Four Key Dimensions that Characterize the forms of Observation

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Observation is a vital tool for data collection in observational research. Observational research is carried out in a natural environment such as at home, at the workplace instead of controlled environments such as in the laboratories. With the observational research, the researcher can observe how the sample subjects such as people interact with products and people and the how they face challenges. Observational research approaches are useful where the researcher has to look for improvement opportunities or innovation in some process. Observational research can be considered as simple as watching and taking notes, but in actual practice, it is not that simple. There exist some subtle differences in observations that can alter the results accompanied by the data collected.

For observational research to be successful, there are some critical aspects that the researcher must keep in mind. If the research involves observation of individuals or group of people without informing them about the observation, then ethical considerations must also be followed. There will be a narrow line between moral restrictions and recording the results of the observation. Most of the time observational research is associated with qualitative methods o research but the results obtained from observation can be quantified as well for quantitative analysis (Smith, Quested, Appleton, & Duda, 2016). It is usually helpful to use multiple observers to observe the same situation with different perspectives. Using multiple observers will add credibility to the results because it will uncover the agreements and disagreements between the observers of different perspectives. Hence the result data will be more trustworthy than using a single observer.

A common approach usually taken by the observational researchers is known as the complete observer. In this approach, the observer is completely isolated from the participants of the research. The participants will not notice the observer. This approach is useful in minimizing the Hawthorne Effect. Hawthorne effect states that an individual may change behavior towards a certain event if aware of being observed. Simply human participants tend to change their behavior under-informed observation. The effect is validated by numerous daily life social experiments as well. Despite having the benefit of original observation results, the approach raises ethical concerns as well. How would an individual feel if he found out someone was watching his actions, but he did not know? The approach may not be welcomed in some conditions. Benefits of the approach include less emotional involvement of the observer and correct recording of the results. Demerits of the approach cannot be ignored as well because a total isolated observer will not be able to understand the whole phenomenon. The observer will not be able to get real and deep inside of the experiment.

In the second approach, the observer will act as a participant of the group under observation. The observer will be recognized by the participants, and in some cases, the participants are also partially aware of the research goals of the observer. The observer tries to play a neutral role as much as possible by keeping the interaction with participants of the observation very limited. The approach is common when the observer has to gain knowledge of the behavior of the participants with a certain product such as a software product to solve the problems (Girard & Cohn, 2016). The benefits to the approach include the greater precision of the recorded data because the observer was also a part of the group under observation. The observer can record more results in a short period of time with close observation of the activities of the participants of the group. Demerits of the approach include the biased recording of the results because an observer can develop emotional attachments with the participants. Moreover, if a wide area has to be covered as per the requirement of the study, then that will not be possible with this approach.

The third dimension is an observational setup in which the participants are playing the role of the observer as well. Such as the researcher is fully engaged with participants of the research. While the researcher is playing the role of a friend, the participants are aware of the research goals as well. The drawback to the approach is the same as the researcher main develop emotional relationships with the participants and it will affect the results of the research. The fourth dimension is a fully embedded observer in the group or samples. The observer plays the role of a spy because the participants will not be aware of the presence of the observer or researcher (Karlsson, Fridh, & Eriksson, 2017). The researchers behave as neutral and perform all of the activities with the participants gaining complete insight into their behaviors. The approach is also referred to as going native in research design. The best way to understand behavior or thing is to experience it firsthand. Example of this dimension in customer-centered research may be of a secret shopper. Demerits of the approach are similar to the previous dimensions that the observer may develop emotional connections with the research findings.

Collecting factual data in qualitative research is a challenging task. One way of eliminating the problem is to perform observation in a controlled environment where the samples behave naturally. All the four dimensions of the observational research are helpful in qualitative methods of the research as long as ethical situations are observed as well.

References

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