

Chapter Outlines for:

Frey, L., Botan, C., & Kreps, G. (1999). *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods*. (2nd ed.) Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

## Chapter 10: Naturalistic Research

### I. Introduction

- A. The social context (situations where people usually interact) in which people communicate influences what occurs.
- B. **Naturalistic inquiry** is research that focuses on how people behave when absorbed in genuine life experiences in natural settings.

### II. Common Assumptions Guiding Naturalistic Inquiry

- A. The goal of naturalistic research is to develop context-specific statements about the multiple, constructed realities of all the key participants.
- B. There are three general assumptions of naturalistic research.
  - 1. **Naturalism**: The belief that phenomena should be studied in context.
  - 2. **Phenomenology**: The belief that the object of interest be examined without any preconceived notions or expectations.
    - a. *Presupposition-less research*: The researcher makes his/her own norms, values, and ideology apparent and does not assume they are shared.
  - 3. **Interpretive nature** of naturalistic research: The belief that the researcher, while trying to see the situation from the point of view of those studied, cannot escape his/her own view.

### III. Types of Naturalistic Inquiry

- A. The focus on methodologies centers on various aspects of ethnography
  - 1. From the Greek “ethos” meaning, “race, tribe, nation.”
  - 2. From the Greek “graphos,” meaning “something written down.”
- B. There exist 4 types
  - 1. **Ethnography**: The use of direct observation and extended field research to produce a thick, naturalistic description of a people and their culture.
  - 2. **Ethnomethodology**: Empirical study of methods used to give sense to and accomplish daily actions; attempt to understand commonplace talk routines.
    - a. *Ethnomethodological indifference*: Used by ethnomethodologists to abstain from judging others’ actions.
    - b. *Experimental breaching*: Deliberately upsetting patterned routines to reveal rules participants use to organize experiences.
    - c. There are two lines of ethnomethodological inquiry
      - i. *Conversation analysis*: Examines interaction using qualitative methods.
      - ii. *Formal ethnomethodology*: Perspective used by the researcher to view taken-for-granted behavior.
  - 3. **Critical Ethnography**: Ethnography designed to promote emancipation and reduce oppression; gives voice to mistreated people and those struggling for social change.
  - 4. **Autoethnography**: Personal ethnography) researchers examine their own life experiences and fieldwork.
    - a. *Autobiography*: story of one’s own life; exemplified in autoethnography.

### IV. The Flow of Naturalistic Inquiry

- A. Characteristics of the naturalistic research process.
  - 1. *Site*: Studying phenomena in context, or *in situ*.
  - 2. *Embodied practice*: Researchers place their bodies in a context and use themselves as the primary “instrument” to collect data.
  - 3. *Qualitative methods*: An array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and come to terms with the meaning of naturally occurring phenomena.

- B. The flow of naturalistic research (see figure 10.1) demands a human instrument and builds on tacit knowledge using qualitative methods engaging in purposive sampling, the design that emerges, along with induction and grounded theory (which involves negotiated outcomes) leads to a case report which is idiographically interpreted and tentatively applied.
- C. Naturalistic researchers usually employ multiple methodological procedures for the best way to elicit the various and divergent constructions of reality that exist within a context of study.
  - 1. Naturalistic researchers use *nonrandom, purposive sampling*.
  - 2. **Informants** can provide unique insight into a culture.
  - 3. An **emergent design** introduces or changes procedures during the research process.
  - 4. **Member checks** occur when researchers give a draft of their research report to participants or similar people for feedback.
- D. Findings from naturalistic research are reported in the form of a **case study** (a detailed examination of a single subject, group, or phenomenon).
- V. Collecting Data on Naturalistic Inquiry
  - A. There are *two major investigative strategies* used by naturalistic researchers.
    - 1. Direct Observation
    - 2. In-depth interviews
  - B. Naturalistic observational research entails going “into the field” to observe everyday activities.
    - 1. Fieldwork involves a number of important issues.
      - a. Deciding what to study: Observe as much as possible, focusing on one of three interrelated aspects.
        - i. Understanding the communication behavior of a particular group of people.
        - ii. Gaining access to the group.
        - iii. Being associated with a group in another role.
      - b. Role of the observer: Naturalistic researchers must decide on the observational role to assume (four types).
        - i. **Complete participant**: Fully involved in a social setting and does not let people know they are being studied; “going native;” (consider ethical dilemmas).
        - ii. **Participant-observer**: Involved as fully as possible in a social situation where people know they are being studied; agenda is revealed.
        - iii. **Observer-participant**: Primarily observes and participates only to a limited extent; marginal member of the group.
        - iv. **Complete observer**: Does not interact with the group, strictly an observer; greatest objectivity.
      - c. Length of Observations varies.
        - i. Only a single or few observational period(s) is/are necessary for a fleeting phenomenon.
        - ii. Sustained observations, or longitudinal research, is preferred because it helps establish quality relationships between researcher and participants.
      - d. Observe impressionistically; look for clues to comprehend a setting’s actions.
      - e. Recording observations
        - i. **Field notes**: written or audiorecorded records of what occurred.
        - ii. *Headnotes* which are: written examples of mental logs.
        - iii. Use of *activity logs*, journals, or self-observational diaries.
        - iv. *Notes* are crucial to describing and inferring patterns in people’s communication.
        - v. *Experience Sampling Method*
  - C. Interviewing in naturalistic inquiry
    - 1. Interviews are used to obtain information from a relatively small, representative sample so that generalizations can be made about the population of interest.

2. **In-depth interviews**, in contrast to surveys, proceed inductively and use an unstructured format consisting of open questions; highly exploratory.
3. There are several issues interviewers face including:
  - a. Whom to interview and sampling strategy:
    - i. Purposive (nonrandom) sample?
    - ii. Key informants?
    - iii. **Theory-based sample?**
    - iv. Network (snowball) sample?
    - v. Convenience sample?
  - b. Interview logistics must also be addressed ranging from:
    - i. Where?
    - ii. One-on-one vs. team approach?
    - iii. Alone or together?
    - iv. Focus groups?
    - v. When?
  - c. The interview format must also be ascertained prior to data-collection
    - i. Unstructured versus structured type?
    - ii. Use a **long interview** that uses a questionnaire to create a sharply focused and intense series of messages?
    - iii. Use a funnel format that proceeds from general to specific levels of inquiry?
  - d. There are also a variety of interview methods and philosophies:
    - i. Phenomenology: Interviews are used to understand how people experience life processes without imposing preconceptions
    - ii. Feminist perspective: Speaks to the unique experiences of women
    - iii. Ethnomethodological interview
    - iv. **Life story interview** (oral history)
    - v. Similarity between interviewer and interviewee
    - vi. **Critical Incident Technique**: Asks for most memorable positive and negative experiences within a specific, social context
    - vii. **Episode analysis**: Reconstruction of a scene that represents a reoccurring pattern in a relationship
    - viii. **Account analysis**: Asking people to account for observations
    - ix. **Protocol analysis**: Verbalization of feelings, thoughts while engaged in an activity
    - x. **Stimulated recall**, using a tape recording for example to help trigger participants' reflections of an exchange.
  - e. When recording and transcribing interviews, the amount of detail depends on the purpose of the research and must be done accurately.

## VI. Start Making Sense: Analyzing and Reporting Qualitative Data

- A. A massive amount of detail must be made sense of and reported.
  1. Consider Levine's five general storage and retrieval processes.
- B. **Analyzing qualitative data**: Analysis of data that indicates the meanings people have of something exemplified by:
  1. Should be viewed as an ongoing process
  2. Collected data must be reduced
  3. The goal is to explain the meaning of the data
    - a. **First-order explanations**, that is, the research participants' explanations
    - b. **Second-order explanations**, that is, the researcher(s)' explanations.
  4. Some naturalistic researchers analyze for the purpose of theory development.
  5. Testing theory and building grounded theory
    - a. Some researchers analyze data deductively to see if data conforms to their expectations.

- b. **Analytic induction:** To infer meanings from the data collected; look for emerging patterns.
  - c. **Grounded theory:** Generalizations are inferred from the collected data (see the constant comparative method).
  - d. Memoranda: Researcher's hunches and theoretical ideas about the structure underlying the studied phenomenon.
  - e. Eventually, categories become "saturated."
  - f. Research that seeks to develop theory from the ground up should meet four criteria: believable; comprehensive; grounded; and applicable.
6. Qualitative data-analytic techniques:
- a. **Dialectical analysis:** Explores tensions produced from seemingly contradictory elements within a system (i.e., a stepfamily).
  - b. Metaphor analysis: Seeks participants' use of metaphors.
  - c. Fantasy theme analysis: Examines the stories shared among people (see Symbolic Convergence Theory).

C. Reporting findings from naturalistic research.

1. Telling a **tale**: A story told by a member of one culture about another culture (or own) to the members of his/her own culture.
  - a. **Realist tale**: Story told from the point of view of the people studied.
  - b. **Confessional tale**: Focuses primarily on the researcher and his/her experiences during fieldwork.
  - c. **Impressionistic tale**: Blends realist and confessional tales to provide an account of the participants and the researcher as central characters.
  - d. **Critical tale**: Critiques problematic social structures through the perspective of those who are disadvantaged.
  - e. **Formal tale**: Follows the rules of a particular theory or analytic procedure.
  - f. **Literary tale**: Told using a novelist's sense of narration.
  - g. **Jointly told tales**: Researchers and participants work together.
2. Writing the report (several structures):
  - a. Thematic
  - b. Chronological
  - c. Puzzle-Explication
  - d. Separate narration and analysis
  - e. Narrowing and expanding the focus
  - f. Exemplars: Quotes and descriptions that help illustrate and crystallize the concept.
3. Other forms of presentation
  - a. Performance
  - b. Film
  - c. Photography.

VII. Conclusion

- A. Naturalistic researchers must identify and gain entry to the site they want to study, determine the role they will take, what and how they will observe, who they will interview and what they will ask. and how to record the information and present it.