What Are the Major Types of Social Research?

The objective of academic research, whether by sociologists, political scientists, or anthropologists, is to try to find answers to theoretical questions within their respective fields. In contrast, the objective of applied social research is to use data so that decisions can be made.
—Herbert J. Rubin, *Applied Social Research*, pp. 6–7

Three years after they graduated from college, Tim and Sharon met for lunch. Tim asked Sharon, "So, how is your new job as a researcher for Social Data, Inc.? What are you doing?" Sharon answered. "Right now I'm working on a cross-sectional survey of teachers as part of an applied research project on six day care centers to provide descriptive data that we can use in an evaluation study being prepared for a nonprofit foundation." Sharon's description of her research project on the topic of day care touches on dimensions of social science research. In this chapter, you will learn about the dimensions and get a "road map" of the types of social research.

Social research comes in many shapes and sizes. We can organize research in several ways: experimental versus nonexperimental, case study versus cross-case research, or qualitative versus quantitative.[1] We can organize the many kinds of studies along five dimensions (see Chart 1). The dimensions include how we use a study's findings and its primary audience; why we conduct a study; the number of cases and how we examine them; how we incorporate time; and decide which techniques we deploy to gather data. You can position a single research study on each of the dimensions of social research.

You will find learning the dimensions and their interrelationships to one another useful. First, they make it easier to understand research reports that you hear about or read in scholarly journals. After you recognize a study's dimensions, you can quickly grasp what a study says and how it was conducted. Second, when you conduct your own study, you must make many decisions. You can think of the dimensions as decision points you will encounter as you develop a specific research plan. To make good decisions, you should be aware of trade-offs and the strengths and weaknesses at each decision point. Additionally, the dimensions are interrelated. Some dimensions tend to go together (e.g., study goal and a data collection technique). As you learn about the dimensions, you can begin to see how best to combine dimensions to address specific research questions of interest.

CHART 1 Dimensions and Major Types of Social Research

USE AND AUDIENCE OF RESEARCH
- Basic
- Applied
  - Evaluation
  - Action
  - Social Impact

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH
- Explore
- Describe
- Explain

WITHIN OR ACROSS CASES
- Case Study Research
- Across Case Research

SINGLE OR MULTIPLE POINTS IN TIME
- Cross-Sectional
- Longitudinal
  - Time series
  - Panel
  - Cohort
- Case Study

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES
- Quantitative Data
  - Experiment
  - Survey
  - Nonreactive (content analysis, secondary analysis, existing statistics)
- Qualitative Data
  - Field (ethnography, participant observation)
  - Historical-comparitive

USE AND AUDIENCE OF RESEARCH

Social research has two wings or orientations. There is a somewhat detached "scientific" or "academic" orientation and a more activist, practical, and action-oriented orientation. This is not a rigid separation. Many researchers work in both, or they move from one to the other at different career stages. The orientations differ in how to use findings and who the primary audience is.

Basic research Research designed to advance fundamental knowledge about how the world works and build/test theoretical explanations by focusing on the "why" question. The scientific community is its primary audience.

Basic Research

Also called *academic research* or *pure research*, **basic research** advances fundamental knowledge about the social world. It is the source of most new scientific ideas and ways to think about social events. The scientific community is its primary audience. Researchers use basic research to support or refute theories about how the social world operates and changes, what makes things happen, and why social relations or events are a certain way.

Some people criticize the basic research orientation and ask, "What good is it?" They consider basic research to be a waste of time and money because they cannot see an immediate use for it or resolve a pressing issue with it. While many practitioners want answers to questions that they can implement within the next week, month, or year, a basic researcher might devote years to painstakingly seeking answers to questions that could reshape thinking for many decades to come. Much basic research lacks practical applications in the short term, but it builds a foundation for knowledge and broad understanding that has an impact on many issues, policy areas, or areas of study. Basic research is also the main source of the tools—methods, theories, and ideas—that all researchers use. Almost all of the major breakthroughs and significant advances in knowledge originated in basic research. It lays a foundation for core understandings and may have implications for issues that do not even exist when a study is conducted.

Basic researchers may examine issues that appear impractical because applications for the resulting knowledge may not appear for many years or decades. Often we can see only the practical applications after diverse basic knowledge advances have accumulated over a long time. For example, in 1984 Alec Jeffreys, a geneticist at the University of Leicester in the United Kingdom, was engaged in basic research studying the evolution of genes. As

an indirect accidental side effect of a new technique he developed, he learned how to produce human DNA "fingerprints" or unique markings of the DNA of individuals. This was not his intent. Jeffreys even said he would never have thought of the technique if creating DNA fingerprints had been his goal. By the mid-1990s, applied uses of the technique had been developed. Today, DNA analysis is widely use in criminal investigations and other areas. Dozens of major practical breakthroughs and innovations had similar origins in initially unrelated basic research.

Few practitioners (e.g., police officers, counselors of youthful offenders) see relevance to a basic research question such as "Why does deviant behavior occur?" Nevertheless, answering such foundational questions stimulates new ways of thinking. The answers might revolutionize and dramatically improve what practitioners do. Public policies and social services can be ineffective and misguided without an understanding of core causes of events or behaviors. Applied research, too, builds new knowledge. Nonetheless, basic research is essential to expand knowledge. Researchers working close to the center of the scientific community conduct most basic research.

Applied Research

When we do **applied research** we address a specific concern. We may offer solutions to a question raised by an employer, a local community, or a social cause.[2] Only rarely in applied research do we try to build, test, or make connections to theory. Most applied research studies are short term and small scale. They offer practical results that we can use within a year or less. For example, the student government of University X wants to reduce alcohol abuse. It wants, therefore, to find out whether the number of University X students arrested for driving while intoxicated would decline if the student government were to sponsor alcohol-free parties next year. An applied research study would be most applicable for this situation.

Businesses, government offices, health care facilities, social service agencies, political organizations, and educational institutions conduct applied studies and make decisions based on findings. Applied research findings shape many decisions. They might trigger the decision to begin a program that will reduce the wait time before a client receives benefits. Findings may help police decide whether to adopt a new police response to reduce spousal abuse. Applied research findings may help a firm decide to market product A to mature adults instead of teenagers.

Active practitioners (e.g., teachers, doctors and nurses, sales representatives, counselors and caseworkers, judges, managers, supervisors, and city managers) are the audience for applied findings. Many in this large diverse audience lack a background in research or a strong scientific perspective. This can create complications. For example, a court proceeding obtains the results from a research study such as a survey. However, nonscientists (judges, jurors, lawyers) evaluate the survey's methodology and findings on a nonscientific basis.[3] As a result, they can misinterpret the results and use evaluation standards that diverge from those of the scientific community. They may accept findings from a study that does not meet basic scientific criteria but reject findings from a study with the highest standards of scientific rigor. Applied researchers must translate scientific-technical findings into the language of lay decision makers. The researchers need to highlight strengths and limitations of a study's design or findings.

A researcher might conduct an applied research study for a decision maker who is uninterested in details of how it was conducted and who wants only a brief summary of key findings. Nonetheless, the researcher should also prepare a complete, detailed research report. Others who have the time and ability to evaluate the quality of the research may be interested, or disputes might arise later. One constraint regarding applied research is that it is less likely to appear in a peer-reviewed publication, if at all. Many times, findings have only limited distribution and are available only to a few decision makers or the practitioners in one organization.

Because we put applied research into practice, it can generate controversy. This is not new. For

Applied research Research designed to offer practical solutions to a concrete problem or address the immediate and specific needs of clinicians or practitioners.

example, in 1903, Ellwood conducted an applied study of the jails and poorhouses and documented serious deficiencies. His research report generated great public indignation. However, he was accused of slandering the state government that had given him employment.[4] William Whyte (1984) encountered conflict over applied studies of a factory in Oklahoma and of restaurants in Chicago. In the first case, the management was more interested in defeating a union than in learning about employment relations. In the other case, the restaurant owners wanted to make the industry look good rather than let anyone learn about the practical details of its operations. Some business organizations have a mind-set that differs from a research-oriented inquiry. Learning to negotiate and communicate across mind-sets is an important skill to develop (Reingold, 1999). A related issue is that sometimes officials call for an applied study on a policy controversy as a delaying tactic. They want only to deflect criticism or postpone a decision until after the political heat dies down and have no real interest in the study or its results.

Applied and basic research orientations weigh research methodology differently (see Table 1). In applied research, researchers must make more trade-offs or compromise scientific rigor to obtain fast, usable results. Compromise is no excuse for sloppy research, however. Applied researchers learn to how to squeeze research into the constraints of an applied setting and balance rigor against practical needs. Such balancing requires an in-depth knowledge of research and an awareness of the consequences of compromising standards.

TABLE 1 Basic and Applied Research Compared

ASPECT	BASIC	APPLIED
Primary audiences	Scientific community (other researchers)	Practitioners, participants, or supervisors (nonresearchers)
Evaluators	Research peers	Practitioners, supervisors
Autonomy of researcher	High	Low-moderate
Research rigor	Very high	Varies, moderate
Highest priority	Verified truth	Relevance
Purpose	Create new knowledge	Resolve a practical problem
Success indicated by	Publication and impact on knowledge/ scientists	Direct application to address a specific concern/problem

Three Types of Applied Research. Applied social research comes in about a dozen forms. Here you will learn about three major types: evaluation, action oriented, and social impact assessment.

1. Evaluation research is the most widely used type of applied research.[5] Large bureaucratic organizations (e.g., businesses, schools, hospitals, governments, large nonprofit agencies) frequently use it to learn whether a program, a new way of doing something, a marketing campaign, a policy, and so forth is effective—in other words, "Does it work?" There is even a scholarly journal devoted to advancing the field of evaluation research, *Evaluation Review*.

Evaluation research Applied research in which one tries to determine how well a program or policy is working or reaching its goals and objectives.

Evaluation research greatly expanded in the 1960s in the United States when the federal government created many new social programs. Most researchers adopted a positivist approach and used cost-benefit analysis (we will examine this later in this chapter). By the 1970s, most government social programs required evaluation research studies to determine their effectiveness.

Evaluation research questions could include these: Does a law enforcement program of mandatory arrest reduce spousal abuse? Will a rape awareness program reduce college men's coercive sex with women? Will a flextime program increase

employee productivity? In an evaluation research study, we measure the effectiveness of a program, policy, or way of doing something. In evaluation research, we can use several techniques (e.g., survey and ethnographic field research), but if the experiment can be used, the result is most effective.

Some practitioners conduct their own evaluation research studies. More often, however, outside managers or decision makers request a study. Outsiders sometimes place boundaries on what a study can include. They might specify one specific outcome of interest. For example, education officials may request a study on improvements in math skills between the second and fifth grades but tell the researcher to ignore other subjects, other aspects of learning, and changes in cognitive-social development in the children.

Ethical and political tensions often arise in evaluation research. This happens because people develop strong interests in specific findings. The findings can affect who is hired, who builds political popularity, or which program is advanced. If someone is displeased with the study findings, they may criticize the researcher or call the study sloppy, biased, or inadequate. Some evaluation researchers have experienced pressures to rig a study, especially one about controversial issues or programs. The possibility of controversy makes it especially important for the applied researcher to be honest and open, and to carefully adhere to proper research procedures.

Despite their value, evaluation research studies have limitations. Few go through a rigorous peer review process, and their raw data are rarely publicly available for scrutiny or replication. In addition, policy makers can selectively use or ignore evaluation reports (See Example Box 1, Evaluation Research). Many studies adopt a very narrow focus, looking at select inputs and outputs more than the entire process or ramifications of a program. For example, in 1996, U.S. social welfare programs were dramatically changed or "reformed." Evaluation research studies of the new welfare programs focused on whether they reduced welfare caseloads and the costs of administering new programs. Few studies considered the impact of new programs on unfulfilled family obligations or rising distress among children. To justify the new programs, policy makers and politicians used the evidence selectively and boasted of its positive benefits.[6]

EXAMPLE BOX 1

Evaluation Research

Wysong, Aniskiewicz, and Wright (1994) evaluated the effectiveness of the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program found in 10,000 schools in the United States and 42 other countries. The program is widely used, well funded, and very popular with police departments, school officials, parent groups, and others. By having police officers deliver talks in early grades, D.A.R.E. tries to reduce illicit drug use among teens by increasing their knowledge of drugs, developing antidrug coping skills, and raising self-esteem. The authors examined two groups of students who were seniors in a high school in Indiana. One group had participated in the D.A.R.E. program in seventh grade and the other group had not. Consistent with many past studies, the authors found no lasting differences among the groups regarding age of first drug use, frequency of drug use, or self-esteem. The authors suggest that the program's popularity may be due to its political symbolic impact. The program may be effective for latent goals (i.e., helping politicians, school officials, and others feel morally good and involved in antidrug actions) but ineffective for official goals (i.e., reducing illegal drug use by teenagers).

Two types of evaluation research are formative and summative. *Formative evaluation* has built-in monitoring or continuous feedback on a program used for program management. *Summative evaluation* reviews final program outcomes. Both are usually necessary.

Many organizations (e.g., schools, government agencies, businesses) have made evaluation research part of their ongoing operations. One example is the *Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS),* first used by the U.S. Department of Defense in the 1960s. The PPBS rests on the idea that researchers can evaluate a program by measuring its accomplishments against stated goals and objectives. The evaluator divides a program into components and analyzes each component with regard to its costs (staff, supplies, etc.)

and accomplishments relative to explicit program objectives. For example, a women's health center offers pregnancy education. It has four program components: outreach, education, counseling, and referrals. The program has four main objectives: reach out to and offer emotional support to women who believe they are pregnant, provide current information about pregnancy, counsel women about their health risks and concerns, and refer pregnant women to health care providers or family planning agencies. An evaluation researcher might examine the cost of each component and measure how well the program has met each of its four objectives. For example, the researcher asks (1) how much staff time and how many supplies have been devoted to outreach activities in the last year, (2) how many calls or inquiries can be traced to such efforts, and (3) how many of women from targeted groups contacted or came to the center for counseling.[7]

2. Action research treats knowledge as a form of power. It blends acquiring new knowledge with using the knowledge to achieve a specific purpose. In action research, we do not remain detached. We close the gap between studying an issue and engaging in social-political action to influence the issue. Various types of action research are inspired

> *by different philosophical stances, in the main driven by varying core assumptions about epistemology and ontology, which normatively inform their practitioners in terms of aims and requirements. Yet the impact of such philosophical variation usually remains unnoticed in published accounts thereby fuelling ambiguity and controversy . . . (Cassell and Johnson 2006:785–786)*

Action research Applied research in which the primary goal is to facilitate social change or bring about a value-oriented political-social goal.

Participatory action research Action research in which the research participants actively help design and conduct the research study. It emphasizes democratizing knowledge-creation and engaging in collective action, and it assumes that political knowledge emerges from participating in research.

Most action research shares five characteristics:

- The people who are studied are active participants in the research process.
- The study incorporates the popular knowledge and concerns of ordinary people.
- The study examines power relations and documents social inequality or injustice.
- Study findings are shared to raise the awareness and empower ordinary people.
- The research is tied directly to social-political action and achieving social goals.

Action research tries to equalize the power relations between research participants and researchers. We avoid having control, status, and authority over the people we study. Instead, we encourage equality and direct involvement by research participants. We want to raise awareness among participants and the public, so published articles are secondary goals. Instead, the emphasis is on sharing the findings with research participants and the public. This takes the form of general reports and pamphlets, press releases for the mass media, or public meetings.

Action research often attracts researchers with impassioned views on an issue (e.g., environmental, egalitarian, feminist). A deeply committed feminist action researcher may see a study as both advancing knowledge and creating social change to transform gender relations.[8] If the researcher studies sexual harassment, the outcome might be making policy changes to reduce its occurences and working with potential victims so they can better defend their rights. Action researchers worked to preserve a town that was about to be destroyed by a dam project. They collaborated with union officials and management to redesign work to prevent layoffs. In developing nations, action researchers often work among illiterate, impoverished peasants to teach literacy, spread an awareness of problems, and improve living conditions.[9]

Participatory action research, a subtype of action research, emphasizes democratizing the knowledge-creation process, revealing injustices, highlighting social inequality and conflict, and engaging in collective action to improve conditions.

A key belief in participatory action research is that knowledge grows out of directly experiencing social-political activism. As the research participants engage in direct action, they become more informed and empowered. They learn and are more likely to succeed.

In a participatory action study, research participants take an active role in formulating, designing, and carrying out the research. They cogenerate findings with professional researchers in a collaborative process. Research participants are involved in problem definition and study implementation. Because most participants are unfamiliar with professional social research, the trained researcher acts as a consultant or collaborator who assists and provides expertise in study design, data gathering, and data analysis/interpretation.

An action researcher balances professional standards with the practical limits of adapting to local conditions and specific participant concerns. Involvement and control by local participants means joint ownership of the findings. The researcher who wants to publish study results in a professional outlet might find that the participants feel the researcher is only trying to advance his or her career. This makes getting the permission and cooperation of participants critical before releasing findings in a professional setting or outlet.[10]

Organizations or people with value/advocacy views who are opposed to the interests of study participants may challenge visible and successful action-research. For this reason, an action researcher needs to have an in-depth knowledge of proper research procedures and very carefully document study methods (see Example Box 2, Action Research).

3. Social impact assessment research estimates the likely social consequences in advance of a planned change.[11] Often social impact assessment (SIA) research is part of a larger environmental impact statement required by government agencies. In the United States, the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) before a federal government agency may take "actions significantly affecting the quality of the human environment" (NEPA, section 102). Preparing SIA for an EIS requires social science research, and it assesses both positive and negative impacts.

Social impact assessment Applied research that documents the likely consequences for various areas of social life if a major new change is introduced into a community.

An EIS is required for locating and building schools, hospitals, prisons, housing developments, shopping centers, factories, landfills, highways, airports, reservoirs, parks, recreation areas, and power plants. If SIA is part of the EIS, it evaluates the consequences of such action including the availability and quality of housing, population characteristics (such as age structure, racial-ethnic diversity, income and education levels), and the distribution of power-authority. It may examine attitudes or perceptions, family bonds, and friendship networks. The SIA part of the EIS can consider impacts on community resources such as health, police, fire, and sanitation services, employment, school and recreational opportunities, and the vitality of non-profit organizations. The SIA also considers impacts on the survival or continuity of distinct communities of people who have established local historical and cultural roots.[12]

Researchers conducting social impact assessments often work in an interdisciplinary research team to measure areas of impact (see Example Box 3, Social Impact Research). Social impact researchers have a professional organization, the International Association for Impact Assessment, with a scholarly journal, *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal*.

After decades of development, the tools and effectiveness of social impact assessment research are well established; however, this type of applied research is seriously underutilized. This is due to several factors. First, most EISs do not require a SIA. Legislators, policy officials, or decision makers rarely ask for a SIA before they approve a major project. Except for a very few large-scale programs, most decision makers choose to change zoning regulations, develop a new business park, create a housing development, alter transportation routes, and so forth without systematically considering the social impact. These issues are decided based on

EXAMPLE BOX 2

Action Research

Williams and associates (2007) used a participatory action approach to study quality of life in Saskatoon, Canada. They gathered quantitative and qualitative data from three areas of the city (low, middle, and high income) in 2001 and again in 2004. They focused on three themes: (1) a growing income gap, (2) social knowledge translation strategies that would include low socioeconomic populations, and (3) how to bring about a positive change in local quality of life. The researchers developed a "hybrid" research organization. It was both university based and local community based and had coleaders (one from the university and one from the community). Community leaders concerned about quality of life issues in Saskatoon were active throughout the study. They incorporated four knowledge-translation strategies: regularly engage the local media (newspaper and television), conduct several community forums, create a Saskatoon Quality of Life Steering Committee with several community organizations, and employ an action researcher who would be a policy entrepreneur (advocate for starting new policies). Community members participated in research design, data collection, and data analysis-interpretation. The authors treated research findings as learning tool for the community that could raise awareness and stimulate action. They used several methods to communicate results: published short briefing papers, created posters, and distributed research summaries at community forums for discussion. Discussing findings was not an endpoint; rather, it was a stage toward creating new policies, programs, or actions based on community reactions to the findings.

Another action research study, this one by Quach and associates (2008), involved an applied action research study of Vietnamese nail salon workers in one county in California "to collect preliminary descriptive information" (p. 340). The authors noted that California has 35,000 nail salons with 300,000 nail technicians who work for long periods with nail products that have toxic and hazardous ingredients. In California, 59–80 percent of licensed manicurists are of Vietnamese descent, and 95 percent are female. Between 1987 and 2002, the proportion of Vietnamese nail workers grew tenfold, but almost nothing was known about their health situation. Researchers designed the study to raise awareness of health issues and encourage participation by workers by creating a Community Advisory Committee to oversee the study. An important feature was that targeted population were immigrants, many with limited English language ability (99 percent had been born in Vietnam and over one-half had lived in the United States ten years or longer). Led by the outreach staff of a local health center, the committee was comprised of ten Vietnamese community members (including nail salon workers), patients at the health center, cosmetology instructors, breast cancer survivors, and mental health counselors from Alameda County (San Francisco Bay area). The study included 201 nail salon workers at 74 salons in the county. Researchers used a 10-minute Vietnamese language questionnaire, focus groups, and observations of salon conditions (e.g., number of doors and windows, ventilators). The study documented numerous health issues. More than one-half of salon workers reported acute health problems (e.g., eye irritation, headaches, breathing difficulties) that started after they began working in the industry. A large majority of nail salon workers reported concerns over exposure to workplace chemicals, but less than one-half of the salons had exhaust ventilation to reduce chemical exposure. Local community members were actively involved at several research stages. Study authors used the findings to educate a range of people in the local community and developed strategies to help reduce exposure to hazardous occupational conditions.

political and economic interests. Second, a social impact assessment study requires time and money. Officials resist spending funds and object to slowing the decision-making process. Because they work in a short time frame, they do not require studies, even if one could produce a more informed decision that saves money and anguish in the long-term. Third, in many places, the political-cultural climate is wary of planning and distrustful of "expert" advice. Such distrust combines with

EXAMPLE BOX 3

Social Impact Research

Many forms of gambling, or "gaming," have expanded in the United States over the past 30 years. In 1980, gambling was legal in only a few states and yielded less than $10 billion in profits. Today, it is legal in 48 states, and profits exceed $50 billion a year. Lawmakers sought new sources of revenue without raising taxes and wanted to promote economic development. The gambling industry promised new jobs, economic revitalization, and a "cut" of the flow of money from gambling. This allowed lawmakers to create jobs, strengthen the local economy, and obtain more revenue—all without raising taxes. Legal rulings have recognized the treaty rights of AmerIndian people, meaning that gaming laws did not apply to AmeriIndian lands. When a new casino was proposed for downtown Rochester, New York, Kent (2004) was commissioned to conduct a social impact study. Like most reports of social impact studies, it was not published in a scholarly journal. The report estimated that the proposed casino would add 1,300 new jobs to the city. New York state could earn an additional $23 million per year, and the city of Rochester about $11 million in tax revenues from casino operations. To estimate the impact, one part of the study compared data from several gambling versus nongambling cities and considered past studies on gambling addiction behavior. This part considered both the economic benefits and added social costs (e.g., crime rates, prostitution, illegal drug use, compulsive gamblers) that appeared in cities with casinos. The report stated that pathological gambling increases with proximity to casino gambling and has costs for individuals and families (with increased divorce and child abuse). The report estimated the dollar value of social costs could reach $10 million annually.

limited knowledge of social science research. As a result, people cling to traditional decision-making methods. They use guesswork rather than research-based knowledge about social impacts of decisions. Fourth, the promoters or investors in new projects often oppose conducting a social impact assessment study. They fear that its findings will create delays, force costly alterations, or derail their plans by identifying social concerns. Lastly, in cases of social impact studies, officials often ignore their results because of overriding political concerns and the influence of entrenched political-economic interests.

Two Tools in Applied Research. Many applied researchers use two tools as part of their research studies: needs assessment and cost-benefit analysis.

A **needs assessment** involves collecting data to determine major social needs and their severity. It is often a preliminary step before a government agency or charity decides on a strategy to help people or conduct further study. Needs assessments often become tangled in complex community relations, and when doing one, we may encounter several issues (see Summary Review Box 1, Dilemmas in Needs Assessment).

A first issue is to prioritize serious needs or problems. Perhaps a community has a dozen issues or concerns, such as women subject to violent domestic abuse, preteens abusing drugs, people who are homeless sleeping in a park, working people losing large amounts of money betting at a racetrack, or executives drinking too much at the country club and then driving. Which issue receives the needs assessment? The most visible need may not be the most serious one or one that mobilizes a great public outcry.

A second issue is to identify information sources for the needs assessment. For example, when deciding to conduct a needs assessment for a program to aid people who are homeless, who is in a best position to provide information? Should we talk about the needs of people who are homeless with the business owners who complain about homeless people living on their street? Should we ask the current service providers to the homeless population (e.g., social workers, health care centers, schools, homeless shelters, food pantries, and soup kitchens)? Should we rely on law enforcement (e.g., police, jailers, court officials)? Should we ask friends, family members, and nonprofessional

Needs assessment An applied research tool that gathers descriptive information about a need, issue, or concern, including its magnitude, scope, and severity.

advocates of people living on the street? Should we ask the people themselves? Ideally, we would include all sources, but identifying the full range may not be easy or make take too much time.

A third issue is that explicit, immediate needs may not include the full range of less visible issues or link them to long-term solutions. For example, we learn that people who are homeless say they need housing. After examining the situation, however, we determine that housing would be available if these people had jobs. The housing problem is caused by a need for jobs, which, in turn, may be caused by a need for skills, a "living wage," and certain types of businesses. Thus, to address the housing need, it is necessary to attract specific types of businesses, enact a new minimum wage, and provide job training. Often the surface, apparent needs are rooted in deeper conditions and causes about which many people are unaware. For example, drinking polluted water, having a poor diet, and lacking exercise may cause an increased need for health care. Does this indicate a need for more health care or for better water treatment and a public health education program?

A fourth issue is that the needs assessment may generate political controversy. It may suggest solutions beyond local control or without a realistic chance of implementation. Powerful groups may not want some of the social needs documented or publicized. We may learn that a city has much unreported crime; however, publicizing the situation may tarnish the image of a safe, well-run city that the Chamber of Commerce and the city government are promoting. Often one group's needs, such as the people who bet too much money at the racetrack, are linked to the actions of others who benefit by creating that need, such as the racetrack's owners and employees. By documenting needs and offering a resolution, we may be caught between opposing groups.

SUMMARY REVIEW BOX 1

Dilemmas in Needs Assessment

1. Who defines what is the most serious issue for which needs should be assessed?
2. Whom should you ask to learn about the needs of a group of people?
3. Should you consider both conscious, visible needs and unspoken, hidden needs?
4. When many areas of needs coexist, which ones should you include in an assessment?
5. Should you limit remedies/solutions for needs to what can be realistically accomplished within the limits set by established powerholders or consider all possibilities even if they may be disruptive?

Economists developed the second tool, **cost-benefit analysis**. It involves estimating the future costs and benefits of a proposed action and assigning them monetary values. We start by identifying all consequences including tangibles, such as job creation, business formation, or graduation rates and intangibles, such as clean air, political freedom, scenic beauty, or low stress levels of a program or action. Next, we assign each consequence a monetary value; some (such as costs) may be negative, some (e.g., benefits) positive, and some neutral. We then calculate a probability or likelihood for each consequence. Lastly, we compare all costs to benefits and decide whether they balance.

Cost-benefit analysis appears to be a nonpolitical, rational, and technical decision-making strategy; however, it is often controversial. As with needs assessment, people disagree about the activities considered relevant or important. Thus, some people will say that the top concerns are business stability and profitability, lower taxes, and new job creation. Others say the top priorities are a healthy and clean environment, open green space, and increased artistic expression and free speech. People may disagree on whether a given consequence is positive or negative. For example, I see widening a road as a benefit. It will allow me to

Cost-benefit analysis An applied research tool economists developed in which a monetary value is assigned to the inputs and outcomes of a process and then the researcher examines the balance between them.

travel to work much more rapidly and reduce congestion. However, a homeowner who lives along the road sees it as a cost. Building the road will require removing some of his or her front yard, increase noise and pollution, and lower the house's market value. In the social impact study on opening a new casino in Rochester, New York (Example Box 3), the report weighed economic benefits (profits, jobs, tax revenues) against social costs (crime, gambling addition, family breakup, illegal drug use). It stated that benefits outweighed costs, yet the people receiving the economic benefits (i.e., local business owners and taxpayers, people who get casino jobs) were not the same ones who pay the social costs associated with the casino (i.e., families that break up because of compulsive gambling, people with worse health due to increased drug use, or women who become prostitutes).

We assign monetary values to costs and benefits in two ways. *Contingency evaluation* asks people how much something is worth to them: for example, a town considering whether to allow a polluting factory to locate there. We would want to estimate the cost of air pollution on the average person's health. We might ask people "How much is it worth to you not to cough a lot and miss work 10 days a year because you are sick with asthma?" If the average value people assign is $150 in a town of 20,000, we estimate the contingency evaluation or subjective benefit of health to be $150 x 20,000 people per year, or $3 million. We balance this cost against higher profits for a company and new jobs created by allowing pollution. One problem with estimates is that few people give accurate ones. In addition, different people often assign very different cost values. To an impoverished person, coughing and missing work may be worth $150. For a wealthy person, it may be $150,000. Broader consequences exist as well. In this example, polluting companies will move to towns with many low-income people who assign lower costs. This will worsen living conditions in lower income areas and increase the gap in life quality between rich and poor.

Using the same example, *actual cost evaluation* estimates the actual medical and job loss costs. We estimate the health impact and then add up likely medical bills and costs for employers to replace sick or disabled workers. Let us say that medical treatment averages $150 per person and a replacement worker costs an extra $300 per lost day of work. The cost of treating 10,000 people each year would be $150 x 10,000 people = $1,500,000. The cost of hiring 1,000 replacement workers for 2 days would be $600 x 1,000 workers = $600,000, for a total estimate of $2.1 million. This method ignores pain and suffering, inconvenience, and indirect costs (e.g., a parent stays home with a sick child or a child cannot play sports because of asthma). To balance the costs with benefits by this method, the polluting factory would need to earn an extra $2.1 million in profits.

Cost-benefit analysis rests on the assumption that we can attach a monetary value to everything (e.g., a child's learning, health, love, happiness, human dignity, chastity) and that people assign similar valuations. We might question these assumptions. Cost-benefit analysis can also raise moral and political concerns. The people paying the cost may not be the ones getting the benefits. In addition, cost-benefit calculations tend to favor wealthy, high-income people over poor, low-income people. A high-income person's time is worth more, so she or he places a higher value on saving 15 minutes in a commute to work than a low-income person would. A high-income person thinks saving 15 minutes is worth $50, but to a low-income person, it is worth $5. Cost-benefit analysis often finds inconveniencing or disrupting the lives of low-income people is more "cost effective."

Cost-benefit analysis tends to conceal the moral-political dimension of decisions. For instance, should we "pull the plug" on a life-support machine for a seriously ill elderly person or keep the person alive for another 6 months. We compare the benefits to the costs. Maybe it costs $200,000 in medical expenses to extend the person's life by 6 months. Is the benefit of 6 months of life for a nonproductive member of society worth $200,000 in costs? In addition to its economic aspect, the cost-benefit balance decision has a moral dimension, yet that dimension in decisions is most visible when it involves a single identifiable person (your grandmother) with whom you have a personal, emotional attachment. The moral dimension is less visible

when make it for someone identified as an individual, (i.e., lost among a group of 1,000 hospital patients) and for whom decision makers (e.g., health insurance officials in a distant city) lack direct, personal contact. Although obscured, the moral dimension of the decision remains.

Moving Beyond the Basic–Applied Dichotomy. The basic versus applied research dichotomy is overly simplistic. Three related issues elaborate on this distinction to build additional types of research beyond the dichotomy:

1. The form of knowledge a study creates
2. The range of audiences that can use research findings
3. Who initiates, designs, and controls a study—an independent researcher or others

Forms of Knowledge. Social researchers produce two forms of knowledge, instrumental and reflexive. Although they overlap, the forms mirror a distinction between neutral, impartial, and task-oriented actions and principled, value-based, engaged behavior. Most studies published in scholarly journals and applied studies by practitioners build and expand **instrumental knowledge**. It is a means–ends or task-oriented knowledge. We use it to accomplish something: a practical task or advancement of what we know about how the world works. We create such knowledge as we extend old or invent new research techniques and gather, verify, connect, and accumulate new information. Instrumental knowledge advances the frontiers of understanding. As we create instrumental knowledge, we can avoid direct engagement in moral or value-directed concerns.

By contrast, **reflexive knowledge** is self-aware, value-oriented knowledge. It is principled and oriented toward an ultimate value or end in itself. We create reflexive knowledge to build on specific moral commitments, consciously reflect on the context and processes of knowledge creation, and emphasize the implications of knowledge. When we create reflexive knowledge, we ask questions such as: Why and how are we creating this knowledge? What is the relevance or importance of this knowledge, and for whom? What are its implications for other knowledge and for moral principles such as justice, truth, fairness, freedom, or equality?

Audiences for Research Findings. As noted earlier, the primary audience of basic research is other professional researchers in the scientific community. Practitioner nonresearchers are the primary audience for applied research. We can expand the practitioner audiences into four types: the public, activists, general practitioners, and narrow practitioners. Each has a different interest. Most of the *public* have only a general interest. They learn about research results in schooling or from the mass media outlets. *Activists*, community advocates, and research participants in action research have a direct, immediate interest in results that are very relevant to their immediate concerns. The *general practitioner*, a high-level decision maker or policy specialist in government or large organizations (e.g., businesses, hospitals, police departments), wants to integrate a broad range of practical knowledge to use to inform many current and future decisions. By contrast, the *narrow practitioner* wants targeted findings that will address a specific, pressing problem.

Researcher Autonomy and Commissioned Social Research. In the idealized and romantic image of research, there is complete freedom to pursue knowledge without restriction. The ideal researcher is independent, has sufficient funds, and has complete control over how to conduct a study. The opposite of this image is research with many restrictions. This describes hired researcher-employee

Instrumental knowledge Knowledge narrowly focused to answer a basic or applied research question, issue, or concern with an outcome or task-oriented orientation.

Reflexive knowledge Knowledge used to broadly examine the assumptions, context, and moral-value positions of basic or applied social research, including the research process itself and the implications of what is learned.

TABLE 2 Expanded Set of Basic and Applied Research Types

AUDIENCE	FORM OF KNOWLEDGE		
	REFLEXIVE	INSTRUMENTAL	INSTRUMENTAL
	Autonomous	*Commissioned*	*Autonomous*
Basic Research Type			
Scientific community	Basic critical	Basic contract	Basic professional
Applied Research Types			
General public	Public intellectual	Dedicated policy	Democratic policy
Participants	Public educator	Consultant	Participatory researcher
Generalist practitioner	Democratic deliberation	Democratic contract	Democratic applied research
Narrow practitioner	Dedicated deliberation	Dedicated contract	Dedicated applied research

or **commissioned research**. Most commissioned studies put limitations on researcher autonomy. Someone else provides the funds, and specifies the scope of the research question and the dissemination of findings. Other "strings" may include restriction to examine certain issues but not others. Researchers may face strict limits on the time to complete a study. Alternatively, they may be told which research techniques to use or which people to contact in the study.

Expanded Set of Basic and Applied Research Types. We can now combine the form of knowledge, audience, and commissioned versus autonomous research to create an expanded set of basic and applied research and researcher roles (see Table 2). Basic research for the scientific community can produce reflexive or instrumental knowledge—critical and professional research, respectively.[13] A large private foundation or government agency might commission a researcher to conduct basic research. This is basic contract research. At times, researchers assume a public intellectual role and produce reflexive knowledge to advance general discussion and public debate. At other times, they produce instrumental knowledge, sometimes from a commissioned or autonomous study. The knowledge might be dedicated to a specific policy and contribute to a policy debate. A researcher who designs reflexive research for participants is in a public educator role. When the knowledge is instrumental, the researcher may act as a consultant to the participants or be a participatory researcher who is equal to the participants. On some occasions, generalist and targeted practitioners create and apply reflexive knowledge in debates and deliberations over issues or decision options. More often practitioners focus on instrumental knowledge. Sometimes a generalist practitioner creates and uses knowledge as a contributor to open, democratic decisions. At other times, a practitioner narrowly focuses on a particular targeted issue that has little application or distribution of findings.[14] An outside group or employer could commission a study, or a researcher could create it autonomously.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

We conduct studies for many reasons: my boss told me to; it was a class assignment; I was curious; my roommate thought it would be a good idea. There

Commissioned research Research funded and conducted at the behest of someone other than the researcher; the person conducting the study often has limited control over the research question, methods of a study, and presentation of results.

are nearly as many reasons to conduct a study as there are researchers. We can organize the purposes of research into three groups: explore a new topic, describe a social phenomenon, or explain why something occurs.[15] Studies may have multiple purposes (e.g., both to explore and to describe), but one purpose is usually dominant (see Summary Review Box 2, Purposes of Research Types).

SUMMARY REVIEW BOX 2

Purposes of Research Types

EXPLORATORY

- Become familiar with the basic facts, setting, and concerns
- Create a general mental picture of conditions
- Formulate and focus questions for future research
- Generate new ideas, conjectures, or hypotheses
- Determine the feasibility of conducting research
- Develop techniques for measuring and locating future data

DESCRIPTIVE

- Provide a detailed, highly accurate picture
- Locate new data that contradict past data
- Create a set of categories or classify types
- Clarify a sequence of steps or stages
- Document a causal process or mechanism
- Report on the background or context of a situation

EXPLANATORY

- Test a theory's predictions or principle
- Elaborate and enrich a theory's explanation
- Extend a theory to new issues or topics
- Support or refute an explanation or prediction
- Link issues or topics to a general principle
- Determine which of several explanations is best

Exploration

We use **exploratory research** when the subject is very new, we know little or nothing about it, and no one has yet explored it (see Example Box 4, Exploratory Research). Our goal with it is to formulate more precise questions that we can address in future research. As a first stage of inquiry, we want to know enough after the exploratory study so we can design and execute a second, more systematic and extensive study. Exploratory research rarely yields definitive answers. It addresses the "what" question: What is this social activity really about? It is difficult to conduct because it has few guidelines, everything is potentially important, steps are not well defined, and the direction of inquiry changes frequently.

Researchers who conduct exploratory research must be creative, open minded, and flexible; adopt an investigative stance; and explore all sources of information. They ask creative questions and take advantage of serendipity (i.e., unexpected or chance factors that have large implications). For example, an expectation might be that the impact of immigration to a new nation would be more negative on younger children than on older ones. Instead, the unexpected finding was that children of a specific age group (between ages six and eleven) who immigrate are most vulnerable to its disruption—more so than either older or younger children.[16]

Exploratory research Research whose primary purpose is to examine a little understood issue or phenomenon and to develop preliminary ideas about it and move toward refined research questions.

Descriptive research Research in which the primary purpose is to "paint a picture" using words or numbers and to present a profile, a classification of types, or an outline of steps to answer questions such as who, when, where, and how.

Description

You may have a well-developed idea about a social phenomenon and want to describe it. **Descriptive research** presents a picture of the specific details of a situation, social setting, or relationship. Much of the social research found in scholarly journals or used for making policy decisions is descriptive (see Example Box 5, Descriptive Research).

Descriptive and exploratory research blur together in practice. A descriptive research study starts with a well-defined issue or question and tries

EXAMPLE BOX 4

Exploratory Research

Most exploratory research uses qualitative data. In general, qualitative research tends to be more open to using a wide range of evidence and discovering new issues. Troshynski and Blank (2008) conducted an exploratory study of men who engage in illegal sex trafficking. The study was unusual because the research participants had actively engaged in an illegal activity. The authors had a chance meeting with someone who knew people "in the business." Over a 3-month period, the authors were able to meet and conduct open-ended interviews with five traffickers. Their goal was to explore how the traffickers saw their business and learn about their backgrounds.

Other exploratory qualitative studies are more complex. Gavlee (2005) conducted an exploratory ethnographic study of racial classification in Puerto Rico. The study was motivated by previous studies that had found that the way people dealt with race in Brazil and much of Latin American differed from ideas about race on the mainland United States. Brazilians emphasized phenotype (outward appearance) over descent, which produced numerous categories that are fluid and uncertain. The study's research questions were these: What categories do people in Puerto Rico use? What are the organizing principles of the categories? Gavlee focused on one small city in Puerto Rico. He spent time in the city and conducted open-ended interviews with twenty-four people to learn terms and categories they used to talk about others. Next, he asked forty-two people to organize a set of pictures of faces that he analyzed using computer software. He discovered that local people organize primarily in terms of appearance rather than race, using five shades of color as categories. Other physical appearance features (hair texture, nose shape) also had minor roles.

Some exploratory studies use quantitative techniques. Krysan (2008) analyzed survey data in an exploratory study of how people of different races in the United States search for housing. The study asked several hundred people in the Detroit area about their recent housing search including how long it took, how many possibilities they inspected during the search, and how many offers or applications they completed. Krysan compared renters and buyers as well as Whites and Blacks with regard to search strategies (e.g., talk to friends, family, or neighbors, look at yard signs, search newspapers or the Internet, use a real estate professional or search service). She looked at percentages and found many similarities but a few differences with regard to race pertaining to type of real estate agent used, Internet use, and length or difficulty of search. People tended to use an agent of their own race. Whites were more likely to use the Internet and more likely to restrict their searchers to White majority neighborhoods. Blacks searched a wider range of locations, had longer searchers, and filed more applications before they had success.

to describe it accurately. The study's outcome is a detailed picture of the issue or answer to the research question. For example, the focused issue might be the relationship between parents who are heavy alcohol drinkers and child abuse. Results could show that 25 percent of heavy-drinking parents had physically or sexually abused their children compared to 5 percent of parents who never drink or drink very little.

A descriptive study presents a picture of types of people or of social activities and focuses on "how" and "who" questions (How often does it happen? Who is involved?). Exploring new issues or explaining why something happens (e.g., why do heavy-drinking parents abuse their children) is less of a concern than describing how things are. A great deal of social research is descriptive. Descriptive researchers use most data-gathering techniques: surveys, field research, content analysis, and historical-comparative research.

Explanation

When encountering an issue that is known and with a description of it, we might wonder *why* things are the way they are. Addressing the "why" is the

EXAMPLE BOX 5

Descriptive Research

The experimental study by Lowery and colleagues (2007) on priming and academic performance, the survey research study by Edgell and Tranby (2007) on religion and beliefs about racial inequality, and the ethnographic study of gangs by Venkatesh (2008) were all descriptive research. The primary focus of each study was to describe patterns rather than address the why question or to test an existing theory.

Another example of a descriptive study is the Unnever and Cullen (2007) study on support for the death penalty. The authors observed that many public opinion polls revealed a sharp racial divide in Americans' support for the death penalty. White racism is often cited as a reason for this difference, yet "there is no systematic theory of why white racism fosters support for capital punishment" (page 1283). The authors conducted a secondary data analysis (see later in this chapter) of survey data with a national sample of 1,500 people. In statistical analysis, they found that while many factors (authoritarian personality, conservative ideology, religious belief, and anti-egalitarian views) contribute to a person's support for death penalty, the strongest predictor of support among Whites was a high score on White racism. Among nonracist Whites, support for the death penalty is similar to levels found among African Americans. The authors briefly discussed theory, but they used theories for only general ideas and primarily described the characteristics of death penalty supporters. They did not directly test any theories or use them to create an explanation (see the next section).

purpose of **explanatory research**. It builds on exploratory and descriptive research and goes on to identify the reason something occurs (see Example Box 6, Explanatory Research). Going beyond providing a picture of the issue, an explanatory study looks for causes and reasons. For example, a descriptive study would document the numbers of heavy-drinking parents who abuse their children whereas an explanatory study would be interested in learning *why* these parents abuse their children. We focus on exactly what is it about heavy drinking that contributes to child abuse.

Explanatory research Research whose primary purpose is to explain why events occur and to build, elaborate, extend, or test theory.

We use multiple strategies in explanatory research. In some explanatory studies, we develop a novel explanation and then provide empirical evidence to support it or refute it. In other studies, we outline two or more competing explanations and then present evidence for each in a type of a "head-to-head" comparison to see which is stronger. In still others, we start with an existing explanation derived from social theory or past research and then extend it to explain a new issue, setting, or group of people to see how well the explanation holds up or whether it needs modification or is limited to only certain conditions.

WITHIN OR ACROSS CASES

Studies vary according to the number of cases we examine and the depth-intensity of investigation into features of the cases. Sometimes we carefully select or sample a smaller number cases out of a much larger pool of cases or population. These studies may still involve hundreds or thousands of cases. In other studies (especially experiments), we analyze a few dozen people and manipulate conditions for those people. In still another type of study, we intensively examine one or a small handful of cases, perhaps fewer than ten. While the number of cases in a study is important, the more critical issue is whether a study primarily focuses on features within cases or across cases. As Ragin (1994:93) observed, "often there is a trade-off between the number of cases and the number of features of cases researchers typically can study."

The concept of "case" is central but can be complex. Gerring (2007:17) calls a case a "definitional morass." The complication arises because many possible things can be cases. They can be determined by a study's perspective and research

EXAMPLE BOX 6

Explanatory Research

The historical-comparative study on the movement for jury rights by McCammon and colleagues (2008) was explanatory. The study focused on explaining why movements were more successful in some states than others. The existing-statistics study by McVeigh and Sobolewski (2007) was also explanatory because the authors tested ethnic competition theory and split labor market theory to explain county voting patterns.

Explanatory studies usually outline an existing theory and test it or extend the theory to a new area or group. A well-known social psychological theory for the past 50 years has been the contact hypothesis. It has primarily been used to study interracial relations. It explains the degree of prejudice and negative attitudes by saying that people tend to hold negative views toward an "out-group" because of ignorance and negative stereotypes. Once people have contact with and get to know out-group members, they replace their ignorance and negative stereotypes with more positive views. It answers the question why people hold negative feelings toward out-groups with the contact hypothesis: their lack of contact with the out-group. Many studies examined this hypothesis, by investigating specific conditions of contact and the degree to which an out-group is perceived as threatening.

Lee, Farrel, and Link (2004) extended the contact hypothesis to explain a new topic, people in U.S. cities who are homeless. They looked at fourteen measures of exposure to these people. The measures ranged from having information (e.g., articles, television) about them, personal observation, and personal interaction, to having been homeless oneself or having a family member who was or is. They also developed comprehensive measures of a person's view on people who are homeless. These included beliefs about why people become homeless, seeing them as dangerous, feeling empathy and having positive emotions, and supporting their rights. Using telephone survey data from a random sample of 1,388 adults in 200 U.S. metropolitan areas in 1990, they found clear evidence supporting the contact hypothesis. People who had more contact and more intimate types of contact with people who are homeless held the most favorable views of them and were more likely to support programs that helped people who are homeless compared to people who had little or no contact with them. They also found some variation in views about people who are homeless based on a person's race, age, education level, and political ideology.

question. Formally, a case is bounded or delimited in time and space; it is often called a "unit" or "observation." An individual person can be a case as can a family, company, or entire nation. What serves as a case in one study may not be a case in a different study. For example, the nation might be a case that can examine aspects of it or aspects of individuals as cases within one nation's population.

A case is not simply any individual person, family, company, or nation; we select it as part of a "class of events" or because it belongs to a category of cases (see George and Bennett, 2005:17). We study a case because it is part of some grouping—type or kind—that we study to develop knowledge about causes of similarities and differences among a type or kind of case. For example, I would not study my neighbor Alex as a case just because he lives next to me; however, I might include Alex as a case within a class of similar cases: middle-aged men with a physical disability that prevents them from working and who became full-time "househusbands" to a professional spouse. Likewise, I might study the 1962 Cuban missle crisis as a case, but it would be as one case within a category of cases: international crisis management and deterrance situations.

In any study, researchers should ask both how many cases are involved and whether the emphasis is more on a detailed examination within a few cases or across many cases.

Case-Study Research

Case-study research examines many features of a few cases. The cases can be individuals, groups, organizations, movements, events, or geographic units. The data on the case are detailed, varied, and extensive. It can focus on a single point in time or a duration of time. Most case-study research is qualitative, but it does not have to be. By contrast, almost all cross-case (or noncase research) is quantitative. Qualitative and case-study research are not identical, but "almost all qualitative research seeks to construct represention based on in-depth, detailed knowledge of cases" (Ragin, 1994a:92).[17] The ethnography on urban gangs by Venkatesh (2008) was a case study. It described how specific events and relationships unfolded over the course of 8 years in and around one gang in a limited geographic area of South Chicago.

Case-study research intensively investigates one or a small set of cases, focusing on many details within each case and the context. In short, it examines both details of each case's internal features as well as the surrounding situation. Case studies enable us to link micro level, or the actions of individuals, to the macro level, or large-scale structures and processes (Vaughan, 1992). As Walton (1992b:122) remarked, "The logic of the case study is to demonstrate a causal argument about how general social forces shape and produce results in particular settings."

Case-study research has many strengths. It clarifies our thinking and allows us to link abstract ideas in specific ways with the concrete specifics of cases we observe in detail. It also enable us to calibrate or adjust the measures of our abstract concepts to actual lived experiences and widely accepted standards of evidence. Other case-study strengths involve theory. As Walton (1992b:129) noted, "Case studies are likely to produce the best theory." This occurs for three reasons. First, as we become very familiar with the in-depth detail of specific cases, we can create/build new theories as well as reshape current theories to complex cases or new situations. Second, when we examine specific cases, the intricate details of social processes and cause-effect relations become more visible. The increased visibility allows us to develop richer, more comprehensive explanations that can capture the complexity of social life. In addition, case studies provide evidence that more effectively depicts complex, multiple-factor events/situations and processes that occur over time and space. Case-study research also can incorporate an entire situation and multiple perspectives within it.

Case study research has the following six strengths:[18]

1. *Conceptual validity.* Case studies help to "flush out" and identify concepts/variables that are of greatest interest and move toward their core or essential meaning in abstract theory.
2. *Heuristic impact.* Case studies are highly heuristic (i.e., providing further learning, discovery, or problem solving). They help with constructing new theories, developing or extending concepts, and exploring the boundaries among related concepts.
3. *Causal mechanisms identification.* Case studies have the ability to make visible the details of social processes and mechanisms by which one factor affects others.
4. *Ability to capture complexity and trace processes.* Case studies can effectively depict highly complex, multiple-factor events/situations and trace processes over time and space.
5. *Calibration.* Case studies enable researchers to adjust measures of abstract concepts to dependable, lived experiences and concrete standards.
6. *Holistic elaboration.* Case studies can elaborate on an entire situation or process holistically and permit the incorporation of multiple perspectives or viewpoints.

Case studies have a detailed focus but tell a larger story (see Example Box 7, Case-Study Research). Walton remarked (1992a) in his case study of one community, Owens Valley, California, "I

Case-study research Research that is an in-depth examination of an extensive amount of information about very few units or cases for one period or across multiple periods of time.

EXAMPLE BOX 7

Case-Study Research

Perhaps you have seen the prize-winning 2002 movie *The Pianist,* about Wladyslaw Szpilman and the 1943 Jewish uprising in Warsaw, Poland. Einwohner (2003) conducted a historical case study of a single event—the 1943 Jewish uprising—to examine widely accepted social movement theory. The theory builds on three ideas: political opportunity structure (POS), threat, and motivational frame. *POS* is the overall set of options and constraints in institutions and resource control. When new opportunities arise (e.g., the opposition is divided, stalled, distracted, or runs short of supplies), the POS "opens," increasing the odds that a movement can grow or be successful. POS theory also recognizes threat. *Threat* is defined as increased costs to a movement for taking certain actions (e.g., new law restricting protest activity and many people being arrested) or not taking certain actions. A third concept is "motivational frame." A *frame* refers to how people think about and perceive something. A *motivational frame* is what participants perceive to be acceptable reasons or moral justifications for taking an action. The theory says a social movement advances when all three conditions occur: an opening occurs in the POS, the level of threat is low, and people have a frame that motivates them to take action.

Einwohner (2003) studied diaries and historical reports in the specific case of the Warsaw Jewish ghetto in 1943. She found a tightly closed POS and a situation of great threat. The Jews of the ghetto faced highly effective and overwhelming military power, and the Nazis began a policy of systematic extermination. Thus, two of the three conditions required for a successful movement were missing, yet the Jews of the ghetto formed a new and radical motivational frame. They redefined death in struggle as their only acceptable, honorable option. Instead of seeing death as an event to fear and avoid, their view shifted to seeing death in an uprising as a highly courageous, dignified, and honorable action. They redefined being killed in an impossible fight as being honorable and necessary both for each individual and for the entire Jewish people. Thus, the case study found that although two essential factors predicted by the theory (an open opportunity and low threat) were absent, a mass movement emerged. In fact, there was a complete lack of opportunity and extreme threat. In this case, the mass movement depended on the massive and widespread redefinition of what action all of the people had to pursue in a completely hopeless situation. Thus, Einwohner's detailed case study modified a widely accepted and well-documented existing theory.

have tried . . . to tell a big story through the lens of a small case" (p. xviii). The community engaged in social protest as it attempted to control its key resource (water) and destiny. The protest took different forms for more than 100 years. In the study, Walton examined diverse forms of data including direct observation, formal and informal interviews, census statistics, maps, old photos and newspapers, various historical documents, and official records.

Across-Case Research

Most quantitative research studies gather information from a large number of cases (30 to 3,000) and focus on a few of features of the cases. Rather than carry out a detailed investigation of each case, across-case research compares select features across numerous cases. It treats each case as the carrier of the feature of interest.

While certain issues lend themselves to one or another approach, it is sometimes possible to study the same issue using a case study and an across-case research design. Let us say we are interested in how a family decides whether to move to a different town. One strategy is to use a case study of five families. We conduct highly detailed observations and in-depth interviews of each family's decision-making process. Another strategy would be to use an across-case study of the relationship between the husband's job and family income and a decision to relocate to a different town. We look across 1,000

families, identifying the husband's job and income of 250 families that had moved and 750 that had not moved during the past five years. In the across-case study, the family unit acts as a carrier of the features of interest: husband's job, income level, and decision to move or not. Across-case research focuses on the relation among features (job, income, and decision), not on what happens within specific families.

SINGLE OR MULTIPLE POINTS IN TIME

Time is a dimension of every study. We incorporate time in two ways, cross-sectionally and longitudinally. **Cross-sectional research** gathers data at one time point and creates a kind of "snapshot" of social life. **Longitudinal research** gathers data at multiple time points and provides more of a "moving picture" of events, people, or social relations across time. In general, longitudinal studies are more difficult to conduct and require more resources. Researchers may collect data on many units at many time points and then look for patterns across the units or cases.[19]

Cross-Sectional Research

Cross-sectional research can be exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory, but it is most consistent with a descriptive approach. It is usually the simplest and least costly alternative but rarely captures social processes or change. Both the survey by Edgell and Tranby (2007) on religion and beliefs about racial inequality and the existing statistics study of red and blue states by McVeigh and Sobolewski (2007) are cross-sectional. Of studies described in this chapter, the exploratory study on race in Puerto Rico (Gavlee 2005) and on housing in Detroit (Krysan, 2008) were also cross-sectional. The descriptive study on death penalty views by Unnever and Cullen (2007) is also cross-sectional.

Deciding whether a study is cross-sectional or longitudinal is not always simple. It is more than simply a matter of length of time. The experiment on priming by Lowery and associates (2007) has "long-term effects" (4 days) in its title and is longtitudinal. Data in the survey study by Edgell and Tranby (2007) and the existing statistics study by McVeigh and Sobolewski (2007) were collected over several days or months but are cross-sectional studies. The priming experiment is longitudinal not because of the specific length of time involved but because the study's design incorporated time. Researchers gathered data at two distinct time points and compared these data in the data analysis. In the survey and existing statistics studies, researchers could not collect data all at once. They treated the minor time differences in when they gathered data as irrelevant and ignored the time differences in their study design.

Cross-sectional research Any research that examines information on many cases at one point in time.

Longitudinal research Any research that examines information from many units or cases across more than one point in time

Time-series research Longitudinal research in which information can be about different cases or people in each of several time periods.

Longitudinal Research

We can use longitudinal studies for exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory purposes. Usually more complicated and costly to conduct than cross-sectional research, longitudinal studies are more powerful. The study on the jury rights movement by McCammon and colleagues (2008) was longitudinal. It focused on explaining the pace and pattern of change across several decades. The authors gathered data from multiple time points, and their design compared data from them.

We now consider three types of longitudinal research: time series, panel, and cohort.

1. Time-series research is a longitudinal study in which data are collected on a category of people or other units across multiple time points. It enables researchers to observe stability or change in the features of the units or can track conditions over time (see Example Box 8, Time-Series Studies).

Even simple descriptive information on one item of time-series data can be very revealing. For

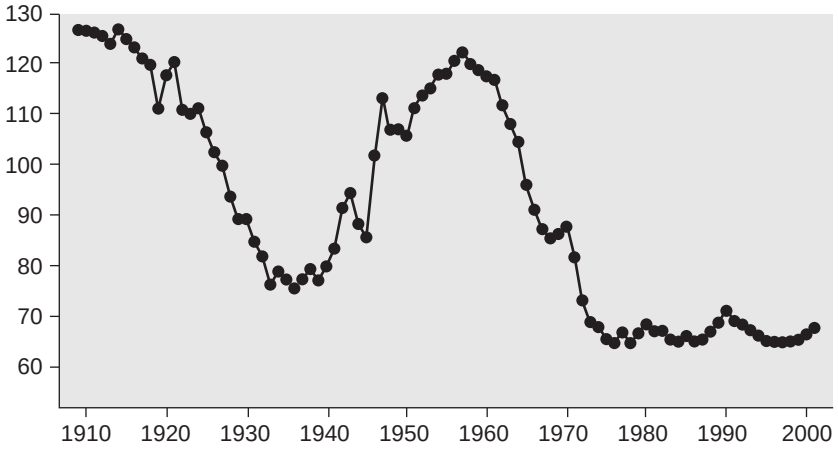


FIGURE 1 United States Birth Rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15–44) 1910 to 2000

Source: Calculated by author from U.S. census data.

example, time-series data on the U.S. birth rate since 1910 (Figure 1) shows that the number of births per woman declined steadily in the 1920s, continued to drop in the 1930s and early 1940s, but sharply reversed direction after World War II ended (1945). This increase began the dramatic upsurge called the "baby boom" of the 1950s to 1960s before declining and becoming stable in the 1970s. Time series can reveal changes not easily seen otherwise. For example, since 1967 the Higher Education Research Institute (2004) has gathered annual survey data on large samples of students entering American colleges for use in applied research by colleges. Time-series results on the percentage of students answering which value was very important for them (Figure 2) show a clear reversal of priorities between the 1960s and 1970s. The students ceased to value developing a meaningful philosophy of life and instead sought material-financial success.

2. The panel study, a powerful type of longitudinal research (see Example Box 9, Panel Studies), is more difficult to conduct than time-series research. Researchers conducting a panel study observe or gather data on exactly the same people, group, or organization across time points. Panel research is formidable to conduct and very costly. Tracking people over time is difficult because some people die or cannot be located. Nevertheless, the results of a well-designed panel study are very valuable. Even short-term panel studies can clearly show the impact of a particular life event.

EXAMPLE BOX 8

Time-Series Studies

A time-series study by Pettit and Western (2004) on imprisonment rates among Black and White men in the United States from 1964 to1997 found that during a major rise in incarceration rates in the 1980s (up by 300%), Black men were six to eight times more likely than White men to go to jail. Young Black men who did not attend college were more likely to be incarcerated, and nearly one in three spent some time behind bars; these rates doubled for Black men who failed to complete high school. By looking across time, the study authors showed that the expansion of the number of jailed people was uneven, and that increasing numbers of jailed people came from certain parts of the U.S. population.

Panel study Longitudinal research in which information is about the identical cases or people in each of several time periods.

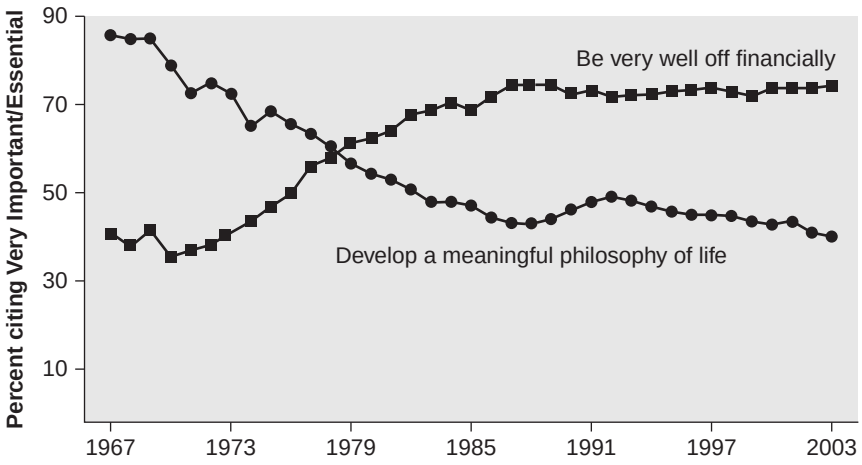


FIGURE 2 Value Priorities of U.S. College Freshmen, 1967–2003

Source: From Higher Education Research Institute. (2004). *Recent findings,* Figure 4. Retrieved September 25, 2004, from www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/findings.html.

However, we learn distinct things from panel studies because we are studying the same people. For example, Brewer et al. (2005) looked at the impact of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on attitudes. The researchers asked about trust in other nations and resurveyed the same Americans in a three-wave panel study (October 2001, March 2002, and September 2002). They found that people's feelings toward other nations after the September 11 attack was not temporary but that people's distrust increased over time and was higher one year later. This showed that the attack had ended an entire era of positive feelings and had triggered a much deeper xenophobia among many in the U.S. population.

3. A **cohort study** is similar to the panel study, but rather than observing the exact same people, it studies a category of people who share a similar life experience in a specified period (see Example Box 10, Cohort Studies). Cohort analysis is "explicitly macroanalytic" (i.e., researchers examine the category as a whole for important features [Ryder, 1992:230]). We focus on the "cohort," or a defined category. Commonly used cohorts include all people born in the same year (called *birth cohorts*), all people hired at the same time, all people who retire in a 1- or 2-year period, and all people who graduate in a given year. Unlike panel studies, we do not have to locate the exact same people for each year in a cohort study but identify only those who experienced a common life event. A cohort study could, for example, compare three marriage cohorts—all people married in each of three years (1970, 1990, and 2010) to see whether they differ as to the features of the marriage ceremony, whether the bride was pregnant at the time of marriage, and other features.

Cohort study Longitudinal research that traces information about a category of cases or people who shared a common experience at one time period across subsequent time periods.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

This section is a brief overview of the main data collection techniques. We can group them into two categories based on the type of data you gather: *quantitative*, collecting data in the form of numbers, and *qualitative*, collecting data in the form of words or pictures. Certain techniques are more effective at addressing specific kinds of research questions or

EXAMPLE BOX 9

Panel Studies

In many large U.S. cities, as many as 50 percent of students who begin high school do not graduate. Neild, Stoner-Eby, and Furstenberg (2008) studied the issue of dropping out by focusing on ninth grade students. They used panel data from the Philadelphia Education Longitudinal Study (PELS) that followed 10 percent of youth in one high school district over time. Students and their parents within those schools were randomly selected to participate in half-hour telephone interviews during the summer after the students had completed the eighth grade. Both parents and students were again interviewed (in English or Spanish) during the fall/winter of the ninth grade year (Wave 2 of the survey), during the summer after ninth grade (Wave 3) and after each subsequent school year until the fall/winter of 2000–2001 (about 6 months after what would have been their fourth year in high school). By the end of the fourth year, 48.9 percent of students who had started in the ninth grade had graduated. The study tried to determine whether ninth grade course failure and attendance added substantially to predicting dropout. They statistically analyzed the data and found that the ninth grade year contributed substantially to the probability of dropping out. It was a key "turning point" in the process. Many students who eventually dropped out had difficulty with the social and academic transition. They had social adjustment difficulties indicated by a rise in behavior and attendance problems, and a high proportion failed key ninth grade classes (math and English) because their preparation for high school–level standards had been inadequate. This is a panel study because the same parents and students were repeatedly interviewed year after year.

Jennings and Zeitner (2003) studied civic engagement, but they focused on the influence of Internet usage among Americans. They noted that cross-sectional data showed that Internet users had high levels of civic engagement, yet more educated people tended to use the Internet more and to be more engaged in civic organizations. Past studies could not identify whether over time increasing usage of the Internet influenced a person's level of civic engagement. By using panel data collected from a survey of high school seniors in 1965 who were again studied in 1973, 1982, and 1997 (by which time they were in their fifties), the researchers could measure levels of civic engagement before and after Internet use. The Internet was not available until after 1982 but was in wide use by 1997. Both people previously interviewed and their offspring were surveyed. The measure of civic engagement included a wide range of behaviors and attitudes. In general, the authors found that those who were more engaged in civic organizations prior to the availability of the Internet were more likely to use it, and people who used the Internet also increased their civic engagement once they started using the Internet. Whereas Internet users among people in the panels since 1965, who are now in their fifties, increased all forms of civic engagement as they adopted the Internet, their offspring who use the Internet are less likely to be volunteers or become engaged in their local community. Internet use increases levels of civic engagement for the older more than the younger generation, especially younger generation Internet users who use it for purposes other than following public affairs.

topics. It takes skill, practice, and creativity to match a research question to an appropriate data collection technique.

Quantitative Data

Experiments. **Experimental research** uses the logic and principles found in natural science research. Experiments can be conducted in laboratories or in real life. They usually involve a small number of people (thirty to one hundred) and address a well-focused question. Experiments are highly effective for explanatory research.

Experimental research Research in which the researcher manipulates conditions for some research participants but not others and then compares group responses to see whether doing so made a difference.

EXAMPLE BOX 10

Cohort Studies

Anderson and Fetner (2008) used data from a cross-national survey of people in various countries conducted in the 1981–1982, 1990, and 2000 periods and examined a question regarding tolerance of homosexuality in the United States and Canada. The authors found that tolerance for homosexuality increased both by birth cohort and over time. Thus, people born later in the twentieth century were more tolerant than people born earlier and everyone was more tolerant in the later time periods. For example, people born in the 1920–1929 era were less tolerant when asked in 1981–1982 than when they were asked 20 years later in 2000. People born in 1960–1963 tended to be more tolerant than the 1920–1929 cohort when they were asked in 1980 and in 2000, and their tolerance increased over time as well. An interesting aspect of this study is the comparison between Canada and the United States. In 1980–1982, Canadians were less tolerant than Americans for every birth cohort. Thus, Canadians born in the 1920s or 1940s or 1960s, who were then in their 60s, 40s, or 20s were all less tolerant than Americans when asked in the 1981–1982 survey. When asked in the 1990 and 2000 surveys, Canadians at every birth cohort were much more tolerant than Americans. In fact, increased tolerance between 1990 to 2000 for Americans was small compared to that of the Canadians. Moreover, the youngest Canadian cohort (people born in the 1960s) increased tolerance far more dramatically than other cohorts and Americans of that cohort. A more detailed analysis showed that Canadians from rural areas, small towns, and large cities all became more tolerant; however, Americans in rural areas and very small towns did not become tolerant; only those in larger towns or urban areas did so. A researcher who studied only cross-sectional data in 1981–1982 would see small cohort difference with the Americans being slightly more tolerant. Consideration of only cross-sectional data in 2000 would identify very large cohort differences and that the Canadians were much more tolerant than the Americans. By looking longitudinally, it is possible to see how opinions changed by cohort and over time very differently in the two countries.

In another cohort study, Bratter and King (2008) examined data from a 2002 U.S. nationally representative sample of people ages 15–44 who were ever married and who had valid information on the race of their first spouse (1,606 males and 4,070 females). The authors studied marriage cohorts (i.e., all people married in a certain year or set of adjoining years), comparing interracial and same-racial group marriage partners. They investigated whether the marriage was intact or had ended at a later time point. In this study, six cohorts were examined (earlier than 1980, 1980–1984, 1985–1989, 1990–1994, 1995–1999, and after 2000). Comparisons across the cohorts showed that interracial couples tended to have higher divorce rates. However, this was not the case for people married across all years but it was especially strong for those marrying during the late 1980s. The researchers found that White female/Black male and White female/Asian male marriages had higher divorce rates than White/White couples but marriages involving non-White females and White males and Hispanics and non-Hispanic persons had similar or lower risks of divorce.

In most experiments, a researcher divides the people being studied (about seventy people in the study) into two or more groups. The researcher then treats both groups identically except that he or she gives one group but not the other a specific condition: the "treatment." The Lowery et al. experiment was "priming" students with words related to being smart. The researchers measure the reactions of both groups precisely. By controlling the setting and giving only one group the treatment, she or he can conclude that differences in group reactions are due to the treatment alone.

Surveys. As researchers, we utilize questionnaires or interviews to learn people's beliefs or opinions in many research situations (e.g., experiments, field

research). **Survey research** uses a written questionnaire or formal interview to gather information on the backgrounds, behaviors, beliefs, or attitudes of a large number of people. Usually, we ask a large number of people (100 to 5,000) dozens of questions in a short time frame. The survey by Engell and Tanby (2007) on religious belief and racial inequality had gathered data in 30-minute-long telephone interviews with 2,081 people in the fall of 2003. Unlike an experiment, we do not manipulate a situation or condition to see how people react; we only carefully record answers from many people who have been asked the same questions. Often we select the people for a survey using a random sampling technique. This allows us to generalize information legitimately from a few people (e.g., 1,000) to many more (e.g., several million). We usually present survey data in charts, graphs, or tables and analyze them with statistics. Most frequently, we use surveys in descriptive research, sometimes in explanatory research, and only rarely in exploratory research.

Nonreactive Research. In experimental and survey research, we actively engage the people we study by creating experimental conditions or directly asking questions. These are called *reactive* methods because a research participant could react in some way because he or she is aware of being in a study. Other quantitative research is called **nonreactive research** because the study participants are not aware that information about them is part of a study. Four types of nonreactive studies are unobtrusive research, existing statistical information, content analysis, and secondary data analysis. *Secondary data analysis* is the statistical analysis of quantitative data that were previously collected and stored (often originally from a survey). Here we briefly consider two types of nonreactive research: content analysis and existing statistical information.

Content Analysis. **Content analysis** is a technique for examining the content or information and symbols contained in written documents or other communication media (e.g., photographs, movies, song lyrics, advertisements). To conduct a content analysis, we identify a body of material to analyze (e.g., school textbooks, television programs, newspaper articles) and then create a system for recording specific aspects of its content. The system might include counting how often certain words or themes appear. After we systematically record what we find, we analyze it, often using graphs or charts. Content analysis is a nonreactive method because the creators of the content didn't know whether anyone would analyze it. Content analysis lets us discover and document specific features in the content of a large amount of material that might otherwise go unnoticed. We most frequently use content analysis for descriptive purposes, but exploratory or explanatory studies are also possible (see Example Study Box 11, Content Analysis).

Existing Statistics. Using **existing statistics research**, we locate a source of previously collected information, often in the form of official government reports. We then reorganize the information in new ways to address a research question. Locating the sources and verifying their quality can be time consuming. Frequently, we do not know whether the needed information is available when we begin a study. We can use existing statistics research for exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory purposes but most frequently for descriptive research.

Survey research Quantitative research in which the researcher systematically asks a large number of people the same questions and then records their answers.

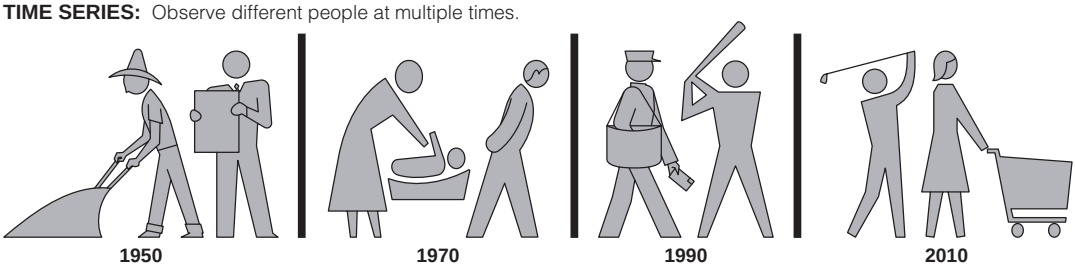
Nonreactive research Research methods in which people are not aware of being studied.

Content analysis Research in which the content of a communication medium is systematically recorded and analyzed.

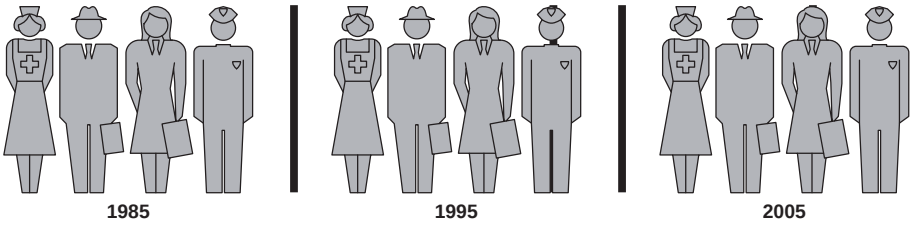
Existing statistics research Research in which one reexamines and statistically analyzes quantitative data that have been gathered by government agencies or other organizations.

CROSS-SECTIONAL: Observe a collection of people at one time.

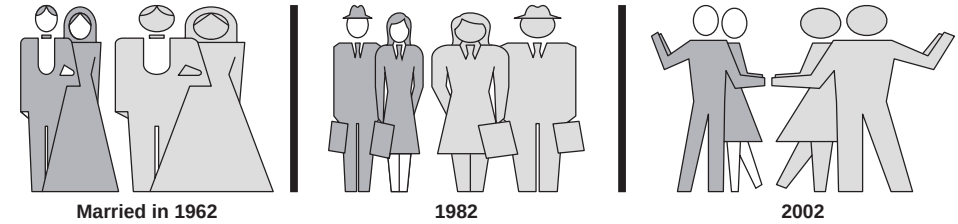
TIME SERIES: Observe different people at multiple times.



PANEL: Observe the exact same people at two or more times.



COHORT: Observe people who shared an experience at two or more times.



CASE STUDY: Observe a small set intensely across time.

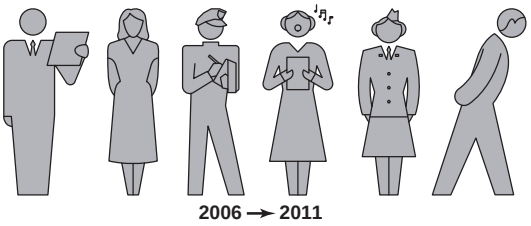


FIGURE 3 The Time Dimension in Social Research

EXAMPLE BOX 11

Content Analysis

Lawrence and Birkland (2004) conducted a content analysis of school shootings after the ones in 1999 at Columbine High School. The researchers were interested in how media coverage shaped eventual legislation on the issue. They examined and coded the content of four data sources: newspaper articles in two leading newspapers between April and August 1999 that mentioned the incident, television news stories in 1999, Congressional debates on the issue in 1999–2000, and legislation introduced in the U.S. Congress in 1999–2000. The authors discovered that some reasons for the shooting that the media and the debates emphasized (influence of pop culture and peer pressure) did not appear in legislation but other issues did (school security and access to guns). An issue (law enforcement measures) not evident in media stories became prominent in debates and legislation.

EXAMPLE BOX 12

Field Research

Mitchell Duneier (1999) conducted a field research of street vendors in Greenwich Village, New York City. He gained entree by browsing through books at one vendor whom he had befriended. The vendor introduced him to other vendors, panhandlers, people who were homeless, and others. Duneier observed them on and off over 4 years, periodically working as a magazine vendor and scavenger. As a White college professor, it took adjustment to learn the daily life and win acceptance among low-income African American men who made a living selling used books and magazines on the sidewalk. In addition to observing and tape-recording life on the sidewalk, Duneier conducted many informal interviews, read related documents, and had a photojournalist take numerous photos of the field site and its people.

Duneier concluded with a critique of the popular "broken window" theory of social control and crime reduction. Where others saw only a disorderly street environment causing deviant behavior and crime, Duneier found a rich informal social life with honor, dignity, and entrepreneurial vigor among poor people who were struggling to survive. He noted that upper-middle-class government officials and corporate leaders often advocate for laws and regulations that threaten to destroy the fluid, healthy informal social structure he discovered because they do not know the people or understand life on the sidewalk. They see only social disorganization because the vibrant daily lives of those who make a living among the flow of people on the sidewalk do not mesh with the upper-middle-class world that is centered in large complex organizations with formal regulations, official procedures, fixed hierarchies, and standardized occupations.

Qualitative Data

Qualitative data come in a vast array of forms: photos, maps, open-ended interviews, observations, documents, and so forth. We can simplify such data into two major categories: field research (including ethnography, participant observation, depth interviewing) and historical-comparative research.

Field Research. **Field research** involves conducting ethnographic case studies on a small group of people for a length of time. Field research begins with a loosely formulated question, then selects a group or site for study, gains access to, and then adopts a social role in the setting and begin observing. Field researchers carefully observe and interact in the field setting for a few months to several years. They get to know personally the people being studied and conduct informal interviews. Data are in the form of detailed notes taken on a daily basis. While observing, researchers constantly consider what they observed and refine ideas about its significance. Finally, the researchers leave the field site, review notes, and prepare written reports. Field research is usually used for exploratory and descriptive studies; it is sometimes used for explanatory research. (See Example Box 12, Field Research).

Field research Qualitative research in which the researcher directly observes and records notes on people in a natural setting for an extended period of time.

EXAMPLE BOX 13

Historical-Comparative Research

Mahoney (2003) presented a puzzle about the countries of Spanish America, specifically 15 countries that had been mainland territories of the Spanish colonial empire. He observed that their relative ranking, from most to least developed in 1900, remained unchanged in 2000; that is, the least developed country in 1900 (Bolivia) remained the least developed in 2000. This picture of great stability contrasts with dramatic changes and improvements in the region during the twentieth century. Going back to the height of the Spanish empire in the seventeenth century, Mahoney noted that the richest, most central colonies in that period later became the poorest countries while marginal, backwater, poor colonies became the developed, richest countries by the late nineteenth century.

To solve this puzzle, Mahoney used two qualitative data analysis tools, path dependency and qualitative comparative analysis (QCA). His data included maps, national economic and population statistics, and several hundred historical studies on the specific countries. He concluded that the most central, prosperous Spanish colonies were located where natural resources were abundant (for extraction and shipment to Europe) and large indigenous populations existed (to work as coerced labor). In these colonies, local elites arose and created rigid racial-ethnic stratification systems. The elites concentrated economic-political power with themselves and excluded broad parts of society. The systems continued into the nineteenth century when new political events, trade patterns, and economic conditions appeared. In the 1700–1850 era, liberal-minded elites who were open to new ideas did not succeed in the central, prosperous colonies. In contrast, colonies that had been on the fringe of the Spanish empire in South America were less encumbered by rigid systems. New elites who were able to innovate and adapt arose in a "great reversal" of positions. After this historical "turning point," some countries had a substantial head start toward social-economic development in the late 1800s. These countries built political-economic systems and institutions that propelled them forward; that is, they "locked into" a particular direction or path that brought increasing returns.

Mahoney (2003:53) argued, "Explanations of differences in units that draw on the current attributes of those units will often be inadequate." In other words, a cross-sectional approach that tries to explain differences among the countries by using data at only one point in time cannot capture significant long-term dynamic processes. An explanation that includes the impact of distant historical events and takes a long-term view is superior.

Historical-Comparative Research. **Historical-comparative research** is a collection of related types of research. Some studies investigate aspects of social life in a past historical era in one society or in a few. Other studies examine a different culture or compare two or more cultures. We might focus on one historical period or several, compare one or more cultures, or mix historical periods and cultures. As with field research, we start with a loosely formulated question and then refine and elaborate on it during the research process. We often use a mix of evidence, including existing statistics, documents (e.g., books, newspapers, diaries, photographs, and maps), observations, and interviews. Historical-comparative research can be exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory, but it is usually descriptive. Not all historical-comparative research follows a qualitative approach; some examine quantitative data (e.g., survey data) in a different time point or a different culture.

Historical-comparative research Qualitative research in which the researcher examines data on events and conditions in the historical past and/or in different societies.

You read about the Warsaw uprising earlier in this chapter (Example Study Box 2). In this

study, the research examined past events in one country/culture. It is also possible to look across multiple countries and time (see Example Box 13, Historical-Comparative Research).

CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of the dimensions of social research. You saw that one research study can be classified in a number of different ways (e.g., by its purpose, research technique) and that the dimensions loosely overlap with each other (see Chart 1). The dimensions of research are a "road map" through the terrain of social research.

KEY TERMS

action research
applied research
basic research
case-study research
cohort study
commissioned research
content analysis
cost-benefit analysis
cross-sectional research
descriptive research
evaluation research
existing statistics research
experimental research
explanatory research
exploratory research
field research
historical-comparative research
instrumental knowledge
longitudinal research
needs assessment
nonreactive research
panel study
participatory action research
reflexive knowledge
social impact assessment
survey research
time-series research

REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When is exploratory research used, and what can it accomplish?
2. What types of results does a descriptive research study produce?
3. What is explanatory research? What is its primary purpose?
4. What are the major differences between basic and applied research?
5. Who is likely to conduct basic research, and where are results likely to appear?
6. Explain the differences among the three types of applied research.
7. How do time-series, panel, and cohort studies differ?
8. What are some potential problems with cost-benefit analysis?
9. What is a needs assessment? What complications can occur when conducting one?
10. Explain the differences between qualitative and quantitative research.

NOTES

1. Abbott (2004:40–79) offers a more comprehensive and complex organization of methods.
2. See Finsterbusch and Motz (1980), Freeman (1983), Lazarsfeld and Reitz (1975), Olsen and Micklin (1981), and Rubin (1983) on applied research. Whyte (1986) critiques social research that is not applied. McGrath and colleagues (1982) discuss judgment calls relevant in applied research.

3. See Crespi (1987) and Dutka (1982) on the use of survey research in legal proceedings.
4. See Turner and Turner (1991:181).
5. For a brief introduction to evaluation research, see Adams and Schvaneveldt (1985:315–328), Finsterbusch and Motz (1980:119–158), and Smith and Glass (1987). A more complete discussion can be found in Burnstein and associates (1985), Freeman (1992), Rossi (1982), Rossi and Freeman (1985), Saxe and Fine (1981), and Weiss (1972).
6. See Oliker (1994).
7. Smith and Glass (1987:41–49) discuss PPBS and related evaluation research.
8. See Reinharz (1992:252).
9. See Cancian and Armstead (1992), Reason (1994), and Whyte (1989).
10. On participatory action research, see Cassell and Johnson (2006), Kemmis and McTaggart (2003), and Stoecker (1999).
11. Social impact research is discussed in Chadwick and associates (1984:313–342), Finsterbusch and Motz (1980:75–118), and Finsterbusch and Wolf (1981). Also see Rossi and colleagues (1982) and Wright and Rossi (1981) on "natural hazards" and social science.
12. See Becker and Vanclay (2003) and *Guidelines and Principles For Social Impact Assessment* by The Interorganizational Committee on Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment (1994). http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/social_impact_guide.htm
13. See Burawoy and colleagues (2004).
14. Hammersley (2000) makes this generalist versus narrow practitioner distinction.
15. Babbie (1998), Bailey (1987:38–39), and Churchill (1983:56–77) also discuss explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive research.
16. See Guy and colleagues (1987:54–55) for discussion.
17. For discussions of case-study research, see George and Bennett (2005), Gerring (2007), Miller (1992), Mitchell (1984), Ragin (1992a, 1992b), Stake (1994), Vaughan (1992), Walton (1992b), and Yin (1988).
18. (see George and Bennett 2005:19–22; Gerring 2007; McKeown 2004; Ragin 2008:71–84; Snow and Trom 2002).
19. See Mitchell (1984) and Stake (1994).