

# Virtual/Participants Observation

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- Virtual and Participants Observation are both very important data collection tools that evaluators use throughout the project cycle.



- Evaluators use Virtual and participant observation to gather data about project inputs, outputs, and outcomes

- Virtual worlds are computer simulated environments and can exist in many forms, for instance Internet based (“in the cloud”) or contained on a USB drive (so called simson-a-stick), DVD’s, or discs. T
- Virtual World Characteristics:
  - They are interactive, usually three-dimensional worlds. Users interact with the environment and with each other through the use of an avatar, a virtual graphic representation of oneself.
  - Many virtual worlds are designed for social and research purposes.



# *Participants Observation*



- Participant Observation (PO) is a type of research strategy.
- Aim - to gain a close and intimate familiarity with a given group of individuals (such as a religious, occupational, or sub cultural group, or a particular community) and their practices through an intensive involvement with people in their natural environment, usually over an extended period of time.

- *Participant Observation* describes a type of research where the researcher is a member, or has access to engage, with the phenomenon under investigation.
- *PO enables* investigator/researcher gains a more in-depth understanding of project activities and stakeholder perceptions.
- It gives a unique understanding of the research or project community, as you get an intuitive understanding about the culture from participating in it.

- Participant observation is a research method which involves “getting to know” the people or culture of those who are being observed and studied as the researcher immerses themselves in culture they’re observing.
- It could be described as “putting yourself in their shoes”
- It is a research method which does not maintain personal and social distance between the researcher and people who are being studying.

- PO gives us an intuitive and intellectual grasp of the ways that society is organized and prioritized, and how people relate to each other.
- It enables researcher to ask questions, engage in discussions with individuals or groups, and/or “do” the activity being studied

- Participant Observation, gives hope of a researcher to be accepted as an insider, or to get to the backstage where are a true participant.
- It involves getting close enough to people so that they feel comfortable telling us about their lives,

- **Participants observation include:**
  - interviews,
  - direct observation,
  - participation,
  - collective discussions,
  - analyses of personal documents,
  - self-analysis and
  - analysis of life histories

- Evaluators use participant observation in the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of projects.
- In the **planning phase**;
  - It is use to assess a community's needs and appropriate ways to craft development projects.

- In the **implementation phase**;
  - It is use to improve an ongoing activity, such as a training workshop, as it is being monitored.
- PO can be used to add validity to monitoring efforts.
- It helps to see and understand what people are doing, which can be compared to what people are saying.

- It helps researcher to see if people are doing something different from what they say that they do.
- It allows researchers to add depth to **evaluations**, witness and understand behavioral or attitudinal change.

- PO give access to knowledge of what people do (cultural behavior), what people know (cultural knowledge), and what people make and use (cultural artifacts).
- As researcher engage in participant observation, he usually **write notes** that become the **raw data to be analyzed**

# Virtual Participant Observation

- *Participant observation* to collect data in a process that includes the researchers' involvement in communications—for example, posting to forums, blogs, or walls in online communities or on social media sites.
- The researcher responds to others' posts, engages openly with the group, and might share knowledge gained from study or experience.

- Participant observers can have both informal discussions or formal interviews with group members.
- Online, a researcher using participant observation might contact the manager or moderator of an online discussion to request permission to study the group as the participant.
- Depending on the nature of the group and the nature of the study, the researcher may or may not disclose that he/she is collecting data as a participant in the group.

- **The general strengths of participant observation:**
  - It is very flexible as a research method.
- It provides a high quality level and depth of information which it provides.
- It also offers a greater understanding of the societies it studies and encourages opportunity for empathy.

- **Limitations of participant observation:**
- the high level of participation requires a lot of financial resources.
- it takes up a lot of time.
- the researcher must have a high level of skill in order to be capable of carrying out the research.

# Types of Participant Observation

- Participant Observation can be conducted either *openly* or *secretly* in the culture which the researcher is observing:
  - Complete Observer.
  - Observer as **Participant**.
  - **Participant** as Observer.
  - Complete **Participant**.



- As a **participant observer**, the researcher goes into the field of study to **observe** people, events, and social contexts. A researcher's involvement can be divided into five levels:
  - (1) nonparticipation,
  - (2) passive participation,
  - (3) moderate participation,
  - (4) active participation, and
  - (5) complete participation.



- **Complete Observation: (Covert)**
  - It is use when researcher/evaluator observe the project population without interacting with stakeholders, towards seeing their behavior only.
  - the researcher remains separate from the project population, and is not interacting or asking questions.

- This is a detached observer where the researcher is neither seen nor noticed by participants.
- It's one way of minimizing the *Hawthorne Effect* (where people act differently when they know they're being watched) as participants are more likely to act natural when they don't know they're being observed.

- The evaluator is simply observing and coming away with some preliminary conclusions as a complete observer.



- **Observer as Participant:**

- the researcher is known and recognized by the participants and in many cases, the participants know the research goals of the observer.
- There is some interaction with the participants but the interaction is limited.
- The researcher's aim is to play a neutral role as much as possible.

- **Observer as Participant:**



- **Participant as Observer: (Overt)**
  - the researcher is fully engaged with the participants. He/She is more of a friend or colleague than a neutral third party.
- While there is full interaction with participants, they still know that this is a researcher.

# Participant as Observer:



- **Complete Participant:**
- It is a fully embedded researcher, almost like a spy. Here the observer fully engages with the participants and partakes in their activities.
- Participants aren't aware that observation and research is being conducted, even though they fully interact with the researcher.
- It is referred to as “*going native*,” in reference to performing indigenous fieldwork.

- The idea is that the best way to understand a type of role, people, or culture is to experience it firsthand.





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