

Overview of Research Methods in Behavioral Sciences

Why Behavioral Theory and Research?

- Avoid the quick-fix mentality
 - Keep current with the research literature in the field
 - Be skeptical when simple solutions are offered and analyze such solutions and their supposed evidence thoroughly
 - Make sure the concepts you apply are based on science rather than advocacy
 - Experiment with new solutions yourself if possible

How do we come to know things?

- Tenacity – we believe that something is true simply because we have always believed it to be true
- Intuition – we believe something is true because it feels obvious and disputable
- Authority – we believe a statement is true because it is made by a respected or expert source
- Personal experience – we believe information we acquire through interacting with other people and the world at large and conclude that our experience reflects truth

Research Methods

- Naturalistic observation
- Participant observation
- Case method
- Surveys
- Correlation research
- Experiment method

Naturalistic Observation

- Qualitative research technique in which an investigator observes events occurring in an organization while attempting not to affect those events by being present
- Advantages
 - Observing subjects in their natural habitat
- Disadvantages
 - Observer Bias - error introduced into measurement when observers overemphasize behavior they expect to find and fail to notice behavior they do not expect

In the social sciences, qualitative research is a term that describes research that focuses on how individuals and groups view/understand the world and construct meaning out of their experiences

Participant Observation

- Naturalistic observation of an organization made by individuals who have been hired as employees
- Advantages
 - gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals
- Disadvantages
 - The desire to change things; manipulated the outcome
 - Outcomes are very difficult to predict from the outset
 - Challenges are sizeable and achievements depend to a very large extent on researcher's commitment, creativity and imagination

Case method

- Qualitative research method in which a particular organization is studied in detail, usually in the hopes of being able to learn about organizational functions
- Advantages
 - Allows for the characterization of real-life events (e.g. organizational and managerial processes)
 - No requirement for control over behavioral events
 - Provides a conduit to go from theory to data and back to theory
- Disadvantages
 - More reactive
 - Potential bias
 - Can result in massive, unreadable documents
 - Generalization is a concern

Survey

- Questionnaire designed to measure people's perception of some aspect of organizational behavior
- Advantages
 - Efficient in collecting information from a large number of respondents
 - A wide range of information can be collected
 - Because standardized, relatively free from several types of errors
 - They are relatively easy to administer
 - There is an economy in data collection
- Disadvantages
 - Depend on subjects' motivation, honesty, memory, and ability to respond
 - Surveys are not appropriate for studying complex social phenomena
 - May have low validity when researching affective variables
 - Respondents are usually self-selected as opposed to random

Correlation Research

- An empirical research technique in which variables of interest are identified and carefully measured. These measures are then analyzed statistically to determine the extent to which they are related to one another
- Advantages
 - Large amounts of data can often be collected easily, efficiently, and quickly
 - Can be readily used to study behavior in natural settings
- Disadvantages
 - No control over the values of the independent variables
 - Correlation does not indicate a casual link between variables or the direction of causality

Experiment Method

- An empirical research method in which one or more variables are systematically varied (the independent variables) to determine if such changes have any impact on the behavior of interest (the dependent variable)
- Advantages
 - Manipulation of the independent variable
 - Control over extraneous variables
 - Random assignment to treatments
 - Hold other variables constant
- Disadvantages
 - Can be artificial
 - Subjects might not be reacting spontaneously

Lab or Field Experimentation

