant drawing in an interview

As part of her research Heather wanted her participants to reflect on what they saw as the essence of leadership. She decided to ask each of them to 'sketch' what they considered to be the essence of leadership at the start of their interview. Although some participants were initially reluctant to draw protesting that their drawings would not be 'any good', offering colour pens and paper to each participant resulted in 30 drawings. Most were relatively quickly sketched in 5 to 10 minutes. Despite the initial hesitation from some participants, most were pleased with their sketches. Heather used each participant's drawing as the basis for their subsequent interview. Drawings such as the one included in this box highlight aspects of leadership such



as taking followers on a journey (the path), through troubled times (the clouds and rain) and areas where it might be difficult to see what was going to happen next (the trees), to a successful finish (the chequered flag) where things were brighter (the sun shining).



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