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Question

Explain the various research methods and how they can be applied

Answers

The research methods are classified as Quantitative and Qualitative methods.

Quantitative Research Methods 1

Quantitative methods are research techniques that are used to gather quantitative data, data that can be sorted, classified, measured¹. The following are Quantitative research methods:

1) Quantitative survey- Surveys are a popular method of collecting primary data. The broad area of survey research encompasses any measurement procedures that involve asking questions of respondents. They are a flexible tool, which can produce both qualitative and quantitative information depending on how they are structured and analyzed. This is applied when primary data is needed from a large number of sources to answer research questions. Surveys are a useful means of gathering data from businesses, community organizations and residents, and survey research is one of the most important areas of measurement in applied social research.¹

2) Secondary data collation and analysis- This method refers to the review of existing information, and in the quantitative context may involve the manipulation of statistical data. It differs from primary research techniques in that the researcher does not collect the data directly and cannot control the actual data collected, but can bring to bear new insights through interpretation or presentation. The main use for this sort of information is that it can provide a starting point for an evaluation or analysis to gain some background knowledge and understanding.¹

3) Statistical analysis- This is a mathematical method of interrogating data. This is done by looking for relationships between different sets of data.

There are two types of statistics:

- Descriptive statistics: numerical summaries of samples (what was observed);
- Inferential statistics: from samples of populations (what could have been or will be observed).

It is used to summarize and analyze data so that it is useful and can inform decision-making.

Qualitative Research Methods²

Qualitative methods are generally associated with the evaluation of social dimensions. Qualitative methods provide results that are usually rich and detailed, offering ideas and concepts to inform your research. Qualitative methods can tell you how people feel and what they think, but cannot tell you how many of the target population feel or think that way as quantitative methods can. The following are the qualitative research methods:

1) Social survey/questionnaire- Social surveys are a questionnaire-based method of research that can produce both qualitative and quantitative information depending on how they are structured and analyzed.²

Questionnaire surveys are used in a wide range of settings and together a variety of different types of information²

2) Interviews- This is one of the most popular and frequently used methods of gathering information from people about anything. It is also the most popular method used within the social sciences. Interviews are typically used when seeking the views and opinions of people with a specific perspective².

3) Discussion groups - This consists of a number of individuals you invite to discuss their views on a particular topic, typically involving between 6 and 12 people, which is conducted specifically to get a group of people's views on a subject. Groups can be constructed in order to attempt to recreate demographics.

Discussion groups are best applied when rich, in-depth material from a number of people is required. ²

4) Workshops- Workshops are a group-based method of research in which there is an emphasis on activity-based, interactive working. The focus is on everyone participating and undertaking the work.

There are a variety of reasons why it would be appropriate to hold workshop sessions, including:

- Raising awareness (e.g. about a new funding stream and how to apply)
- Capturing views and information (e.g. about local service, etc)
- Building consensus (e.g. to take forward a draft strategy or action plan)

- Developing skills and capacity (e.g. on how to implement emerging government policy).

5) Observation- this is sometimes referred to as “participant observation” or “ethnography” is the key method of anthropology and in itself can consist of a mix of techniques; informal interviews, direct observation, participation in the life of the group, collective discussions, analyses of personal documents produced within the group, self-analysis, and life histories, notes, diaries and transcripts are often kept and the observation method can generate a lot of written material which the investigator must synthesize.

When should it be used?

Observation is more appropriate when seeking to uncover:

-Observable details like daily time allotment. The investigator watches the activities and actions of people involved in a process and works out the specific time allocation devoted to every single step, with the objective of improving efficiency by cutting out unnecessary or time consuming steps.

-Group dynamics -If the subject of your enquiry is a collective, in this context more likely to be a partnership board or steering group rather than a tribe or sub-culture, then close attention to the dynamics of the interaction between the people involved can be very illuminating. The observation method highlights interpersonal relationships and the investigator can reflect upon social proximity and distance, observe relationships and explore body language and other behaviors. 3

6) Visual techniques- methods such as drawing, painting, video, photography and hyper-media offer increasingly accessible and popular resources for research. 3

Types of visual research include- Cartoon test, film and videos, photographic research etc.

It is appropriate to conduct this type of work at the start of the research process as a way of highlighting issues to be examined further during the course of the process, or it may be something that is developed as part of a blend of evaluation methodologies.3