

## Subject: Human Resource Management

Production of Courseware

Q - Content for Post Graduate Courses



Paper 05: Research Methodology  
Module 31: Observation and Ethnography



## Development Team

### Principal Investigator:

Prof. Ipsita Bansal  
Department of Management Studies  
BPS Women University, Khanpur Kalan, Sonepat

### Paper Coordinator:

Prof. S.P. Singh  
Faculty of Management Studies  
Gurukul Kangri University, Haridwar

### Content Writer:

Prof. S.P. Singh  
Faculty of Management Studies  
Gurukul Kangri University, Haridwar

### Content Reviewer:

Prof. H.L. Verma  
Vice-Chancellor  
Jagannath University, Bahadurgarh, Haryana

Items	Description of Module
Subject Name	Management
Paper Name	Research Methodology
Module Title	Observation and Ethnography
Module ID	Module 31
Pre-Requisites	Understanding the nature of qualitative research
Objectives	To study the observation and ethnography
Keywords	Non-participant observation, participant observation, field notes, Qualitative research methods

Role	Name	Affiliation
Principal Investigator	Prof.Ipshita Bansal	Department of Management Studies, BPSMV, Khanpur Kalan, Sonipat
Co-Principal Investigator		
Paper Coordinator	Prof. S.P.Singh	Department of Management Studies, GKV, Haridwar
Content Writer (CW)	Prof. S.P.Singh	Department of Management Studies, GKV, Haridwar
Content Reviewer (CR)		
Language Editor (LE)		

### QUADRANT -I

1. Module 31 : Observation and Ethnography
2. Learning Outcome
3. Introduction
4. Non-participant observation
5. Phases of observations
6. Problems in conducting observation
7. Limitation of the method
8. Participant observation
9. Ethnography
Summary

#### 1. Module 31: Observation and Ethnography

#### 2. Learning outcome

After you finish this module, you shall be able to:

- ❖ Know non-participant observation
- ❖ List the phases of observations
- ❖ Understand the problem in conducting observation
- ❖ Know the limitations of the observation
- ❖ Understand the participant observation
- ❖ Comprehend the ethnography

### **3. Introduction**

A glance at the evolution of qualitative research will tell the researcher that methodological discussions about the role of observation as a sociological research method have been pivotal to it. Various notions of observation and of the role of the observer can be searched in the literature. There are certain studies where the observer does not become component of the sphere of research under observation (e.g., in the tradition of Goffman 1961). These studies are completed by approaches attempting to accomplish the objective of getting an insider's knowledge of the field through the researcher's enhanced absorption of information as a participator in the observed field. In recent years ethnography has replaced participant observation. Generally, these approaches emphasize that practices are merely approachable through observation; interviews and narratives. It is often claimed that observation equips the researcher to identify how things take place. However, in interviews presentations comprise a combination of how something is and how something should be, needs to be freed from confusion. The observation can be divided into non-participant observation and participant observation.

### **4. Non-Participant Observation**



**Figure 1Non-participant observation (adapted from stjob.sg)**

Observation is an ordinary skill with a set of methods arranged according to a system and used in qualitative research. Practically all the senses are integrated into observations. Observational methods may be divided along five dimensions.

#### **4.1 Types of observation**



#### **4.1.1 Covert versus overt observation**

This refers to the extent to which the observation is revealed to those being observed?

#### **4.1.2 Non-participant versus participant observation**

This refers to the extent to which observer becomes an active part of the observed field.

#### **4.1.3 Systematic versus unsystematic observation**

This refers to the extent to which the observation is standardized or it remains flexible and responsive to the processes.

#### **4.1.4 Observation in natural versus artificial situations**

There are observations carried out in the field of interest or are interactions moved to a special place to make them observable more systematically

#### **4.1.5 Self-observation versus observing others**

This refers to the extent attention is paid to researcher's reflexive self-observation for further grounding the interpretation of the observed.

This general classification to observation can also be applied in qualitative research. The non-participant observation abstains from interventions in the field in comparison to interviews and participant observations. In non-participant observation simple observers follow the flow of events, behavior and interaction goes on as they would in the absence of a researcher, uninterrupted by intrusion (Adler and Adler 1998). Gold (1958) distinguished four kinds of participant roles including the complete participant, the participant as observer, the observer as participant and the complete observer.

The complete observer remains at a distance from the observed events in order to avoid influencing them. This can partially be accomplished by replacing the actual observation in the situation by videotaping. Alternatively, efforts may be undertaken to divert the attention of those under observation from the researcher so that they become unaware to the process of observation. In this context, covert observation is used, when observed persons are not aware that they are being observed. This procedure, however, is ethically contestable), especially if the field can be observed, and there are no issues in informing the observed or getting their consent. Often, however, this sort of observation is practiced in open spaces where this agreement cannot be obtained.

#### 4.2 Phases of Observation



Adler and Adler (1998), Denzin (1989b), and Spradley (1980) have named the following phases of an observation:

- ❖ The selection of a setting
- ❖ Defining the documentation in the observation and in every case;
- ❖ The training of the observers for accomplishing the standardization of such focuses;
- ❖ Descriptive observations providing an initial, general presentation of the field;
- ❖ Focused observations concentrating on relevant aspects to the research question;
- ❖ Selective observations intended to purposively grasp major aspects;
- ❖ The end of the observation.

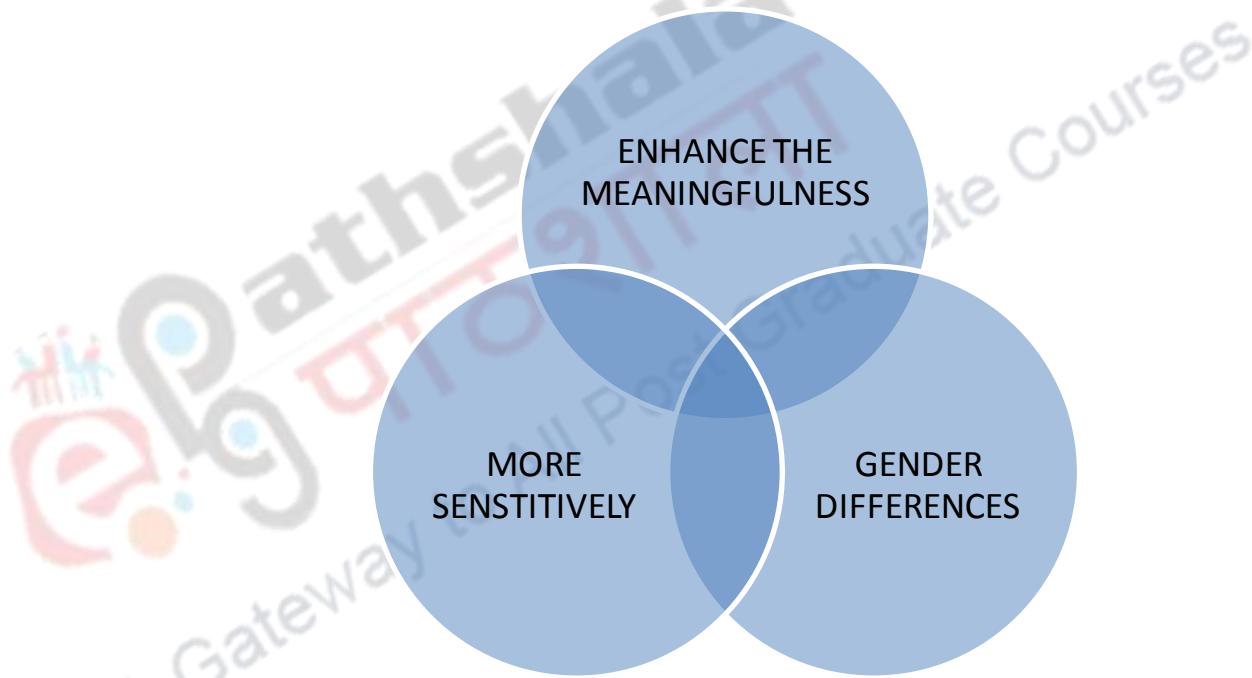
#### 4.3 Problems in conducting the observation

## DEFINE A ROLE FOR THE OBSERVERS

## PUBLIC AND UNSTRUCTURED FIELD

The major problem in conducting the observation is to define a role for the observers that they can take and that allows them to remain in the field or at its edge and observe it at the same time. The more open and unstructured the field is, the easier it will be to take an unconscious role and does not affect the field. The easier a field is to oversee, the more complex it is to take part in it without becoming a member.

### 4.4 Contributions to the General Methodological Discussion



Observations with other sources of data and the engagement of various observers enhance the meaningfulness of the data collected. Gender differences are a decisive aspect also, especially when observation is planned in public places, where the chances of approach and movement are much more confined for women due to specific threats than for men. Women perceive such restrictions and dangers much more sensitively, which forces them observe differently and take note of different things in comparison to male observers. This indicates the gendered nature of field work (Lofland 1998). For this reason this use of mixed-gender teams in observational studies is suggested. Another suggestion is the painstaking self-observation of the researcher while entering the field, during the course of the observation, and when looking back on its process for integration of implicit impressions, apparent incidentals, and perceptions in the reflection of the process and results.

### 5. Method Fit into the Research Process

The analysis of the production of social reality from an external perspective is the testing of theoretical concepts for certain phenomena on the basis of their occurrence and distribution. Research questions aim at descriptions of the state of certain life worlds. The selection of situations and persons occurs systematically according to criteria to have a representative sample, and random sampling therefore is applied. Data analyses are based on counting the incidence of specific activities by applying procedures of categorizing.

#### 4.4 Limitations of the Observation

EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVE.

OBSERVATION OF OPEN PLACES.

OBSERVE EVENTS AS THEY NATURALLY TAKE PLACE.

OBSERVATION INFLUENCES THE OBSERVED

Non-participant observation is an approach to the observed field from an external perspective. Therefore, it should be applied primarily to the observation of open places in which the number of the members cannot be restricted. Furthermore, it is an effort to observe events as they naturally take place. The observation exerts influence on the observed in an instance. Furthermore, the researchers' refraining from interacting with the field leads to problems in analysis of data and evaluating the interpretations, because of the systematic restriction on revealing the inner perspective of the field and of the observed persons. This strategy is connected more with knowledge of methods based on quantitative and standardized research.

### 5 Participant Observation



**Figure 2 Participant observation**

Observation, specifically participant observation, has been used in various study area as a tool for gather data about individuals, cultures and processes in qualitative research (Barbara B Kawulich (2005). Participant observation is a strategy of research that unites analysis of document, interview of respondents and informants, direct participation, observation, and introspection. (Denizen1989b)

Different methods of observation are meaningful to researchers in a various ways. They make available researchers with means to verify for nonverbal expression of feelings, identify the parties to the interaction, seize upon the way participants communicate with every other individual, and check for time devoted to different activities (SCHMUCK, 1997). Participant observation allows researchers to confirm statement of terms that participants apply in interviews, observing events that informants may be or may not be in a position to share. (MARSHALL & ROSSMAN, 1995)

DeWALT and DeWALT (2002) confirmed that the objective of design of research design applicable to participant observation as a method is to develop a knowledge of the complete person of the phenomena being studied as objective and accurate as possible under the given conditions. The participant observation may also be applied as a mean to increase the validity of the research as observations may help the investigator to acquire better knowledge of the context and phenomenon being studied. Validity is more powerful with the use of strategies used with observation, such as conducting interviews, analysis of documents, or carrying out surveys and administering questionnaires, or with other methods used in quantitative research. Participant observation is also useful in answering descriptive research questions, to construct theory, or to design a hypothesis or test hypotheses (DeWALT & DeWALT, 2002). At the time of formulating a research study and taking decision to use observation as a instrument of data collection, one

must take into account the sorts of questions orienting the study, the site of the study, the available opportunities for observation, the representative nature of the participants, and the strategies applied for recording and analyzing the data should be taken into account. (DeWALT & DeWALT, 2002)

There are reasons for using participant observation in research

- ❖ to identify and direct relationships with informants;
- ❖ to help the researcher feel the nerve of the way things are organized and determine the priority, people interrelationship of people, and the parameters of culture;
- ❖ to indicate to the researcher that the cultural members prefer to be important in manners, leadership, politics, social interaction, and taboos;
- ❖ the researcher becomes known to the cultural members and facilitating the process of research,
- ❖ To provide researcher questions to be asked to the participants.

### **5.1 Phases of Participant Observation?**

Participant observation is treated as a process in two respects. First,

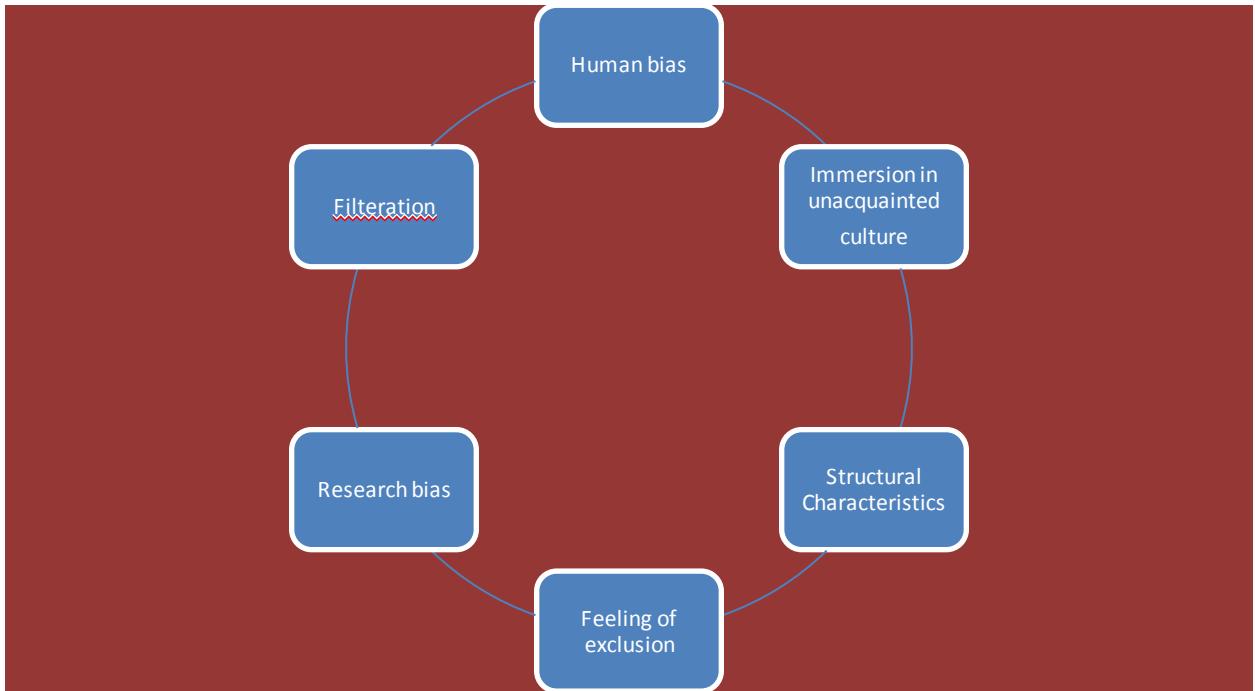
1. The researcher should more and more be a participant and obtain access to the field and to individuals.).
2. The observation should proceed through a process of getting increasingly concrete and focused on the necessary aspects of the research questions.

Thus, Spradley (1980) marked three distinct phases of participant observation:

- (a) Descriptive observation, at the beginning, provides the researcher with an orientation to the field being studies. It serves to provide nonspecific descriptions and is applied to seize the intricacy of the field to the possible extent and to develop simultaneously more factual research questions and directions of vision;
- (b) Focused observation restricts the researcher's perspective about most essential processes and problems of the research questions.
- (c) Selective observation focuses on identifying further evidence and instances for the kinds of processes and practices found in the previous step.

### **5.2 Limitations of Participant Observation**

Observation as an instrument of data collection suffers from several limitations.



**Figure 3** Limitations of Participant Observation

### 5.2.1 Human bias

A biased human conducts participant observation to serve as the instrument for data collection; the researcher needs to understand the way gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and theoretical approach may affect observation, analysis, and interpretation.

### 5.2.2 Immersion in unacquainted culture

SCHENSUL, SCHENSUL, and LeCOMPTE (1999) think participation as almost total involvement in a culture unfamiliar to study others' lives through the researcher's participation as a full-time resident or member, though majority of observers are not full participants in community life. Several factors affect whether the community accepts the researcher, including his appearance, ethnicity, age, gender, and class.

### 5.2.3 Structural Characteristics

The structural characteristics may also inhibit one's acceptance.

1. The research may not be involved in activities;
2. A lack of trust,
3. Restlessness in the presence of an outsider
4. Possible threat to either the community or the researcher
5. Short of funds to support the research

The researcher might be excluded from the community due to:

1. Unfamiliarity of the researcher to language community members use;
2. Shift from one language to another the researcher does not know;
3. Changing the topic at the arrival of the researcher,
4. Refuse to reply certain questions.

5. The community members fail to invite the researcher to social events.
6. Members of the community move away from the researcher

#### **5.2.4 Feeling of Exclusion**

Almost all researchers personally experience a feeling of exclusion at some point in the research process, specifically in the beginning. The researcher recognizes exclusion to the research process. After the researcher spends some time in the community, it is probable that the community accepts the researcher to some extent

#### **5.2.5 Research bias**

If the researchers use only participant observation as a technique of data collection, it is possible that they are not able to report antagonistic facets of the cultural members. Other methods inspire confident in the novice researcher to use reflexivity one's research to help him know the biases he has that may interfere with correct explanation of objects under observation. Researcher bias is one of the characteristics of qualitative research that allow people to infer that qualitative research suffers from subjectivity. Some qualitative researchers (Ratner, 2002) believe that is not possible for someone to be objective and subjective at the same time while others are confident that the aspects can co-exist. When reflecting on biases, one can realize biases that may disfigure understanding and put them in place with those that assist to be more objective.

#### **5.2.6 Interpretative frame filter observation**

SCHENSUL, SCHENSUL, and LeCOMPTE (1999) suggested that the interpretative frames of a person filter observation.

The theoretical frameworks and ethical attention to detail form the most exact observation. The skill of the researcher to observe, document and to interpret the observed is the distinguishing characteristic of the participant observation. During the first part of research process the researcher should make accurate observation and take field notes in the absence of forming opinions beforehand from the researcher's theoretical way of regarding situations, but concede them to rise forth from the community under study.

### **6. Ethnography**



**Figure 4 Ethnography (Adapted from spireresearch.com)**

Ethnography denotes the methods of data collection, such as conducting interview, observation and analysis of documents taken together. (Kawulich, 2005). In recent discussions, attention has increasingly been drawn to more general strategy of ethnography, which interweaves observation, participation with other procedures. In its most distinctive form it engages the ethnographer participating in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching occurrences, listening to what subjects say, asking questions - in fact, gathering available data to highlight the issues that are the central point of research (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). The real definition and formulation of methodological principles and phase are placed in assistance to practicing a usual research attitude observed and studied in the field. However, in a more recent overview, Atkinson and Hammersley (1998) noted various substantial features of ethnographic research. The research question and the circumstances in the respective field dominate the data collection. Methodological discussions focus more on questions of how to report findings in a field than on methods of data collection and interpretation. However, methodological strategies used in the fields under study usually rest on the participant observation. Interviews and the analysis of documents are incorporated into this sort of participatory research design where they have the potential of further knowledge

### **Summary**

Various notions of observation and of the role of the observer can be searched in the literature. There are certain studies where the observer does not become component of the sphere of research under observation (e.g., in the tradition of Goffman 1961). Observation is another routine skill, which is methodologically systematized and used in qualitative research. Practically all the senses are integrated into observations. Observational methods may be divided along five dimensions including covert vs. overt, non-participant vs participant observation, systematic vs.

unsystematic observation, observation in natural or artificial situations and self-observation vs. observing others. Adler and Adler (1998), Denzin (1989b), and Spradley (1980) have named the seven phases of an observation. The major problem in conducting the observation is to define a role for the observers that they can take and that allows them to remain in the field or at its edge and observe it at the same time. Observations with other sources of data and the engagement of various observers enhance the meaningfulness of the data collected. Gender differences are a decisive aspect also, especially when observation is planned in public places, where the chances of approach and movement are much more confined for women due to specific threats than for men. The analysis of the production of social reality from an external perspective is the testing of theoretical concepts for certain phenomena on the basis of their occurrence and distribution. Non-participant observation is an approach to the observed field from an external perspective. Observation, particularly participant observation, has been applied in different disciplines as an instrument for collecting data in about persons, processes, and cultures for conducting qualitative research (Barbara B Kawulich (2005). ? Participant observation is treated as a process in two respects. One, the researcher should more and more be a participant and obtain access to the field and to individuals. Second, the observation should proceed through a process of getting increasingly concrete and focused on the necessary aspects of the research questions.

Observation as an instrument of data collection suffers from several limitations such as human bias, immersion in unacquainted culture, structural characteristics, feeling of exclusion and research bias and observation filtered through interpretative frame. Ethnography denotes the methods of data collection, such as conducting interview, observation and analysis of documents taken together. In its most distinctive form it engages the ethnographer participating in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching occurrences, listening to what subjects say, asking questions - in fact, gathering available data to highlight the issues that are the central point of research. The real definition and formulation of methodological principles and phase are placed in assistance to practicing a usual research attitude observed and studied in the field. The research question and the circumstances in the respective field dominate the data collection.