

REAL WORLD RESEARCH

SECOND EDITION

Robson, C. (2002) Real World Research
2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell

Keeping a research diary

- Notes of everything you read
- **Full** references
- Thoughts and ideas
- Reminders and appointments
- Notes of meetings (especially of tutorials)
- Progress reports
- Problems and possible solutions

Fixed or flexible design?

- Some projects using social research methods are pre-planned in detail: they have **FIXED** designs (commonly referred to as **quantitative research**).
- Others expect the plan to change or evolve while the project is underway: their design is **FLEXIBLE** (commonly referred to as **qualitative research**).

Flexible designs

- Initial planning is limited to the focus of the research and (possibly) to setting out some general research questions.
- Details of the design change depending on the initial findings.
- Examples are grounded theory and ethnographic studies.
- They typically rely largely on the collection of **qualitative** data (and are often referred to as **qualitative research**) though some quantitative data is often also collected.

Positivist assumptions

- Objective knowledge (facts) can be gained from direct experience or observation, and is the only knowledge available to science. Invisible or theoretical entities are rejected.
- Science separates facts from values; it is 'value-free'.
- Science is largely based on quantitative data, derived from the use of strict rules and procedures, fundamentally different from common sense.
- All scientific propositions are founded on facts. Hypotheses are tested against these facts.

continued...

Positivist assumptions

(cont.)

- The purpose of science is to develop universal causal laws. The search for scientific laws involves finding empirical regularities where two or more things appear together or in some kind of sequence (sometimes called a 'constant conjunction' of events).
- Cause is established through demonstrating such empirical regularities or constant conjunctions – in fact this is all that causal relations are.
- Explaining an event is simply relating it to a general law.
- It is possible to transfer the assumptions and methods of social science from natural to social science.

Philosophical critiques of positivist assumptions

- Doubts about the claim that direct experience can provide a sound basis for scientific knowledge.
- Rejection of the view that science should deal only with observable phenomena.
- Impossibility of distinguishing between the language of observation and of theory.
- Theoretical concepts do not have a 1:1 correspondence with 'reality' as it is observed.
- Scientific laws are not based on constant conjunctions between events in the world.
- 'Facts' and 'values' cannot be separated.

(after Blaikie, 1993; p.101)

Features of relativistic approaches

- The view that scientific accounts and theories do not have a privileged position; they are equivalent to other accounts (including lay ones). Different approaches are alternative ways of looking at the world and should be simply described, rather than evaluated in terms of their predictive power, explanatory value or truth value.
- There are no rational criteria for choosing between different theoretical frameworks or explanations, and moral, aesthetic or instrumental values or conventions always play an essential part in such choices.
- Reality is represented through the eyes of participants. The existence of an external reality independent of our theoretical beliefs and concepts is denied.

continued...

Features of relativistic approaches

(cont.)

- The importance of viewing the meaning of experience and behaviour in context and in its full complexity.
- A view of the research process as generating working hypotheses rather than immutable empirical facts.
- An attitude towards theorizing which emphasizes the emergence of concepts from data rather than their imposition in terms of a priori theory.
- The use of qualitative methodologies.

(after Fletcher, 1996 p.414; additional material from Steinmetz, 1998)

Features of the emancipatory paradigm

- It focuses on the lives and experiences of diverse groups (e.g. women, minorities and persons with disabilities) that traditionally have been marginalized.
- It analyses how and why resulting inequities are reflected in asymmetric power relationships.
- It examines how results of social inquiry on inequities are linked to political and social action.
- It uses an emancipatory theory to develop the research approach.

(after Mertens et al., 1994)

A realist view of science

- There is no unquestionable foundation for science, no 'facts' that are beyond dispute. Knowledge is a social and historical product. 'Facts' are theory-laden.
- The task of science is to invent theories to explain the real world, and to test these theories by rational criteria.
- Explanation is concerned with how mechanisms produce events. The guiding metaphors are of structures and mechanisms in reality rather than phenomena and events.
- A law is the characteristic pattern of activity or tendency of a mechanism. Laws are statements about the things that are 'really' happening, the ongoing ways of acting of independently existing things, which may not be expressed at the level of events.

continued...

A realist view of science

(cont.)

- The real world is not only very complex but also stratified into different layers. Social reality incorporates individual, group and institutional, and societal levels.
- The conception of causation is one in which entities act as a function of their basic structure.
- Explanation is showing how some event has occurred in a particular case. Events are to be explained even when they cannot be predicted.

(partly after House, 1991)

Classifying the purposes of research

■ Exploratory

- To find out what is happening, particularly in little-understood situations
- To seek new insights
- To ask questions
- To assess phenomena in a new light
- To generate ideas and hypotheses for future research

continued...

Classifying the purposes of research

(cont.)

■ Descriptive

- To portray an accurate profile of persons, events or situations
- Requires extensive previous knowledge of the situation etc. to be researched or described, so that you know appropriate aspects on which to gather information

continued...

Classifying the purposes of research

(cont.)

■ Explanatory

- Seeks an explanation of a situation or problem, traditionally but not necessarily in the form of causal relationships
- To explain patterns relating to the phenomenon being researched
- To identify relationships between aspects of the phenomenon

■ Emancipatory

- To create opportunities and the will to engage in social action

Ethical issues: practices to avoid

- Involving people without their knowledge or consent
- Coercing them to participate
- Withholding information about the true nature of the research
- Otherwise deceiving the participant
- Inducing them to commit acts diminishing their self-esteem

continued...

Ethical issues: practices to avoid

(cont.)

- Violating rights of self-determination (e.g. in studies seeking to promote individual change)
- Exposing participants to physical or mental stress
- Invading their privacy
- Withholding benefits from some participants (e.g. in comparison groups)
- Not treating participants fairly, or with consideration, or with respect

Political influences on research

The person(s) or agencies sponsoring, funding or otherwise providing resources, access or facilities for the research may influence some or all of the following:

- Selection of research focus
- Selection of research design (research questions, strategy, methods, etc.)
- Granting of access
- Publication of findings
- Use made by sponsor of findings

Note: Knowledge that a research project has been sponsored by a particular agency may affect the **credibility** of its findings

Choosing a research strategy

- Is a **fixed** or **flexible** design strategy appropriate?
- Is your proposed study an evaluation?
- Do you wish to carry out **action research**?
- If you opt for a **fixed** design strategy, which type is most appropriate?
- If you opt for a **flexible** design strategy, which type is most appropriate?

continued on final slide...

Traditional fixed design research strategies (1)

Experimental strategy

- Samples selected from known populations
- Allocation to different experimental conditions
- Planned change introduced on one or more variables
- Measurement on small number of variables
- Control of other variables
- Usually involves hypothesis testing

Traditional fixed design research strategies (2)

Non-experimental strategy

- Samples selected from known populations
- Allocation to different experimental conditions
- Measurement on small number of variables
- Control of other variables
- May or may not involve hypothesis testing

Traditional flexible design research strategies (1)

Case study

- Selection of a single case (or a small number of related cases)
- Study of the case in its context
- Collection of information via a range of data collection techniques

Traditional flexible design research strategies (2)

Ethnographic study

- Selection of a group, organization or community of interest or concern
- Immersion of the researcher in that setting
- Use of participation observation

REAL WORLD RESEARCH

SECOND EDITION

Chapter 6: Flexible Designs

Robson, C.(2002) Real World Research
2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell

General skills needed by flexible design investigators

- **Question asking.** Need for an 'enquiring mind'. Your task in fieldwork is to enquire why events appear to have happened or to be happening.
- **Good listening.** Used in a general sense to include all observation and sensing, not simply via the ears. Also 'listening' to what documents say. **Good** means taking in a lot of new information without bias.

continued...

General skills needed by flexible design investigators

(cont.)

- **Adaptiveness and flexibility.** These studies rarely end up exactly as planned. You have to be willing to change procedures or plans if the unanticipated occurs. Need to balance **adaptiveness** and **rigour**.
- **Grasp of the issues.** The investigator needs to **interpret** information during the study, not simply record it.
- **Lack of bias.** The preceding skills are negated if they are simply used to substantiate a preconceived position. Investigators should be open to contrary findings.

Validity (credibility, trustworthiness) in flexible designs

Can be strengthened by:

- providing an accurate and complete description
- being prepared to modify your interpretation in the light of your involvement
- considering alternative explanations
- actively seeking data which do not fit in with your explanation
- using reflexivity to identify possible bias
- triangulation
- peer debriefing and support
- member checking
- providing an audit trail

Case study (after Robert Yin)

Case study is a **strategy** for doing **research** which involves an **empirical** investigation of a **particular** contemporary phenomenon within its real life **context** using **multiple sources of evidence**.

Some types of case study

- Case study of a person
- Set of individual case studies
- Community studies
- Social group studies
- Studies of organizations and institutions
- Studies of events, roles and relationships

A case study plan

- **Overview.** Background information about the project (context and perspective, issues and relevant readings)
- **Procedures.** Covers the major tasks in collecting data, including:
 - access arrangements
 - resources available
 - schedule of the data collection activities and the periods of time involved

continued...

A case study plan

(cont.)

- **Questions.** The set of research questions with accompanying list of probable sources of evidence and data matrices
- **Reporting.** Covers the following:
 - outline of the case study report(s)
 - treatment of the data
 - audience(s)

Difficulties in doing an ethnographic study

- Calls for a detailed description, analysis and interpretation of the group, requiring an understanding of the specialist concepts used when talking about socio-cultural systems.
- Traditional ethnographies extend over a long time. 'Mini-ethnographies' cut this down drastically, creating a tension with the requirement to develop an intimate understanding of the group.
- Ethnographies have typically been written in a narrative, literary style which may be unfamiliar to those with a social science background.
- Researchers have been known to 'go native'.

Features of the ethnographic approach

- Your task is to uncover the shared cultural meanings of the behaviour, actions, events and contexts of the group.
- To do this requires you to gain an insider's perspective.
- Hence you need both to observe and study the group in its natural setting, and to take part in what goes on there.
- Participant observation in the field is essential but no method of data collection is ruled out in principle.
- The central focus of your study and detailed research questions will emerge and evolve as you continue your involvement.
- Data collection is likely to be prolonged over time and to have a series of phases. Focus on things which occur frequently so that you can develop understanding of their significance.

Reasons why you might use participant observation

- You see interactions, actions and behaviours and the way people interpret these, act on them etc., as central.
- You believe that knowledge of the social world can be best gained by observing 'real life' settings.
- You consider that generating data on social interaction in specific contexts, as it occurs, is superior to retrospective accounts or their ability to verbalize and reconstruct a version of what happened.

continued...

Reasons why you might use participant observation

(cont.)

- You view social explanations as best constructed through depth and complexity in data.
- You are happy with an active, reflexive and flexible research role.
- You feel it is more ethical to enter into and become involved in the social world of those you research, rather than 'standing outside'.
- You cannot see any alternative way of collecting the data you require to answer your research questions!

REAL WORLD RESEARCH

SECOND EDITION

Chapter 7:

Designs for Particular Purposes: Evaluation, Action and Change

Possible purposes of an evaluation

- To find out if client needs are met
- To improve the programme
- To assess the outcomes of a programme
- To find out how a programme is operating
- To assess the efficiency of a programme
- To understand why a programme works (or doesn't work)

Criteria for an evaluation

Any evaluation should meet the following criteria:

- **Utility.** There is no point in doing an evaluation if there is no prospect of it being useful to an audience.
- **Feasibility.** An evaluation should only be done if it is feasible to conduct it in political, practical and cost-effective terms.
- **Propriety.** An evaluation should only be done if you can demonstrate that it will be carried out **fairly** and **ethically**.
- **Technical adequacy.** Given reassurance about utility, feasibility and proper conduct, the evaluation must then be carried out with technical skill and sensitivity.

Checklist for planning an evaluation

■ Reasons, purposes and motivations

- Is the evaluation for yourself or someone else?
- Why is it being done?
- Who should have the information obtained?

■ Value

- Can actions or decisions be taken as a result?
- Is somebody or something going to stop it being carried out?

■ Interpretation

- Is the nature of the evaluation agreed between those involved?

continued...

Checklist for planning an evaluation

(cont.)

■ Subject

- What kinds of information do you need?

■ Evaluator(s)

- Who gathers the information?
- Who writes the report?

■ Methods

- What methods are appropriate to the information required?
- Can they be developed and applied in the time available?
- Are the methods acceptable to those involved?

continued...

Checklist for planning an evaluation

(cont.)

■ Time

- What time can be set aside for the evaluation?
- Is this adequate to gather and analyse the information?

■ Permissions and control

- Have any necessary permissions to carry out the evaluation been sought and received?
- Is participation voluntary?
- Who decides what goes in the report?

continued...

Checklist for planning an evaluation

(cont.)

■ Use

- Who decides how the evaluation will be used?
- Will those involved see it in a modifiable draft version?
- Is the form of the report appropriate for the designated audience (style/length)?

And remember:

- Keep it as simple as possible – avoid complex designs and data analyses
- Think defensively – if it can go wrong it will, so try to anticipate potential problems

Skills needed to carry out evaluations

- writing a proposal
- clarifying purposes of the evaluation
- identifying, organizing and working with a team
- choice of design and data collection techniques
- interviewing
- questionnaire construction and use
- observation
- management of complex information systems
- data analysis
- report writing, including making recommendations
- fostering utilization of findings
- sensitivity to political concerns

Steps in carrying out a needs assessment

- Identify possible objectives
- Decide on important objectives
- Assess what is currently available to meet the important objectives
- Select final set of objectives

Stages of action research

- Define the inquiry
- Describe the situation
- Collect evaluative data and analyse it
- Review the data and look for contradictions
- Tackle a contradiction by introducing change
- Monitor the change
- Analyse evaluative data about the change
- Review the change and decide what to do next

(slightly modified from Bassey, 1998, pp.94-5)

Assumptions for those wishing to initiate change (from Fullan, 1982, p.91)

- Don't assume that your version of what the change should be is the one that could or should be implemented.
- Change involves ambiguity, ambivalence and uncertainty about the meaning of the change.
- Some conflict and disagreement are not only inevitable but fundamental to change.
- People need pressure to change but it is only effective under conditions that allow them to react and interact.

continued...

Assumptions for those wishing to initiate change (from Fullan, 1982, p.91)

(cont.)

- Effective change takes time.
- Lack of implementation is not necessarily because of rejection or resistance.
- Don't expect all, or even most, people or groups to change.
- You need a plan based on these assumptions.
- Change is a frustrating, discouraging business.

Disadvantages of the practitioner-researcher role

- **Time.** Trying to do a systematic enquiry on top of normal commitments is very difficult.
- **Lack of expertise.** Depends on the individual. A major problem can be 'not knowing what it is that you don't know'.
- **Lack of confidence.** Lack of experience in carrying out studies leads to lack of confidence.
- **'Insider' problems.** The insider may have preconceptions about issues or solutions. There can also be hierarchy difficulties and possibly the 'prophet in own country' phenomenon (i.e. outside advice may be more highly valued).

Advantages of the practitioner-researcher role

- **‘Insider’ opportunities.** You will have a pre-existing knowledge and experience base about the situation and the people involved.
- **‘Practitioner’ opportunities.** There is likely to be a substantial reduction of implementation problems.
- **‘Practitioner-researcher’ synergy.** Practitioner insights and role help in the design, carrying out and analysis of useful and appropriate studies.

Communication skills needed by the real world researcher

- Explaining the rationale for a project (showing the client and others what is in it for them).
- Listening and reacting (showing understanding and generating confidence in the researcher).
- Defending or presenting an idea, opinion or project (showing professional competence and ability to contribute to management/organizational objectives).

continued...

Communication skills needed by the real world researcher

(cont.)

- Redirecting or redefining their expressed interest or objectives (ensuring that research results will be useful and making sure that the research answers the questions they should be asking).
- Getting agreement and commitment (making sure that they understand what must be done to provide support and follow-up).

(from Hakel et al., 1982, pp.105-8)

REAL WORLD RESEARCH

SECOND EDITION

Chapter 8: Surveys and Questionnaires

Robson, C.(2002) Real World Research
2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell

Steps in carrying out a small-scale interview-based questionnaire survey

- Development of research questions, study design (including sample selection for pre-tests and main study), and initial draft of questionnaire
- Informal testing of draft questionnaire
- Revise draft questionnaire
- Pre-test of revised draft using interviews
- Revise questionnaire again (possible revision of design and main study sample)
- Carry out main data collection interviews
- Code data and prepare data files
- Analyse data and write report

Disadvantages of questionnaire-based surveys

General

- Data are affected by the characteristics of the respondents.
- Respondents will not necessarily report their beliefs, attitudes etc. accurately.

Postal and other self-administered surveys

- Typically have a low response rate. As you don't usually know the characteristics of non-respondents you don't know whether the sample is representative.
- Ambiguities in, and misunderstandings of, the survey questions may not be detected.
- Respondents may not treat the exercise seriously; and you may not be able to detect this.

continued...

Disadvantages of questionnaire-based surveys

(cont.)

Interview surveys

- Data may be affected by characteristics of the interviewers.
- Data may be affected by interactions of interviewer/respondent characteristics.
- Respondents may feel their answers are not anonymous and be less forthcoming or open.

Advantages of questionnaire-based surveys

General

- They provide a relatively simple and straightforward approach to the study of attitudes, values, beliefs and motives.
- They may be adapted to collect generalizable information from almost any human population.
- High amounts of data standardization.

continued...

Advantages of questionnaire-based surveys

(cont.)

Postal and other self-administered surveys

- Often the only, or the easiest, way of retrieving information about the past history of a large set of people.
- Can be extremely efficient at providing large amounts of data, at a relatively low cost, in a short period of time.
- They allow anonymity, which can encourage frankness when sensitive areas are involved.

Interview surveys

- The interviewer can clarify questions.
- The presence of the interviewer encourages participation and involvement.

Avoiding problems in question wording

- Keep the language simple.
- Keep questions short.
- Avoid double-barrelled questions.
- Avoid leading questions.
- Avoid questions in the negative.
- Only ask questions where respondents are likely to have the knowledge needed to answer.
- Try to ensure that the questions mean the same thing to all respondents.
- Avoid a prestige bias.

continued...

Avoiding problems in question wording

(cont.)

- Remove ambiguity.
- Avoid direct questions on sensitive topics (in interview situations).
- Ensure question's frame of reference is clear.
- Avoid creating opinions.
- Use personal wording if you want the respondents' own feelings etc.
- Avoid unnecessary or objectionable detail.
- Avoid prior alternatives.
- Avoid producing response sets.

(from de Vaus, 1991; pp.83-6)

Factors in securing a good response rate to a postal questionnaire (general)

- Appearance of the questionnaire is vital.
- Clarity of wording and simplicity of design are essential.
- Arrange the contents to maximize co-operation.

Factors in securing a good response rate to a postal questionnaire (design and layout)

- Coloured pages can clarify the structure.
- Answering by putting ticks in boxes is familiar to most respondents.
- Sub-lettering questions (e.g. 5a, 5b, etc.) can help in grouping questions on a specific issue.
- Repeat instructions if confusion is possible.

continued...

Factors in securing a good response rate to a postal questionnaire (design and layout)

(cont.)

- Initial questions should be easy and interesting. Middle questions cover the more difficult areas. Make the last questions interesting to encourage return of the questionnaire.
- **Wording of questions is of crucial importance. Pre-testing is essential.**
- A brief note at the end can ask respondents to check that they have not accidentally omitted to answer any questions; solicit an early return of the questionnaire; thank them for their help; and offer to send an abstract of the findings.

Factors in securing a good response rate to a postal questionnaire (initial mailing)

- Use good-quality envelopes, typed and if possible addressed to a named person.
- Use first class postage, stamped not franked if possible.
- Enclose a stamped addressed envelope for return of the questionnaire.
- For 'home' surveys, Thursday is the best day for sending out; for organizations, Monday or Tuesday.
- Avoid a December mailing.

Factors in securing a good response rate to a postal questionnaire (covering letter)

- This should indicate the aim of the survey, convey its importance, assure confidentiality and encourage reply. If serial numbers or other codings are used, say why.
- Tailor it to the audience (e.g. a parent survey might stress its value for child-care).
- Give the name of the sponsor or organization carrying out the survey on the letterhead and in the body of the letter.
- Pre-survey letters, advising respondents of the forthcoming questionnaire, can increase response rate.

Factors in securing a good response rate to a postal questionnaire (follow-up letter)

- **This is the most productive factor in increasing response rates. All of the above suggestions apply.**
- Emphasize the importance of the study and the value of the respondent's participation.
- Conveying disappointment and surprise at non-response can be effective.
- Don't suggest that non-response is common.
- Send a further copy of the questionnaire and another stamped addressed envelope.

Factors in securing a good response rate to a postal questionnaire (additional advice)

Further follow-ups

- These are subject to the law of diminishing returns but are worthwhile. Three reminders are commonly recommended. They can increase response rates by a further third.

Use of incentives

- Incentives accompanying the initial mailing appear to be more effective than rewarding the return of completed questionnaires (e.g. through a prize draw). They should be a token rather than a payment, e.g. a ball-point pen.

Interview schedule (interview-based survey)

- Interviewer's introduction
- Introductions to particular questions (or groups)
- The questions (word for word)
- Set of possible answers (prompts)
- Response codes
- Possible 'skips'
- Closing comments
- Procedure reminders

General advice for interviewers carrying out structured interviews

- **Appearance.** Dress in a similar way to those you will be interviewing. If in doubt err on the side of neatness and neutrality.
- **Approach.** Be pleasant. Try to make the respondent comfortable.
- **Familiarity with questionnaire/interview schedule.** View yourself as an actor, with the interview schedule as your script. Know it thoroughly.

continued...

General advice for interviewers carrying out structured interviews

(cont.)

- **Question wording.** Use the exact wording of questions and keep to their sequence.
- **Fixed-alternative response questions.** Only allow the standard alternatives.
- **Open-ended response questions.** Either code immediately or record the answers exactly for later coding. Don't make cosmetic adjustments, correct or fabricate.

Planning and conducting telephone surveys

- Letter before calling
- Explanations
- Check person
- Check time
- Keep it short
- Rapport

continued...

Planning and conducting telephone surveys

(cont.)

- Friendly voice
- Speed of speech
- Log and outcomes
- Prior rehearsal
- Hourly goals
- Tape-record? (ask permission)

(from Mertens, 1998, pp.131-132)

Developing a diary form

- Think of it as a questionnaire.
- Ensure that respondents know **what** they have to do, **why**, and **when**.
- Include an item only if you know what you are going to do with it.
- Check that 'things are going on all right', preferably by a personal contact.
- General considerations about confidentiality, anonymity, feedback of results, permissions, etc. apply.

Types of sample: probability samples

- Simple random sample
- Systematic sample
- Stratified random sample
- Cluster sample
- Multistage sample

Types of sample: non-probability samples

- Quota sample
- Dimensional sample
- Convenience sample
- Purposive sample
- Snowball sample

Types of sample: other (for special purposes)

- Time sample
- Homogenous sample
- Heterogenous sample
- Extreme case sample
- Rare element sample

REAL WORLD RESEARCH

SECOND EDITION

Chapter 11: Observational Methods

Robson, C.(2002) Real World Research
2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell

When participant observation might be useful in a small project

- With small groups
- For events/processes that take a reasonably short time
- For frequent events
- For activities that are accessible to observers
- When your prime motivation is find out what is going on
- When you are not short of time

The process of analytic induction

- Formulate a rough definition of the phenomenon of interest.
- Propose a possible explanation.
- Study a situation to assess whether this explanation fits the evidence.
- If it doesn't, come up with a different explanation or redefine the situation so that it excludes the phenomenon.
- Repeat with further situations. Confidence in the explanation increases when you find more situations where it fits the evidence.

Recording participant observation

- You need a system to capture information as fully as possible.
- Make a record of observation on the spot, during the event. This may be very condensed, using abbreviations, etc.
- Go through it shortly afterwards to add detail and to ensure that it is understandable.
- Getting this full record right may take as long as the original observation did.
- If on-the-spot recording is not feasible notes should be made soon afterwards.
- Always prepare the detailed notes of the full report within twenty-four hours of the field session, and don't start another session until you have.

Developing a coding scheme

The categories should be devised to provide information relevant to the research questions in which you are interested. To be straightforward and reliable in use they should be:

- Focused
- Objective
- Non context-dependent
- Explicitly defined
- Exhaustive
- Mutually exclusive
- Easy to record

Note: Developing a new scheme is a lot of work. If there is an existing scheme which appears appropriate, consider using or adapting it.

Measuring inter-observer agreement

- Draw up the 'confusion matrix'.
- Calculate the proportion of agreement.
- Calculate the proportion expected by chance.
- Calculate Cohen's Kappa.

REAL WORLD RESEARCH

SECOND EDITION

Chapter 12: Additional Methods of Data Collection

Robson, C.(2002) Real World Research
2nd edn. Oxford: Blackwell

Advantages of 'trace' measures

- They are unobtrusive and non-reactive.
- They can provide valuable cross-validation of other measures.
- They encourage ingenuity and creativity on the part of the enquirer.

Disadvantages of 'trace' measures

- The person(s) responsible for the trace and/or the population from which they come may be difficult or impossible to specify.
- It may not be reasonable to assume that all persons involved make equivalent contributions to the trace.
- Apparent link between cause and effect may be mediated by other factors.
- Ethical difficulties of researching without people's knowledge or consent.

Advantages of content analysis

- When based on existing documents it is unobtrusive.
- The data are in permanent form and hence can be subject to re-analysis, allowing reliability checks and replication studies.
- It may provide a low-cost form of longitudinal analysis when a run or series of documents of a particular type is available.

Table 10.3 Content analysis of 603 newspaper clippings covering Los Belvederes, 1982-1990

Main topic of newspaper clipping (including feature articles, brief reports, press releases, commentary, and letters to the editor)	Number of newspaper clippings and percent of total per year							
	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988-1989	1990
<u>Popular Mobilization</u> ¹ Demands and/or claims re: land tenure, services and political action.	14 45%	14 40%	16 14%	15 22%	39 39%	56 ² 37%	21 25%	7 32%
<u>Ecological arguments</u> and projects calling for alternative (sustainable) development	0 0%	0 0%	24 21%	7 10%	0 0%	1 1%	0 0%	0 0%
<u>Diverse Topics</u> (e.g., poverty, residential segregation) covered from a pro-colono perspective;	9 29%	4 11%	21 18%	13 19%	13 13%	14 9%	15 19%	4 19%
<u>Official declarations</u> and politically conservative commentary concerning the politics of containment ³	8 26%	17 49%	56 48%	32 48%	47 47%	80 53%	45 56%	11 52%
Total N = 603	31	35	117	67	99	151	81	22

Disadvantages of content analysis

- The documents available may be limited or partial.
- The documents have been written for some purpose other than for the research, and it is difficult or impossible to allow for the biases or distortions that this introduces.
- It is very difficult to assess causal relationships.

Using administrative records for research purposes

- The quality of the data must be assessed.
- Careful study of existing record systems may allow you to avoid unnecessary duplication in data collection.
- Sampling from administrative records may well be needed.

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods

- Triangulation
- Qualitative method used to facilitate fixed research design
- Quantitative method used to facilitate flexible research design
- Provision of a general or more complete picture
- Structure and process
- Researcher and participant perspectives

continued...

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods

(cont.)

- Adding statistical generalizability
- Facilitating interpretation
- Relations between macro and micro levels
- Stage of the research
- Hybrids

(from Bryman 1992; pp.59-61)

Checklist on negotiating access

- Establish points of contact and individuals from whom need permission.
- Prepare outline of study.
- Clear official channels by formal requests for permission.
- Discuss study with gatekeepers.
- Discuss study with likely participants.
- Be prepared to modify study in the light of the discussions.