

Recording Overview

- **Observation turns on note taking**
 - In fact all of qualitative research turns on note taking/writing
- **Basic types of information to record**
 - Some types of information are typically useful to record
- **Determining information to record**
 - Figuring out what else to record
- **Types of recording**
- **There are no set rules about what to record**
 - Your ability to be a good qualitative researcher
 - + In part determined by making the right choices in recording



Recording Basic Types of Information to Record

- **Space**
 - Describe the physical properties of the space your observing
- **Time**
 - Note the time of recording, date, time, place
- **Integrate materials into notes**
 - If you get a handout, make a note of it in your notes (referencing)
- **Names of participants**
 - Usually better not to use their real names, get into a habit of coding



Recording

Determining what to record

- **Begin with your research question**
 - Might provide some guidance on what is especially important to record
- **Do not overly constrain yourself at first**
 - Danger of letting question narrow your observational scope too much
- **Take notes on**
 - What's directly relevant
 - What strikes you as interesting
 - Everything else



Recording

About the Process

- **You are the instrument**
 - Your data is only as good as you are
- **Building explicit awareness**
 - Look for details, be observant, what's going on around you
- **Building memory**
 - Recall: need to be able to recall as much about events as possible



Recording

In-vivo and afterwards

- Sometimes it's possible to record in-vivo
 - Infrequently case that you can take full notes in field (missing too much)
- Other times it must be done after the event
 - Essential to know what order activities happened
 - Competes with recall, which tends to prioritise "exciting" things
- Write down the important things first
 - Get them out of your head
 - Then replay the day and slot them into order (best with word processor)
 - Expect to take two or three hours each day making notes
- May oscillate between in-vivo and afterwards
 - Throughout day



Recording

Types of Recording

- Jottings
 - Notes taken in the field
- Diary
 - Place to record emotional responses to fieldwork itself
- Full Notes
 - Descriptive, Analytic, Methodological
- Jottings and Full Notes
 - Observation of a meeting to discuss status of software changes
 - + Within a wireless network element



Recording Jottings

- Jottings
 - Keywords, phrases
 - Two types
 - + What you see: observable events, conversations, and so forth
 - + What you think about analytically: when you analyse what you've seen
 - Important to distinguish among the two so you know what's what



Recording Diary

- Diary
 - Place to keep emotional responses to what's happening
- Especially important in long-term situations
 - Where the full gamut of emotions can be experienced
 - But useful as mechanism to explicitly declare biases in short term



Recording

Example: Jottings and Diary

8:30 am. Alpha Weekly Meeting. CR2, Alpha team head and team leads.

(E: it's too early in the morning, not happy)

Windowless room, florescent lights. Door on short wall. Chaotic conference room furniture.

Everyone has paper sheets, think its same (Beki: need to confirm this)

(I get paper: AWM date #1) confirmed. <— *Unique reference for it and note it in my field notes*

Status discussion

box “ready” conversation ends

“need to get” (Beki: variety of dependencies on outside entities including other departments, outside vendors, are there others?)

“rattling cages” action item department head

unspoken cases (Beki: what are unspoken cases about? When are those unspoken cases discussed?)

Technical discussions (E: I don't grok the details, it's hard to follow I am not paying attention)

10:32 dept. head looking at watch, meeting still going, 10:35 she breaks meeting

- **Electronic copy of original jottings**

- Beki: is the way I signify my analytic thoughts, it's where I'm “speaking”
- E: reminder of my emotional state



Recording

Full Notes

- **Methodological**

- Notes about methodology: things that worked, things that didn't
 - + Useful for classroom teaching :-), useful to remember so you don't repeat mistake in setting

- **Analytic**

- Notes that begin to synthesise across different observations
 - + The beginnings of analysis
 - + Important to distinguish from field notes because they belong in interpretation

- **Descriptive**

- Notes about what you saw



Recording

Example: Full *Descriptive* Notes

8:30am. Alpha Weekly Meeting. Everyone has a two-page spreadsheet that contains a list of items in 8pt font. Each row is a system function; each column a version of the system the department head has responsibility for. The purpose of the meeting is to review the status of each function with respect to each version of the system. A few of the boxes are already filled in, letting everyone know whether the function is implemented for the release. The goal of this meeting is to fill in the rest of the boxes.

10:30am. The meeting is not finished, but must be adjourned, since the department head has another meeting. The spreadsheet remains incomplete. The discussions have been of several forms. Some team leaders announce that they have delivered functions. The box gets filled with "ready." Software that does not work receives more discussion. In some cases, the software depends on hardware or other software from other groups outside the department. The department head takes an action item to "rattle some cages" to ensure that her schedule does not get delayed by non-functional code any further. The cases where one team leader depends on another team leader's code and there are problems (non-delivery, technical incompatibility between the two groups) get two responses. One response is a lengthy discussion of the technical difficulties of the current work. This often gets the other team leaders into longer debates about different technical solutions that might be tried. Others are not discussed, the team leader acknowledges that he has spoken with either just the team leader, or with the leader and the department head. Nothing is written in the box. Nothing more is said publicly.



Observation

In Pairs

- Assumption previously, individual fieldworker
 - Majority of cases that will likely be true
- Observation in pairs
 - An opportunity to validate
- Mechanics
 - Conduct observations as individuals
 - Then debrief each other on what happened
 - + Did you both see the same types of behaviour (great)
 - + Why did you see different things (looking in different places, interpreting same event)
 - Arrive at a common, shared, understanding of what you saw
 - That becomes your fieldnotes

