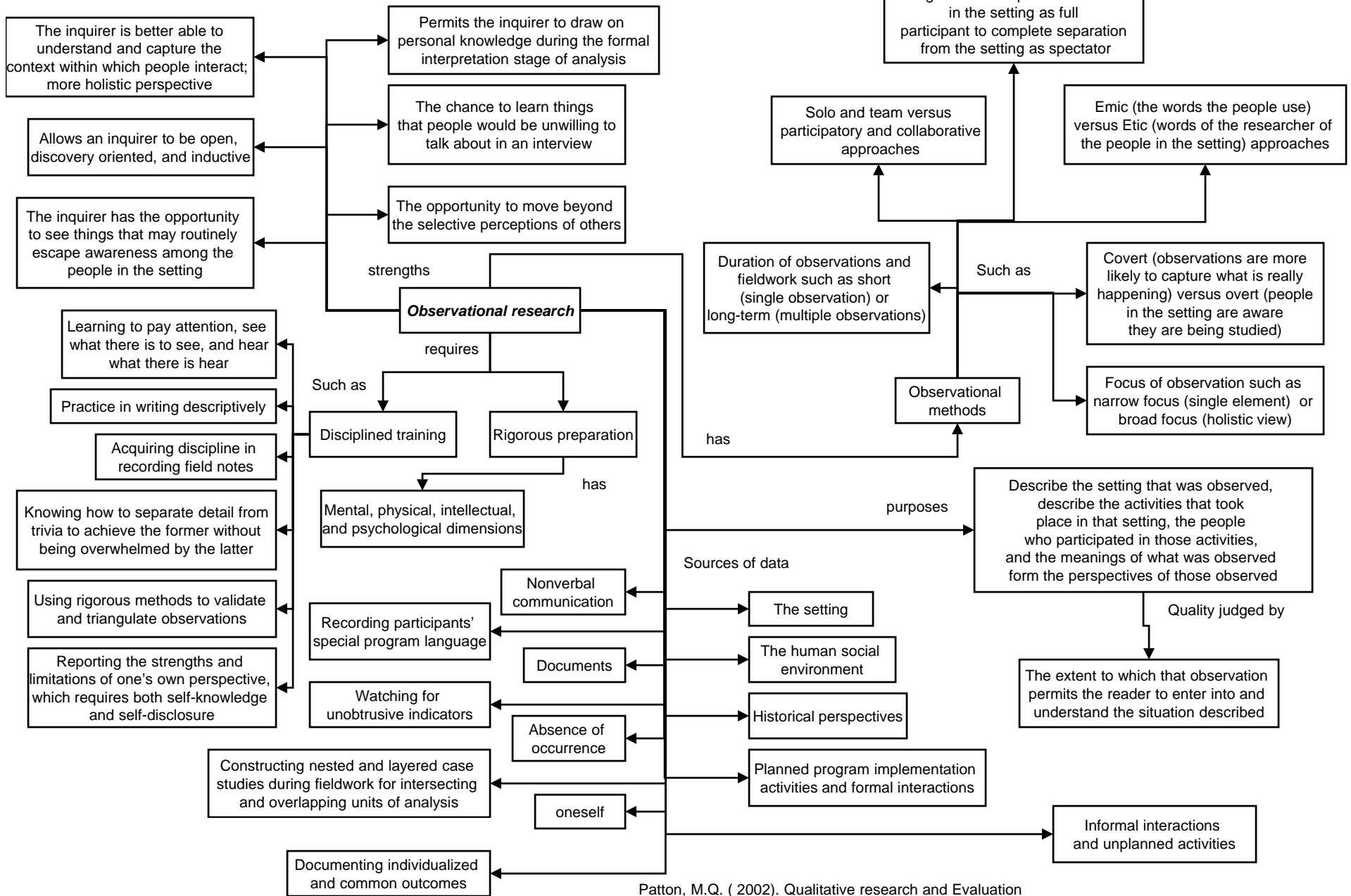


Fieldwork Strategies and Observation Methods

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Patton, M.Q. (2002). Qualitative research and Evaluation Methods. Chapter 6: Fieldwork Strategies and Observation Methods. Third Edition. Sage Publications, Inc.

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Summary Guidelines for Fieldwork

1. Design the fieldwork to be clear about the role of the observer (degree of participation); the tension between insider (emic) and outsider (etic) perspectives; degree and nature of collaboration with co researchers; disclosure and explanation of the observer's role to others; duration of observations (short vs. long); and focus of observation (narrow vs. broad).
2. Be descriptive in taking field notes. Strive for thick, deep, and rich description.
3. Stay open. Gather a variety of information from different perspectives. Be opportunistic in following leads and sampling purposefully to deepen understanding. Allow the design to emerge flexibly as new understanding opens up new paths of inquiry.
4. Cross-validate and triangulate by gathering different kinds of data: observations, interviews, documents, artifacts, recordings, and photographs. Use multiple and mixed methods.
5. Use quotations; represent people in their own terms. Capture participants' views of their experiences in their own words.
6. Select key informants wisely and use them carefully. Draw on the wisdom of their informed perspectives, but keep in mind that their perspectives are selective.
7. Be aware of and strategic about the different stages of fieldwork.
 - a. Build trust and rapport at the entry stage. Remember that the observer is also being observed and evaluated.
 - b. Attend to relationships throughout fieldwork and the ways in which relationships change over the course of fieldwork, including relationships with hosts, sponsors within the setting, and co researchers in collaborative and participatory research.
 - c. Stay alert and disciplined during the more routine, middle phase of fieldwork
 - d. Focus on pulling together a useful synthesis as fieldwork draws to a close. Move from generating possibilities to verify emergent patterns and confirming themes.
 - e. Be disciplined and conscientious in taking detailed field notes at all stages of fieldwork.
 - f. In evaluations and action research, provide formative feedback as part of the verification process of fieldwork. Time that feedback carefully. Observe its impact.
8. Be as involved as possible in experiencing the setting as fully as appropriate and manageable while maintaining an analytical perspective grounded in the purpose of the fieldwork.
9. Separate description from interpretation and judgment.
10. Be reflective and reflexive. Include in your field notes and reports your own experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Consider and report how your observations may have affected the observed as well as how you may have been affected by what and how you've participated and observed. Ponder and report the origins and implications of your own perspective.

1. What kinds of data will you collect when in the field?

Different kinds of data that could be collected on the field are: a) detailed description of the setting such as the physical environment, b) social environments such as the ways in which human beings interact and create social-ecological constellations that affect how participants behave toward each other in those environments, c) historical information, d) nonverbal communication, e) watching for unobtrusive indicators, f) documents such as records, documents, artifacts and archives, g) observation of absence of occurrence, etc. Other important data to be collected in specific situations are identification of implementation activities and formal and informal interactions that focus on building observations around activities that have a kind of unity around them. Other data that may be collected are the construction of nested and layered case studies for intersecting and overlapping units of analysis and the identification and documentation of individualized and common outcomes. A different kind of data that can be collected is observation of oneself. The identification of our own voice and reflexivity is very important to emphasize our self-awareness, our political/cultural consciousness and ownership of one's perspective.

2. What are your feelings about overt vs. covert roles as a researcher? How does this impact your study?

This topic of researchers role as overt and covert presents a dilemma for me. As Patton points it out, I also believe that the overt and covert roles of the researcher are a concern about the validity and reliability of the observational data. And not only these roles of the researcher deal with validity and reliability, but also are highly related to ethics. On the one hand, if the researcher adopts a covert role, he could be dealing with problems of participation consent, but on the other hand, participants would behave differently when knowing they are being observed. I consider that the role will adopt will depend on the situation and on the ethical perspective the researcher has adopted

3. Discuss how “sensitizing concepts” could guide your observations. How does “being sensitized” affect bias?

Sensitizing concepts could guide our observations as a way to provide us with a framework of how the concept is given meaning in a particular place or set of circumstances being studied. It may serve as a starting point in thinking about the class of data that will provide the researcher an initial guide in the research. However, being sensitized can affect bias because the researcher may enter the research field with some preconceptions. Patton warns us that “overused sensitizing concepts can become desensitizing.”

4. How can you authentically report your participants' emotions?

It is difficult to report our participants emotions. We can take special care of the nonverbal language to try to identify those emotions, but we must be aware of the possibility of the participant not being sincere. However, we have to do as much as it is in our hands to report those emotions by providing thorough descriptions of what we are being observing perfectly separating our own voice from our participants. We can try to use triangulation by first observing participants and then interviewing them. Even more, once we have written our description, we can go back and ask the participant to read such description and provide feedback.