

Ethnographic Research

"When used as a method, ethnography typically refers to fieldwork (alternatively, participant-observation) conducted by a single investigator who 'lives with and lives like' those who are studied, usually for a year or more."

--John Van Maanen, 1996

Ethnography

relies heavily on up-close, personal experience and possible participation, not just observation, by researchers trained in the art of ethnography. The ethnographic focal point may include intensive language and culture learning, intensive study of a single field or domain, and a blend of historical, observational, and interview methods.

Sampling's Ethnographic research

employs three kinds of data collection: interviews, observation, and documents. This in turn produces three kinds of data: quotations, descriptions, and excerpts of documents, resulting in one product: narrative description. Ethnographic methods can give shape to new constructs or paradigms, and new variables, for further empirical testing in the field or through traditional, quantitative social science methods.

Ethnography Methodology

People's behavior

is studied in everyday contexts, rather than under experimental conditions created by the researcher.

Data are gathered

from a range of sources, but observation and/or relatively informal conversations are usually the main ones.

The approach to data collection is "unstructured in the sense that it does not involve following through a detailed plan set up at the beginning; nor are the categories used for interpreting what people say and do pre-given or fixed. This does not mean that the research is unsystematic; simply that initially the

data are collected in as raw a form, and on as wide a front, as feasible.

The focus is usually a single setting or group, of relatively small scale. In life history research the focus may even be a single individual.

The analysis of the data involves interpretation of the meanings and functions of human actions and mainly takes the form of verbal descriptions and explanations, with quantification and statistical analysis playing a subordinate role at most.