

# Introduction to Research Methods

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Introduction to Research Methods

## Lecture 8



## Learning Outcomes

1. Explain the purpose and principles of structured observation.
2. Distinguish between participant, semi-participant, and non-participant observation roles.
3. Organize and moderate focus groups effectively.

## Learning Outcomes

4. Understand the logistics and challenges of online focus groups.
5. Manage group dynamics and encourage participation.
6. Recognize ethical and practical considerations in focus groups..

## Introduction to Observation

### Purpose of Observation

- To provide evidence of the 'here and now'
- Discover how people behave and interact in specific situations

### Types of Research Involving Observation

- Laboratory experiments
- Ethnographic observations



## Designed Observation Techniques

### Focus

Emphasis on using observation as a deliberate and planned data collection method.

### Importance of Structured Observation

Casual observation can be unreliable due to selective memory. Structured methods ensure comprehensive and accurate data.



## When to Use Observational Techniques

### Appropriateness

Observation can be useful in most research scenarios but needs to be the most fitting method for the specific study.

### Key Consideration

Decide on the appropriate form and structure of observation tailored to the research goals.



## Dimensions of Variation in Observation

### Five Dimensions

- Role of the observer: How involved the observer is in the setting.
- Portrayal of that role to others: How the observer presents their role to participants.
- Portrayal of the purpose of the research: How the research purpose is communicated.
- Duration of the observations: Length of the observation period.
- Focus of the observations: Specific behaviors or events being observed.

## The Role of the Observer

### Fundamental Distinction

- The observer's level of participation in the setting being studied.

### Balance Between Involvement and Objectivity

- Increased involvement can provide deeper insights but might reduce objectivity.



## Levels of Observer Participation

### Three Basic Choices

Participant observer: Fully involved in the setting.

Semi-participant observer: Partially involved.

Non-participant observer: Not involved, purely observing.

### Insider vs. Outsider Debate

Emic (insider): Researcher is part of the community.

Etic (outsider): Researcher is an external observer.

Choose the role that best suits the research needs.



## Practical Considerations

### Observation Realities

- Observations are dynamic and may require the observer to adapt quickly.

### Example

- A researcher observing a teenager struggling with a homework project decides to assist after gathering sufficient data to avoid causing distress..



## Ethical Considerations in Observation

### Responsibilities

- Observers must balance their duties to the research, participants, and themselves.

### Ethical Dilemmas

- Observers need to set boundaries on what they are comfortable with and maintain participant well-being.



## Participant Observation

### Definition

- Engaging closely with the lives and activities of the setting under study to develop an insider's view.

### Complete Observer

- Extreme form where the researcher infiltrates without the knowledge of participants.
- Controversial and ethically questionable.



## Ethical Considerations in Participant Observation

### Complete Observer Issues

- Covert nature and necessity of pretence.
- Ethical concerns about deception and lack of participant consent.

### Recommended Approach

- Active involvement with transparency about the researcher's role and purpose.



## Benefits and Challenges of Participant Observation

### Benefits

- Provides deep insights through active engagement.
- Allows for the use of tacit knowledge in understanding the context.

### Challenges

- Maintaining objectivity.
- Managing existing relationships and reactions of others in the setting.



## Semi-Participant Observation

### Definition

- Researcher visits the location multiple times over an extended period, balancing participation and observation.

### Observer Effect

- Initial impact of the observer diminishes over time, leading to a more natural setting.

## Conducting Semi-Participant Observation

### Interaction

- Interact minimally, primarily to ask questions for confirmation.

### Example

- Researcher assists a participant after observing distress, demonstrating the balance between observation and intervention.



## Non-Participant Observation

### Definition

- Researcher remains uninvolved and purely observes.

### Advantages

- Easiest form of observation.
- No interaction required, focusing solely on watching and recording



## Portrayal of the Observer Role to Others

### Disclosure

- Range from full to no disclosure about being observed and the research purpose.

### Ethical Stance

- Full or partial disclosure recommended to maintain ethical standards and participant trust.



## Portrayal of the Research Purpose

### Participant Comfort

- Inform participants about why they are being observed and potential benefits.

### Covert Research

- Generally discouraged in academic settings due to ethical concerns.

## Duration of Observations

### Planning

- Determine both the length of individual observations and the overall duration of fieldwork.

### Post-Observation

- Schedule time to expand on notes immediately after leaving the setting.



## Focus of Observations

### Sensitizing Concepts

- Use concepts to guide systematic description of events and behaviors.

### Maintaining Focus

- Enter with a defined topic, but remain open to new insights.

### Literature Review

- Use prior knowledge to inform observation focus and adjust as needed.

## Recording Observations

### Importance of Normality

- Maintain a normal atmosphere during observations.
- Avoid taking extensive notes in front of participants.

### Timing and Note-Taking

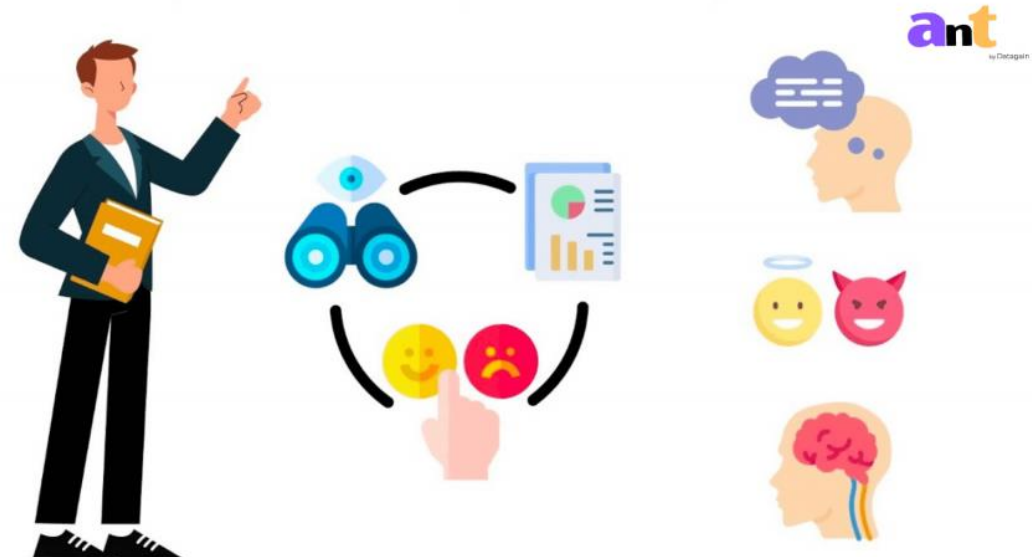
- Plan observations for 30 minutes to one hour but allocate two hours to include note-taking time.
- Field notes should be descriptive, not interpretative.



## Immediate Transcription

### Post-Observation

- Transcribe notes immediately to retain context.
- Add interpretative notes during transcription, clearly marked.



## Minimizing Obtrusiveness

### Note-Taking Balance

- Take minimal notes during observation to avoid being intrusive.
- Record key points, such as verbatim quotes, discreetly.

### Avoiding Data Collection Cut-Off

- Ensure data collection methods do not hinder access to additional data.

## Utilizing Briefing Sheets and Site Maps

### Briefing Sheet

- Enter the setting with a list of behaviors or activities to observe.
- Be flexible and ready to add unexpected data.

### Site Maps

- Pre-map the location to track movements and interactions.
- Use codes for different movements and activities.



## Arranging Statements Randomly

### Components

- Subject code name
- Location
- Date
- Topic of observation
- Setting description
- Detailed observation notes (facts in ink, interpretations in pencil)

## Processing Field Notes

### De-Briefing Questionnaire

- Prepared in advance and completed after leaving the setting.
- Risk: May limit openness to unexpected data due to pre-defined questions.

### Immediate Processing:

- Process notes soon after observation to retain details.
- Avoid delaying transcription to prevent loss of context.

## Introduction to Focus Groups

### Definition

- **Focus group:** A group of individuals selected by researchers to discuss and comment on a specific research topic (Powell, Single, and Lloyd, 1996).

### Historical Context

- Used in social research since the late 1930s.
- Commonly applied in market research to investigate consumer preferences and habits.



## Role of the Researcher in Focus Groups

### Researcher's Role

- Acts as a mediator between the question and the group, and between individual members.
- Requires a high level of understanding and skill, particularly in moderating discussions.



## Popularity and Application

### Increasing Popularity

- Focus groups are becoming more common in qualitative research.
- They allow for data collection from multiple sources simultaneously.

### Benefits

- Obtain various perspectives and explanations from a single session..

## Purpose of a Focus Group

### When to Use Focus Groups

- Obtain general background information.
- Generate research hypotheses.
- Stimulate new ideas and concepts.
- Diagnose potential problems with new programs, services, or products.
- Generate impressions of products, programs, services, institutions, etc.
- Learn how respondents talk about the phenomenon of interest.
- Interpret previously obtained qualitative results.

## Application Throughout Research Design

### Early Stages

- Explore topics and identify salient issues.
- Use 'open' focus groups to let participants highlight significant points.

### Mid-Stages

- Explore issues in more depth after initial data collection (e.g., interviews, observations).

### Late Stages

- Confirm emerging findings and ensure quality control through participant checks and balances.

## Advantages of Focus Groups

### Range of Views

- Enables exploration of a wide range of perceptions, feelings, and attitudes.

### Depth of Discussion

- Allows in-depth discussions with a small group that can represent a larger population.

### Versatility

- Useful at any point during a research study for planning, data collection, or evaluation.

## Organizing a Focus Group

### Skill and Art

- Conducting a focus group requires skill and experience.
- Quality of data depends on the moderator's effectiveness.
- Organizational skills and topic knowledge are crucial.



## Basic Design of a Focus Group

### Identifying Participants

- Typically six to ten people, with backups.

### Location and Invitation

- Select and book a suitable location.
- Send out an invitation including purpose, synopsis, logistics, and ethical considerations.



## Chapter

## 8

## Preparation and Equipment

### Room Setup

- Arrange the room for clear visibility and audibility.

### Necessary Equipment

- Tape recorder (optional)
- Flipchart and pens
- Briefing sheet and disclaimer



## Moderating the Discussion

### Briefing Sheet

- Prepare a document outlining research goals.

### Starting the Discussion

- Introduce yourself and the participants.
- Use open-ended questions to facilitate complex discussions (e.g., how, why, under what conditions)..



## Encouraging Free-Flowing Discussion

### Overcoming Stalls

- Ask participants to write down and share their ideas.
- Note ideas on a chart or board for visibility.
- Use written responses to reignite the discussion.

### Emphasizing Openness

- Stress that there are no right or wrong answers.
- Focus on discovering participants' feelings and beliefs.



## Online Focus Groups

### New Domain

The internet offers new opportunities for focus groups.

### Principles and Purpose

Core principles remain the same, but logistics differ from face-to-face focus groups.



## Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Interaction

### **Synchronous Interaction**

Real-time communication, maintains immediate interaction.

### **Asynchronous Interaction**

Delayed communication, can alter the dynamics of the focus group.

# SYNCHRONOUS

## WHAT IS IT?

Live, with all participants on at the same time



# ASYNCHRONOUS

## WHAT IS IT?

Pre-recorded, enabling one-to-many and many-to-one video



## Participant Considerations

### Comfort and Confidence

- Ensure participants are comfortable and confident in a virtual environment.

### Technological Barriers:

- Access to reliable software and necessary skills for participation.

## Advantages and Challenges

### Advantages

- Immediate transcripts.
- Less intimidation among participants.
- Access to geographically dispersed communities.

### Challenges

- Lack of visual cues.
- Difficulty in following parallel discussions.
- Ensuring effective interaction online.

## Practical Considerations

### Fit for Purpose

- Evaluate if online focus groups suit the research topic and population.

### Experience and Suitability

- Consider the researcher's experience and the appropriateness of the method.



Thank You