SECTION III

ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR AND METHODOLOGIES

8

Gestalt research: clinical-field-research approaches to studying organizations

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The general purpose of organizational behavior as a discipline is to improve useful knowledge and understanding of how members of real organizations actually behave. Accordingly, organizational behavior researchers need to get inside ongoing organizations to interview and observe their members at work. In this chapter, after defining and clarifying what we mean by the term *clinical field research*, we discuss several important issues that researchers face in designing and conducting clinical-field-research projects. We will give examples of how the issues have been handled by previous researchers, and in addition suggest answers to some of the questions raised by critics of this research strategy. In this way we hope to clarify the types of research questions and purposes most appropriate to clinical-field-research methods.

WHAT IS CLINICAL FIELD RESEARCH?

Perhaps the overriding purpose of clinical field research is to gain an in-depth understanding of the totality of a real, ongoing, and complex social situation. We use the term *gestalt research* to indicate the intention to capture this wholeness of ongoing complex social systems.

One distinguishing characteristic of gestalt or clinical field research is that typically only a very small number of situations (often only one) are studied. If the researcher's purpose is rigorously to test predefined hypotheses or theoretical propositions, or perhaps to discover whether phenomena occur within a statistically valid sample or similar social system, a "clinical" approach is usually inappropriate. However, when the researcher's purpose is to understand the internal dynamics and functioning of an organization or its members and to study in depth and over time one or a very small number of organizations, gestalt research is the sensible way to proceed.

Many criteria used to judge the validity of more experimental research methodologies are violated by gestalt or clinical-field-research approaches. One way to describe clinical research, or at least to describe what it is *not*, is to outline some of the standard rules of "scientific objectivity" that are normally violated by clinical field methodologies.

First, this approach violates the precept that the researcher should somehow be isolated or distanced from the phenomena being studied in order to avoid contamination effects. We believe the clinical and gestalt researcher is inevitably involved with the situation being studied; the researcher influences the situation and is influenced by it. The duty or essential skill of the clinical researcher is not to avoid involvement but to recognize and take account of the nature of that involvement. For example, the researcher's initial contact with the so-

cial system or organization that is the setting for the research project has subtle effects on that system. Observing how a system reacts to the researcher's presence, procedures, and questions is itself one of the most interesting sources of data for understanding how a system functions. Of course, researchers employing other methodologies—for example, those of the experimental social sciences—also recognize the extent to which they are influencing and being influenced by the phenomena they wish to understand. However, the issue of researcher involvement is especially unavoidable in clinical-field methodologies. Too often, it is suggested that the obvious involvement of clinical researchers in the setting of their research somehow makes their results less valid and reliable. We are suggesting, in contrast, that if clinical field researchers recognize the problems potentially created by researcher involvement, they may be able to capitalize on that involvement to learn more about how a social system functions when exposed to an external stimulus.

A second way in which clinical field research approaches may violate traditional rules of scientific inquiry is that this research is not, in the most basic form, designed to test hypotheses or to confirm a theory. Clinical field research may generate hypotheses that can be tested by other methods, and it may contribute, over time, to building useful theory. However, its immediate aim is usually more modest, but no less useful. This aim is to understand in depth how some aspect of a real-world social system actually functions and to describe this process in ways that will help others understand the functioning of this and other social systems. This purpose and working goal can be valued as highly in academia, when done well, as it has often been in the world of practice. As we will describe later in this chapter, several clinical-field-research studies have had a profound influence on both the theory and practice of organizational behavior.

Several other precepts of the scientific method are violated by clinical field researchers. Specifically, randomization procedures, statistical sampling procedures, reliability and internal validity questions (in the usual sense), and tests of statistical significance are not central concerns and are often regarded as peripheral questions of interest. Further, the quality of the description of phenomena is often regarded as more important than the quality of reported observations. In short, clinical field research is quite different from what many behavioral researchers have been trained to regard as "scientific." To some it is so different that it may not be regarded as research at all. To us it certainly is research, different, but no less valuable and no less rigorous when well practiced.

Before proceeding, two additional points need to be clarified. First, the word *clinical* should not be interpreted to mean that the researcher's role is primarily to heal or facilitate change. To us, clinical means that the researcher is closely interacting with, and trying to understand, real-world phenomena. The researcher's primary role is not that of consultant, change-agent, or interventionist. Certainly, the clinical field researcher intervenes, but only as a consequence of methodological procedures and not as a necessary part of the mission of clinical research. For this reason the term *gestalt research* may more accurately describe the research patterns discussed in this chapter.

The second introductory point we want to make is perhaps more obvious: the two major research tools for this methodology are interviewing and observation. Some interview and observation procedures are highly systematic and prescribed, and we will refer to some of these more structured approaches. However, many of the most respected clinical-field-research projects have employed unstructured interviewing and observation techniques which have been adapted to the characteristics of the particular field environment. Many regard this willingness to adapt methods of data collection to forces within the social system being studied as peculiarly nonscientific. Yet we believe this adaption is often necessary in order to obtain meaningful data.

Our discussion of clinical field or gestalt research methodology is organized around the issues raised in the different phases of this type of research project. We will consider in turn the following research steps: (1) developing the overall purpose and focus; (2) initial immersion in the field; (3) choosing and adapting specific types of field methodologies; (4) organizational entry and contracting approaches; (5) developing observation and interviewing techniques; and (6) processing these data and deriving findings and results. Various critical and strategic dilemmas associated with clinical-field-research approaches are also presented.

RESEARCH PURPOSE

As we have suggested, the appropriateness of any methodology depends, in part, upon the purpose of the research project. Whether a gestalt or clinical field approach should be chosen depends on what kind of knowledge is being sought and what kind of problem is to be investigated.

Kinds of knowledge

A gestalt approach is perhaps most obviously appropriate when the subject has not already given rise to established theory and clearly stated propositions. If little

research has been done on the phenomena to be understood, it may make sense to go into the field with an exploratory and relatively open frame of mind to discover what can be learned through direct observation. Researchers may bring clinical data-gathering skills and perhaps a general way of thinking appropriate to the phenomena they want to understand, but no clearly formulated propositions to be tested. For example, a new kind of role in organizations may have emerged, and the researchers simply want to learn more about how members performing this function actually behave. Or they may be interested in a type of organization or set of organizational relationships about which little is known. In such cases it may be important to understand in depth how a particular role or set of relationships function in one or two instances before more systematic experiments or more broadly based surveys can sensibly be designed.

Often a clinical exploration of previously unresearched phenomena is the only way to begin to build a base of understanding necessary for subsequent development of theory leading to propositions that later can be tested by survey or experimental methods. In other words, the most obvious rationale for choosing a gestalt approach is that we lack the information needed to design other methodologies. But this is not the only rationale.

Occasionally clinical field research is used to test the validity of a specific theoretical proposition. However, most behavioral theories do not claim that their propositions usually hold true under all circumstances. Propositions are much more likely to describe tendencies or trends, or relationships valid only under relatively controlled circumstances. The discovery of one or two contrary instances, under complex environmental conditions that cannot all be controlled, does not necessarily discredit the proposition or the theory from which it is derived. This is why clinical field research is usually more appropriate for the hypothesis-generating phase than for the theory-testing phase in the development of knowledge. Does this mean that gestalt research in organizational behavior becomes less relevant as knowledge matures? We do not think so, if only because of the vast complexity of the field and the continual need for in-depth understanding of specific instances as new organizational forms develop and adapt to their ever-changing environment.

Kinds of problems

A gestalt approach is appropriate when the problem being investigated is related to how a social system, in all its complexity, actually functions. The underlying assumption is that by understanding the functioning of one system we can increase understanding of other similar systems. The history of organizational behavior as a field lends strong support to this notion.

Clinical field research in one or a small number of organizations over a relatively long period of time may be especially appropriate when the problem is related to how a social system adapts to various kinds of internal and external changes. The impact on organization functioning of management succession, consulting interventions, environmental challenge, structural redesign, and other changes, has been researched through clinical case studies. (For a review of research on organizational change, see Beer 1980.) Indeed, it is difficult to see how issues of this kind can be adequately understood by other approaches.

The nature of the problem to be researched influences the choice of methodology in another respect. A gestalt approach may be more appropriate when the main goal of the study is to improve practice, rather than to build knowledge. If the main intended audience of a research project is not the academic community but practitioners (government administrators, business managers, union leaders, consultants), a detailed description of how a problem was handled in one instance, based on careful clinical research, can have more face validity and therefore more influence than several more systematic and academically acceptable approaches. The story can teach important lessons, especially if it is real and well told. It can encourage the practitioner to test out for himself, in other situations, approaches that might otherwise never have been tried. A single case may not be a sufficient basis for developing a scientifically valid theory but may have great influence in the world of practice. It is therefore important that clinical field case studies be carefully conducted and responsibly reported, recognizing both the danger of overgeneralization and the potential value of experimentation *in practice* with their implications.

In spite of the practical implications of good clinical research, we close this section by reemphasizing its role in building validly generalizable knowledge. Before deciding on this approach, the researcher should ask, What kinds of knowledge about the problem I want to investigate already exist? Are there previously derived theoretical propositions that have been rigorously tested through an experimental or survey research design? Or do we need a more general understanding of the problem before testable propositions are relevant? In the latter case, the clinical or gestalt approach may be the most efficient way to explore relatively new territory. With the exception of propositions that can be disproved by discovering one contrary instance, clinical field research is usually less appropriate for testing the validity of existing theories than for discovering unknown propositions and developing new theories.

INITIAL IMMERSION

After deciding to employ a gestalt approach to a research project, but *before* deciding on the particular type of research design, the researcher needs to get out into the field and to begin to understand the phenomena under study and what way of learning about it may work best. Most experienced clinical researchers emphasize the importance of an initial exposure, or "immersion," in the field situation. During this period, the researcher is in a relatively unstructured, open frame of mind concerning what to look for and how to look for it.

We are suggesting that researchers go out into the field and have a look, even before the research concept and practices have been developed. For example, interview a manager before you know how many other interviews you will have or whether you will always be asking the same questions. See firsthand a group at work before you decide how many groups you will observe or what specific observational method you may use. Discover how something is actually done without necessarily knowing whether or not the thing you discover is related to the phenomena you want to study. Refrain from designing the project until you have had an initial direct exposure to at least part of the territory. Naïve, unstructured, unfocused, with open eyes and ears, learn *something* firsthand about what you want to study *before* you begin to study it more systematically.

Sometimes the result of this first immersion in the territory may be a decision not to pursue a clinical approach. The researcher may decide that an experimental or survey design is more appropriate to the question under investigation. On the other hand, it may be apparent that the researcher should look closely but briefly at one or two other field situations before deciding how to proceed. To produce useful results, clinical field research needs to be carefully designed. But the first step is a relatively *un*designed initial exposure to the reality of the field setting. The insights gained from unstructured observation and informal conversation will enable the researcher to select appropriate methods and develop a strategy for gaining permission to conduct subsequent structured phases of the research process.

RESEARCH DESIGN QUESTIONS

Methodological decisions made at the outset of the research process greatly influence the kind of analysis and sampling procedures of the study. This section describes several research design methodological alternatives and the determinants and consequences of these decisions. Finally, brief historical examples of research projects illustrating these alternatives are provided.

Level of analysis

As in most social research, the individual, the group, and the organization are the three basic levels of analysis available to the gestalt researcher. A general rule of thumb for deciding on the appropriate level of analysis is related to the population one wishes to generalize. For example, a researcher interested in studying the communication styles of chief executive officers could certainly use the individual CEO as the unit of analysis. If he or she were interested in studying communication styles in different organizations, the organization could be the appropriate unit of analysis. Aside from this obvious relationship, the focus of the inquiry—on the individual, group, or organization—will reflect the theoretical interest and subsequent generalizability of the research question.

Campbell and Stanley (1966) and Cook and Campbell (1979) have discussed two basic types of validity—internal and external—relevant to research in field settings. Internal validity refers to the extent to which a relationship between two variables could be described as meaningful, irrespective of theoretical predictions (Cook and Campbell 1979). Internal validity depends on the appropriateness of research operations and tests, statistical analyses, and randomization procedures. External validity, in contrast, refers to the generalizability of results or causal relationships to specific social settings or across many social settings. We believe external validity is the primary concern for research projects described in this chapter.

Cook and Campbell discuss three general techniques that researchers can use to increase the external validity of research projects. First, they might randomly select a sample from a larger population of cases. While considerable time and resources are required, results can then be generalized across similar social settings. Second, researchers can intentionally sample for heterogeneity, with the aim of deliberately selecting a wide range of instances from specific classes of behaviors. Finally, Cook and Campbell suggest a prototypical model, in which researchers seek to select the characteristic cases from a specific class of behavior or social settings.

These three models for increasing the external validity or generalizability of research results can also be effectively used in combination. For example, our researcher interested in the communication styles of CEOs might first randomly select a sample of CEOs from across the country and generally study their communication styles. Next, he or she might examine the

general categories or classes of communication styles that emerge. Finally, a closer examination of the prototypical classes of CEO communication styles could be performed. All three approaches can help both to define and to refine generalizations concerning CEO communication styles.

The level of analysis of a research project can also influence the choice and flexibility of research methods. Clearly, interview techniques are more efficient and applicable when dealing with individuals over a long period of time. When the level of analysis of a research project is a group or organization, observation techniques become more and more essential in describing the social setting. Researchers need to be aware of the trade-offs they are willing to make, and understand how the level of analysis influences the degree of flexibility in choosing and practicing interview and observation techniques over the course of a research project.

Finally, the level of analysis of a research program also influences the researcher's relationship to the field setting. If only for logistical reasons, data sources and interrelationships among individuals, groups, and organizations become increasingly complex as the level of analysis increases. Researchers need to become increasingly selective in assimilating and analyzing incoming data as the scope of the research project expands. More important, an awareness of this editing process can lead to a more objective, and perhaps less personally biased, depiction of the social setting.

Number and types of cases

Three general sampling procedures are available to researchers for choosing the number and type of instances of social behavior to study. First, one can focus in depth on one instance of social behavior in a single case study. Alternatively, a comparative case study can be designed to assess and compare two or more cases of behavior that differ on theoretically relevant dimensions. ness of a single social setting. Alternatively, many Finally, a representative sampling of case studies may be undertaken. The researcher examines several cases of social behavior in hopes of obtaining a representative view of the class of behaviors under study.

Sampling choices reflect the nature of the research question and influence a researcher's choice of method. In a very general sense, sampling choices are determined by an individual researcher's style and special competencies. For example, certain researchers may seek close, in-depth contacts with a single social setting over time. Here the goal is to understand the complexities and rich-researchers wish to examine diverse social settings or perhaps large organizations.

In a more theoretically central manner, the number and types of cases studied influences the nature and analysis of the research problem. As we have said, a major issue is whether the research project is designed to *build* theory or to *test* theory. We believe that as the primary purpose of the research moves from theory building to theory testing, it becomes appropriate to expand the number of cases of the research project. For example, the single-case-study method is best employed when the researcher's purpose is to describe, understand, and document rich and complex social behavior. The comparative case study can be used to build theory, but it can also be employed to test specific theory predictions. Such predictions can be directed toward specific target groups or general social settings. A representative sampling of case studies is a particularly effective means of testing theory predictions. By obtaining a representative view of the class of behaviors under study, the researcher can more confidently generalize the findings to other social settings.

Historical examples of level of analysis and sampling questions

The choice of a research methodology involves decisions as to both level of analysis and sampling procedures, as shown schematically in figure 8.1. Each of the nine cells

LEVEL OF ANALYSIS

NUMBER AND TYPES OF CASES

	Individual	Group	Organization
Single	Hodgson, Levinson, and Zaleznik	Zaleznik, Christensen, and Roethlisberger Homans	Selznick
Comparative	Mintzberg	Roethlisberger and Dickson	Blau
Sampling	Carlson	Whyte	Lawrence and Lorsch

Figure 8.1 Level of analysis and sampling design alternatives

in this matrix represents a particular research design or methodology that may be employed by the researcher. In each cell of the matrix appear the names of previous researchers who have chosen that particular methodological alternative.

Individual case study has long been practiced by psychologists and psychiatrists. Freud's case studies provide numerous examples of individual in-depth studies. Historical examples of individual work behavior are also available. Hodgson, Levinson, and Zaleznik's (1965) detailed analysis of three top executives in a hospital is one example of the individual case-study approach. In this study, the researchers conducted intensive observations of individual and interpersonal work behavior. The three executives' personalities and character structures were discussed in terms of specialized roles in the larger power constellation of the hospital. One executive, the hospital superintendent, was described as a domineering paternal figure, while the clinical director was described as a nurturant maternal figure. The third executive, the director of research, was said to be permissive and egalitarian, similar to the uncle figure in many family structures. Each executive was described as having a specialized role in the hospital power system. Power constellations in other organizations were hypothesized to be a product of similar individual and interpersonal role specialization.

Henry Mintzberg's (1973) description of the nature of managerial work provides a *comparative view* of the work of five chief executives. Mintzberg drew on a variety of data sources for each manager studied. He observed each manager for one week, examined a one-month record of their scheduled appointments, gathered information about the organization's environment, and conducted interviews with the managers' assistants to gain data on their personalities, work styles, and work-related activities. Mintzberg points out the basic characteristics of the work behavior of these five managers and describes the unique features of each individual. While his research was not specifically designed to compare different types of managers, Mintzberg suggests that the nature of the industry, organization, managerial style, and business needs all seem to influence the work of managers.

One of the first *in-depth sampling case studies* of individual work behavior was Sune Carlson's (1951) examination of nine Swedish company presidents. Carlson's explicit purpose was to describe executive behavior by studying a series of individual cases. He developed diaries for his executives to use in recording their daily behavior. He analyzed work time, communication patterns, and work content. Carlson found that the executives rarely were free to be alone and work without interruption for more than fifteen minutes during the day. Communication obligations, such as answering mail and meeting with various subordinates, occupied most of the work day.

Researchers have also conducted a number of studies of small groups of people at work in organizations (work groups)a An intensive *in-depth two-year study of work-group* membership, satisfaction, and productivity in a medium-sized manufacturing company was performed by Zaleznik, Christensen, and Roethlisberger (1958)a This study explored the relationship between job-related and non-job-related group membership. Using Homans's (1950) theory of work group behavior, data about the "external system" were used to predict characteristics of the "internal system" or emergent behavior. In essence, a gestalt approach was used to test specific propositions of an existing theory. Satisfaction and productivity were primarily determined by position in the informal social organization and the degree to which an individual's activities and characteristics realized the group's norms and values. Some of the relationships between variables that appeared in the company were hypothesized to exist in other similar work groups.

In effect, if not in original design, one of the most extensive studies of *comparative work-group behavior* was conducted at the Hawthorne Works of the Western Electric Company between 1927 and 1932, as described in detail by Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939). The first group, known as the "relay assembly test room" group, was observed in order to assess the general effects of work conditions, such as rest pauses and changes in work hours, on worker and work-group behavior. Later, a second group, known as the "bank wiring observation room," was observed to discover more about the relationship between the technical and social organization of the work group. This study was designed to answer questions raised by the earlier relay-assembly-test-group observations, by closely examining a group that had not been established as an experiment, subject to unusual attention by management, but as it existed in its natural factory environment. In a comparative sense, while the first Hawthorne study was originally intended to explore the effects of physical conditions of work on worker behavior, the second was designed to focus on broader questions of human relations in the work setting.

Finally, an example of *sampling case studies* is provided by William Whyte's (1948) intensive field study of work-group behavior in twelve large urban restaurants in 1944 and 1945. People working in these restaurants formed social organizations that affected both customer service and worker morale. Whyte noted that the development of social groups was a primary need of restaurant employees. Further, where well-integrated social

cliques existed, absenteeism and turnover were minimized.

Large formal organizations have also been studied by clinical researchers. An early example of a *sociological individual case study* was Selznick's (1949) study of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). Selznick gathered data from 1942 to 1943 by means of personal interviews with TVA and Washington officials who had been intimately involved with the various programs discussed, by tapping "gossip channels," and by examining the written records and files of the TVA. Selznick checked his sources by verbal statements with the formal record and by using multiple data sources and informants. His work represents an early attempt at a case study on the sociology of formal organizations. He discussed the informal and formal structure of the TVA as well as the structural conditions that influenced organizational behavior, such as the "grass roots" ideology. The implications for democratic planning that emerged from this study, such as ideological context, power distribution, and bureaucratic functions, are also described.

A well-known example of the *comparative case study of organizations* is Peter Blau's (1955) study of the dynamics of bureaucracies. Blau examined the social patterns and work behavior of officials in two government agencies—a public employment agency and a federal enforcement agency—from 1948 to 1949. He used direct observation, interviewing, and the analysis of official records as data sources in both case studies. He also interviewed all the members of the two agencies at home in order to clarify the social patterns and practices in each case. Blau found that officials tended to extend the limited objectives of their work duties. He suggested that bureaucratic work conditions generate an increasing concern for the values of the larger society. Internal and external forces were shown to affect both agencies in different ways, and the more effective operations were able to respond flexibly to these forces. Blau also describes the administrators' perceptions of status and professional orientation in the bureaucratic organization.

Paul Lawrence and Jay Lorsch's (1967) examination of organizational characteristics and their environmental constraints provides an example of the *sampling approach to the study of organizations.* Six organizations in the plastics industry were studied. The researchers used both interviews and questionnaires to gather information about the specific demands placed on these six organizations by the plastics-industry environment. They described how environmental conditions, business context, and the domain of operation influence the internal structure and processes of organizations. Lawrence and Lorsch next performed a comparative analysis of a highly effective company and a less effective competitor in the standardized-container and processed-food industries, using a similar research design. This phase of the research project was designed to examine effective and less effective organizations in other industries and environments and to further examine how internal organizational structure was related to external environments. On the basis of these studies, the authors proposed a contingency theory of organizational structure, which suggested that the characteristics of internal organizational functions are related to specific environmental characteristics and interests. This theory has subsequently been tested and modified in a series of other clinical researches using similar methodologies.

ENTRY AND CONTRACTING

After deciding on the level of analysis and sampling procedures of the field research, on the basis of its general purpose and an initial exposure to some field settings, the researcher needs to find one or more sites in which the design can be carried out. How do gestalt researchers gain entry to suitable field settings and permission to proceed? In some ways this is the most problematic and crucial phase of the whole process. Unless it is handled with skill, the project, no matter how carefully designed to accomplish its purpose, may not produce valid data and useful results.

A first step is to stimulate interest in the research objectives on the part of influential persons in one or more target settings. Usually it is important to begin negotiations over entry at the highest feasible level of the organization in which the study is to be conducted. For some designs there are many potential settings; for others there may be only one or two. Sometimes the researchers will have already established a relationship of understanding and trust with influential members of appropriate settings; but often the design requires entry into organizations where the researchers and their institutions are relatively unknown. Because of these and other variations it is impossible to prescribe rules to follow in every case. Here we will merely suggest certain principles broad enough to apply to a wide range of circumstances.

First, explain in writing the purpose and design of the project in simple language that will make sense to practitioners. Sometimes this exercise even helps the researchers themselves become more clear about the project and leads to some useful simplifications in conceptualization and procedures. Present this general statement to one person in each potential site whose position indicates likely interest and influence in negotiating entry. Usually this initial statement should not be a formal request to conduct the study on this site, but should

express a wish to discuss the project and to explore whether the particular site would be appropriate.

Second, if the person shows an interest in the project, arrange a meeting to explore the possibility of conducting the research at that site. Start by listening carefully and responding sensitively to the other person's reactions. What costs and benefits does he or she see in participating, and how realistic are these expectations? What constraints on your design will conducting the research at this site impose, and are they acceptable? How much time will your research require of members of the organization, and what will motivate them to help you to this extent?

These and similar questions need to be openly explored in the first and subsequent "contracting" sessions. Make it clear that this is a research, not a consulting, project. The principal motivation for cooperation should be to contribute generally to knowledge and understanding, not the expectation of immediate or competitive advantage for this organization or some members of it. Members at all levels may benefit simply by discussing their situations with an outsider who listens well to their concerns, but this should be explained as a potential by-product of the research process, not as its purpose. (For excellent advice on "contracting," addressed to consultants but relevant to researchers, see Block 1982.)

During contracting discussions, it is especially important to reach understanding and commitment concerning all relevant questions of confidentiality, release, and publication. Normally the researcher makes very clear that all data from interviews and observations will be held in strict confidence and that no information will be revealed to anyone in the organization in a way that makes it possible to identify the persons who provided that information. Also the researcher promises to conduct the research in every way so as not to bring harm to any member of the organization.

The results of the research belong to the researcher, who may or may not contract to share them with members of the organization before publication. Usually some sharing of general findings makes sense, because discussion with interested members of the organization greatly helps the researcher understand what the findings mean.

What agreement should be reached about publication and release? Normally, members of an organization expect and deserve the right to review the researcher's write-up of results before publication, and the researcher agrees to correct errors of fact and to disguise information regarded as harmful if published in undisguised form. When contracting, entry, and the whole relationship have been skillfully handled, differences about release and publication can almost always be reconciled without violating the organization's legitimate claim to privacy or the researcher's right to reach and publish his own conclusions.

METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGIES

After the entry and contracting phase, the researcher is in a position to develop appropriate methodological strategies. In capturing the wholeness of ongoing social systems, clinical and gestalt researchers are continuously developing testing and adapting research methods and data-gathering sources. In a real sense, over the course of the project, social scientists become street-wise researchers and develop methodological strategies appropriate for and adapted to the problem to be studied. Too often researchers, especially inexperienced ones, are not willing to adopt flexible methodological strategies and seem to overanalyze or "fight" their rich data sources, losing perspective on the larger social question. This tunnel vision may be due in part to a lack of social and/or interpersonal skills required to appreciate the totality of the social system. Many times, however, such resistance is due to an overreliance on and adherence to the standard rules of scientific objectivity that we have discussed. Additionally, we believe that this resistance may reflect the unnecessary and unfounded distinction often drawn between qualitative and quantitative research approaches. That is, clinical or gestalt research has often been portrayed as a qualitative and "soft" approach, while more experimental approaches have been deemed quantitative. Our intention here is to demonstrate that both qualitative and quantitative research-data-collection techniques and methodologies can be employed independently or in a complementary manner. Many qualitative and quantitative research strategies are available to the researcher and have been reviewed elsewhere (Bouchard 1976; Cannell and Kahn 1968; Weick 1968).

In the remainder of this section, we will briefly discuss several commonly employed methodological strategies. One difficult task that the researcher faces is to strike an appropriate balance of researcher involvement and structure in data-collection techniques. This balance needs to fit both the nature of the project and the researcher's own competence and preference to ensure meaningful and reliable findings.

Direct observation

Direct observation is perhaps the most complicated and yet most personally satisfying research methodology. In the most extreme form of direct observation—participant

observation—the researcher actually becomes a member of the social system under study. Severyn Bruyn (1963, 222–23) has summarized the role of the participant observer:

1. The participant observer shares in the life activities and sentiments of people in face-to-face relationships.
2. The role of participant observer requires both detachment and personal involvement.
3. The researcher acquires a social role which is determined by the requirements of the research design and the framework of the culture.
4. The scientific interests of the participant observer are interdependent with the cultural framework of the people being studied.
5. The social role of the researcher is a natural part of the cultural life of the observed.

Several classic studies in organizational behavior have employed a wider range of observation techniques. (For example, in this chapter we have described Blau 1955 and Selznick 1949.) Still, the methodological foundations of this approach have been described by a number of social scientists as unscientific and epistemologically suspect. (For reviews, see Bruyn 1963, 1966.) The overriding advantage of this methodology, however, is precisely that it enables researchers to capture the wholeness and immediate reality of the ongoing social system.

Various observation and interviewing methods are used (see Zelditch 1962), and researcher participation ranges from a high level of involvement, such as William Foote Whyte's (1981) four-year study of an Italian street group, to a very specialized and marginal level of involvement in a social system (see Bouchard 1976)a

We have emphasized the importance of relatively unstructured initial exposure or immersion in the field setting. In the same view, M 9, 62) described his use of participan ology: "No explicit hypotheses were formulated in *Men Who Manage*. . . . I never feel sure that it is relevant for hypothesizing until I have some intimacy with the situation." Once in the field, the observer can use direct-observation techniques, key informants, and natural and archival data sources in documenting the "natural history" of a social system.

Whether the researcher is employing a qualitative or more quantitative analytical method (e.g., the use of explicit measurement techniques) or both, direct observation techniques are subject to the rigorous concerns of reliability and validity, control, objectivity, and measurement. Bouchard (1976) and Bruyn (1963) have carefully summarized many of these concerns and research principles to guide the researcher's observations. The following list summarizes many of these general guidelines:

Focus on the Researcher

1. Be aware of your own biases and the bias you bring to each situation. Separate facts from artifacts.
2. Be sensitive to your own position in the social structure.
3. Be sensitive to changes in your values, attitudes, beliefs, and emotions.
4. Do not overidentify with any subgroup unless it is technically necessary; maintain sufficient distance to allow an uninhibited working style.
5. Be honest and candid with all informants and data sources.

Focus on the Participants

6. Be aware of participants' biases.
7. Examine all counter positions carefully.
8. Observe your subjects in as many different contexts as possible.
9. Strengthen interpretations with data from *multiple* data sources, such as other observers and informants, interviews, and archival data sources.

Focus on the Research Goals

10. Relate the research question to a larger social context or social problem.
11. Specify the procedures used so that other investigators can check and develop similar procedures. (A good example of this is William Foote Whyte's [1981] methodological appendix in the second edition of *Street Corner Society*.)
12. Specify the development of quantitative measures and analytical procedures.

Systematic observation

Qualitative and quantitative systematic observation techniques have also been employed by clinical researchers. Weick (1968, 360) has defined the observational method as "the selection, provocation, recording, and encoding of that set of behaviors and settings concerning organisms (in situ) which is consistent with empirical aims." Traditionally, direct observers have employed a "nondirective" observational field methodology. Weick's definition of systematic observation procedures, however, provides researchers with a more structured and quantitative model for observational methodologies. He notes several reasons for employing systematic observation methods:

1. A wide range of detailed data is provided.
2. Whole events are preserved.

3. The parameters of behavior are defined.
4. More than one individual can be studied.
5. Language may not be available to describe actions.
6. Individuals may not wish to serve as informants, or individual perceptions may be distorted or defective.

Many systematic or structured observation methods have been reviewed in detail elsewhere (e.g., Bouchard 1976; Weick 1968). Here we will briefly discuss three categories of behavior that have been studied by clinical and gestalt researchers: verbal behavior, nonverbal behavior, and overt/spatial behavior.

The analysis of verbal behavior involves studying and observing people talking in their natural surroundings (in situ)a Robert Bales's well-known Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) system (1950) and his later System for the Multiple Level of Observation of Groups (SYMLOG) (1979) are based on peer and observer ratings of verbal statements, individual behavior, and group interaction. Mann (1967) has similarly developed a verbal coding system, which assesses individual behavior by studying the development of feelings toward a group leader. Borgatta (1963) and Argyris (1970) have also each developed a system of categories for coding interpersonal behavior. Verbal behavior has also been assessed by content analysis techniques. For example, Stone, Dunphy, Smith, and Ogilvie's (1966) *General Inquirer* computer programs are designed to assess, identify, and tabulate patterns of verbal behavior. Similarly, systematic studies have been made of nonverbal behaviors such as facial expressions, body movements, tone of voice, and speech patterns. For example, in *Unmasking the Face*, Ekman and Frieson (1975, 1977) provide a coding system for recognizing facial expressions of emotions based on the analysis of facial anatomy.

Finally, overt spatial behaviors have also been systematically observed. Investigators such as Hall (1964) and Sommer (1969) have coded individual use of personal and social space and territory, while other investigators have coded various human movements (for example, Birdwhistell 1970)a The frequency of movements and interpersonal outcomes have been analyzed. These researchers, and others, have shown that individual spatial and overt behaviors are developed with regularity, and that violations of these patterns and boundaries affect social interaction.

The advantages of systematic observation techniques are especially great when multiple measures and multiple observers are employed. Verbal, nonverbal, and other descriptions of behavior can together provide a comprehensive view of social behavior. As we have emphasized, systematic techniques should be used to complement more qualitative observational approaches.

Interviewing strategies

Researchers ask questions. Whether a research problem is exploratory or intended to verify theory, a large part of the data will be collected through interviews, which may range from nondirective interviews to structured question-and-answer formats (for a review, see Cannell and Kahn 1968). Bouchard (1976) has classified four general types of interviews on the basis of the question-and-response format. First, in the "totally structured" or "directed" interview, the interviewer asked a specific set of questions requiring a specific set of responses. A second type of interview, often called the "open-ended" or "free response" interview, has specified questions but allows for any response. The third type of interview has no specified questions and allows for any response. Finally, the "nondirective," "exploratory," or "clinical" interview provides interviewers and respondents total freedom in discussing any materials or questions, with little structure to the interview process.

It seems clear that a genuinely nondirective interview is not practical for most research purposes. However, we believe that a tempered version of the open-ended and nondirective clinical interview, perhaps better called the nondirective research interview, is useful for the research process described by this chapter. Indeed, Whyte (1960) has described the inappropriateness of the genuinely nondirective clinical interview and has suggested that a modified version might be more applicable for field research. He describes his experience:

> Once, while studying human relations in restaurants, I decided that I would be just as nondirective as I could. I began each interview simply by asking the informant to tell me whatever he cared to that was important to him about the job situation. The usual answer was: "What do you want to know?" Some informants were willing to respond to questions, but no one poured out his feelings in response to my general invitation. Rather, the approach seemed to make the informants quite uneasy, and I quickly shifted to providing a good deal more structure in the interview. (p. 352)

The format of the nondirective *research* interview utilizes the general structure of the open-ended, free-response interview and the reflective and listening processes of the nondirective clinical interview. The nondirective research interviewer may come to the interview with a list of topics or general questions to be covered. The order and format of these questions is usually open-ended. Interview questions are designed to build on the respondent's confidence and comfort with the interviewer. The interviewer may also ask the respondent to clarify certain points during the interview process.

Gradually, confidence and rapport can be developed in this nonthreatening conversation.

Whyte (1960) has described several general rules for interviewing in field research. The rules are not meant to be exhaustive by any means, but reflect the goals and procedures of the nondirective research interview. The researcher is advised to

- listen more than talk;
- listen sympathetically and actively;
- summarize and reflect informant responses;
- avoid giving advice and passing moral judgment;
- generally do not interrupt;
- when an interruption is necessary, interrupt gracefully;
- design the questions to help the informants express themselves clearly (for example, use relevant language);
- ensure confidentiality of the interview.

Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939, 270–91) have similarly discussed "rules of orientation" and "rules for conducting the interview," which were developed during the Western Electric Hawthorne research program and subsequently modified for use in employee counseling. (For an account of the counseling program at Western Electric, see Dickson and Roethlisberger 1966.) A similar orientation to counseling and psychotherapy was developed by Rogers (1942, 1951).

There is no clear formula for deciding the types of questions, length of interview, whom to interview, and where and when to conduct the interview. Reviews of the interview process are available (Cannell and Kahn 1968), and we urge interested readers to examine them carefully.

During the interview, researchers are encouraged to probe participants. Certain topics may have been insufficiently covered. A degree of flexibility is also required. As Lofland (1971) suggests, this type of interview might be thought of as a "guided conversation." Finally, professional standards require a general introduction to participants, covering some of the essential points summarized by Lofland.

1. Explain the purpose of the study.
2. Assure anonymity and confidentiality.
3. Indicate that there are no right answers to the questions. Interest is in personal opinions.
4. Assure participants that it is all right to interrupt or ask for clarification.
5. Provide some background about own background and interests.

The collection of data from the interview generally follows the same rules that will apply in taking field notes. However, effective interpersonal and listening skills are mandatory in developing meaningful results.

We believe that the research aims reflected in this chapter are captured by the nondirective research interview. Clearly, the way to learn this technique is to get out in the field and question and listen, testing and improving the accuracy of your listening by occasionally reflecting back what you are hearing.

Unobtrusive research strategies

Eugene Webb and his associates (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, and Sechrest 1966) have described a collection of unobtrusive research methods that can be used to supplement or cross-validate data collected through interviews, questionnaires, and systematic observation. Unobtrusive measures are a collection of nonreactive research tools—that is, these measures are not influenced by the biases and behavior of respondents, experimenters, or interviewers or by other sources of behavior that are influenced or not directly addressed by the research program. Webb and his associates argue for the necessity of employing multiple nonreactive methods as a supplement to the more traditionally employed social science data-gathering techniques (for example, the interview). Unobtrusive measures seem well suited to the clinical, gestalt, and "detective" aspects of the research process described in this chapter.

Webb and his associates discuss three general types of unobtrusive measures: physical traces, archival records, and observation techniques. Physical traces comprise natural erosion measures (for example, the physical wear of a library book can suggest its popularity and remnants of past behavior, or counting the number of liquor bottles in trash cans can be a measure of a town's sobriety)e Archival records represent any data source (public and private) that was produced for other than scholarly purposes. Societal or organizational records, voting behaviors, budgets, birth rates, and appointment calendars all represent the archival record. Selznick's (1949) use of the TVA files and records illustrates the archival method. Finally, observational nonobtrusive measures can range from direct observation to more structured observation techniques. In the direct role, observers may simply code behavior and observe data in a nonobtrusive manner. They can code physical signs, for example, the spatial arrangement of furniture, or the verbal and nonverbal behavior of individuals. More intrusive (and ethically questionable) observation techniques include hidden cameras and recording devices, an intervening observer (for example, Allen Funt of "Candid Camera"), or entrapment studies (for example, the recent Abscam entrapment)e In each case, although the social scientist may structure the situation, the individual is totally free.

Unobtrusive measures, by themselves, cannot eliminate bias and contamination in research projects, but they can be useful tools for supplementing more traditional approaches to social research. An integrative or multimethod approach seems well suited for the researcher whose goal is to capture the wholeness in an ongoing situation. Just as the researcher must become street-wise to understand the totality of the situation, he or she must play the detective, using all available clues and methods to understand the problem at hand.

PROCESSING AND ANALYZING RESEARCH DATA

Researchers are constantly collecting and interpreting data. Indeed, a major part of the ongoing learning process is comparing data sources and field notes during the course of a research project. This section discusses techniques that can be employed in processing and interpreting data.

Processing data

In their discussions of field research methods, Selltiz, Wrightsman, and Cook (1976) and Lofland (1971) each review numerous data-processing techniques. We will discuss several of these data-processing strategies, particularly those that are useful to the field or gestalt researcher.

Field notes are perhaps the most common way for researchers to process data. In describing the process of developing field notes, Lofland (1971, 102–3) emphatically writes:

> Without the sustained writing down of what has gone on, the observer is hardly in a better position to analyze and comprehend the workings of a world than are the members themselves. . . . Field notes provide the observer's raison d'être. If he is not doing them, he might as well not be in the setting.

Lofland carefully describes several fundamental steps in the development of field notes. A first step is to familiarize oneself with the culture, physical character, and natural events in the setting. Through relevant newspapers, observation of natural events, and informal discussions with participants, the researcher begins to develop descriptive *mental notes* on the nature of the field setting. After this initial immersion a second step is to preserve the natural sequence and importance of events through *jotted notes.* Key words, phrases, or quick observations can be jotted on napkins over lunch or in small inconspicuous notebooks. Jotted notes serve to remind the field worker of key events and can jog memories when the time comes to write detailed notes. Finally, mental and jotted notes are used in developing *full field notes.* Lofland suggests that researchers promptly develop field notes at the end of each day, before memory lapses occur. Considerable personal discipline is required for accurately developing descriptive field notes.

Full field notes are meant to capture the ongoing events of the setting. For this reason, a chronological log of events and behaviors, described in a concrete and distanced manner, is suggested. Personal impressions, notes of future interests, previously forgotten material, and analytic suggestions can all be part of the full field notes. Selltiz and her associates also suggest that several common elements should be recorded in most field settings, including information on the participants, setting, purpose, social behavior, frequency and duration of behaviors, and the recording of behavioral anecdotes.

Data-processing techniques utilizing systematic observation are also available to the researcher. Weick (1968) has reviewed many of these more systematic recordings of behavior; we will focus only on techniques that may be useful to the field researcher. The first is the specimen record, a nonselective data-processing technique that sequentially and completely describes specific behaviors of interest. Similarly, observational data can also be collected by means of behavioral checklists. Brandt (1972) has distinguished between static and action checklists. Static checklists code stable characteristics of the participants and environment (for example, race, sex, and weather), while action checklists record actual behaviors. More elaborate checklists of behavior are represented by sign analysis—the sampling of specific predetermined behaviors of interest to the researcher (Brandt 1972)—and category systems, which are designed to yield mutually exclusive and independent dimensions of behavior (Weick 1968). Selltiz and her associates (1976) describe category systems as indicating whether a specific type of behavior has occurred, but not the frequency or intensity of an occurrence; Bales has studied groups using his SYMLOG category system (Bales 1979). Finally, behavior has also been recorded through field formats involving behavioral maps or notation techniques (Weick 1968). Hall (1964), for example, employs pictures, mnemonics, and number codes in describing social interaction.

The nondirective research interview also provides researchers with a rich descriptive data collection and processing technique. Lofland (1971) has outlined several steps in the development of interview topics. First, the researcher frames general topics of interest. This process

may involve feedback and testing ideas, perhaps after the initial immersion in the setting. General clusters of topics may then emerge. The global structure of the topics is next considered. For example, more sensitive issues may be addressed toward the end of the interview. Finally, a general ordering of topics is developed.

Audiotaping and videotaping can be used to record interview and observational data. Most clinical researchers have relied primarily on their own notes, taken during the interview, from which they subsequently dictate or write up the interview. The advantages of note taking include the following:

- It communicates interest in what the subject says.
- It enables researchers to slow the pace of the interview when desirable.
- It helps researchers feed back interim summaries of what he or she is hearing.
- Stopping the note taking toward the end of the interview sometimes stimulates further exploration of sensitive subjects.
- Interviewees may be more comfortable and open than when the interview is taped.

The advantages of taping an interview are that it

- provides an accurate and complete record of what was said;
- minimizes selective bias and memory limitations;
- permits a permanent record that can be checked subsequently for other research purposes and by other researchers.

In all cases, taping interviews should only be conducted with the subjects' informed consent.

Analyzing data

The task of understanding patterns of behavior in organizations is perhaps the most difficult the researcher faces. Long after the interviews have been conducted, the hours of observation have been logged, and the relevant background resources have been reviewed, the researcher must decide how to process and analyze the data. Of course, if the researcher has been a careful detective and analyst all along, constantly questioning and analyzing the data inputs of the ongoing social systems, the process will be much easier.

Several concrete guidelines for processing and analyzing field data are available. Lofland's (1971) detailed analysis of the collection and management of field data, Whyte's (1960) discussion of indexing interview notes, and Mills's (1959) classic description of "filing" qualitative data are each helpful in this regard. These and other descriptions of field methodology all stress the importance of prompt development of a filing or indexing system. Whyte describes how he approached data processing and indexing in *Street Corner Society.*

> As I gathered my early research data, I had to decide how I was to organize the written notes. In the very early stage of exploration, I simply put all the notes in chronological order, in a single folder. As I was to go on to study a number of different groups and problems, it was obvious that this was no solution at all.
>
> I had to subdivide the notes. There seemed to be two main possibilities. I could organize the notes topically, with folders for politics, rackets, the church, the family, and so on. Or I could organize the notes in terms of the groups on which they were based. . . . Without really thinking the problem through, I began filing material on the group basis, reasoning that I could redivide it on a topical basis when I had better knowledge of what the relevant topics should be.
>
> As time went on, even the notes in one folder grew beyond the point where my memory would allow me to locate any given item rapidly. Then I devised a rudimentary indexing system: a page in three columns containing, for each interview or observation report, the date, the person or people being interviewed or observed, and a brief summary of the interview or observation record. Such an index would cover from three to eight pages. When I came to review the notes or to write from them, a five-to-ten minute perusal of the index was enough to give me a reasonably full picture of what I had and of where any given item could be located.[1]

Whyte (1960) suggests that it is not advisable to determine index categories before entering the field. Once the researcher has developed a sense of the culture and has become immersed in the setting, then meaningful categories may become apparent. Additionally, the indexing or filing system should reflect the substantive interests of the researcher.

Lofland (1971) has proposed that researchers may want to develop different types of files for storing, ordering, and retrieving information. A *mundane file* keeps track of such things as names, places, and documents. *Analytic files* contain brief summaries or reports on relevant observations or data sources. The analytic files are used to develop general coding schemes and track patterns of behavior. Finally, *field-work files* contain methodological strategies and choices that may be involved in conducting the research project. Indexes can

1. W. F. Whyte, *Street Corner Society*, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 307–8. © 1943, 1955 by The University of Chicago. Reprinted by permission.

also be used to cross-reference notes in these and other files. Additionally, computer-based storage and retrieval of files seem especially suited for field-research filing systems in light of the recent advances in the use of personal computers.

Field researchers quickly learn that processing and analyzing data sources go hand in hand. They must continuously summarize and process new data and compare new inputs with previous sources. The final analysis involves developing a plan or outline for organizing all these various learnings, and developing labels, categories, and patterns of behavior. We cannot stress too strongly that the final product is only as good as the researcher's *ongoing* analyses, learning, and reanalyses of the field data.

STRATEGIC AND ETHICAL QUESTIONS

Before closing our discussion of gestalt research methodologies, it is important to emphasize several strategic issues and ethical questions that characteristically arise in conducting and reporting field research. Some of these questions are not easy to answer, and the dilemmas have been resolved differently by different researchers. Because we believe these topics have been given insufficient attention in the literature of research methodology, we want to reemphasize here four characteristics of clinical field research.

1. The researcher has some special responsibilities to the members of the organization in which the research was conducted.
2. The research process itself is an intervention which produces some unintended change in the phenomena being studied.
3. The researcher's involvement inevitably raises questions about whether and how the results are biased by that involvement.
4. It is seldom clear whether the results of any one study contribute unequivocally to generalizable knowledge, even when they have a strong impact on practice.

Responsibility to members of the research site

To obtain valid data the researcher is given permission to enter an organization or other social system, to interview and observe its members, and in other ways to interfere with or inconvenience the people whose behavior he or she wishes to understand. What responsibilities does the researcher have in return to the member of the site being studied? The answer to this question depends on the terms of the explicit and implicit contract under which permission to conduct the project is granted. But additional responsibilities are likely to arise during the research process, and general ethical considerations often imply responsibilities that may not be clearly specified during early negotiations. The most important responsibilities concern the confidentiality, clearance, and usefulness of the research project.

Normally the researcher undertakes to make available, before publication, all results of the research to the leaders of the organization, if not all its members. This is done for several reasons: as a check on validity, because the results will presumably be useful in some way to members of the organization, and in order to obtain clearance for publication. If the people whose behavior was studied do not perceive the findings as accurate descriptions of their experience, the validity of the results is certainly suspect. Of course, a distinction needs to be made between the perceived accuracy of reported facts and the perceived validity of the researcher's interpretations. During negotiations over entry, it should be made clear that members of the organization have a greater right to question reported facts than to veto the researcher's intrepretation of their significance. When there is strong disagreement over interpretation, the nature of this diagreement should be reported in published results. Sometimes this distinction is hard to make, and publication of the researcher's findings involves complicated negotiations or bad feelings. Obviously it makes sense to discuss these issues openly during the entire research process.

Negotiations over permission to conduct the research should include agreement about whether the identity of the organization is to be revealed. (Sometimes this decision is postponed until after the research report has been written.) If the organization is not to be identified, it may be necessary before publication not only to give the organization and its members fictitious names but also to alter the report in other ways (e.g., disguise the product or geographical location) so that readers cannot deduce the organization's identity. Sometimes it is difficult to reconcile a legitimate need to disguise identity with the researcher's obligation to report findings that will be regarded as valid.

Often the researcher also has to worry about revealing the identity or violating the confidence of individual informants. Researchers should, and usually do, undertake not to identify reported opinions or quotations from interviews with specific individuals. Sometimes this commitment will require the suppression of relevant data–

for instance, the fact that a certain opinion was only expressed by persons in a particular position. A good practice, not followed as often as it should be, is not to use any extensive quotation without showing it, and the context in which it is to be used, in advance to the informant and receiving explicit permission to use it in this way. When people are asked whether their opinions can be cited, they usually do not object and may agree or even want to be identified, provided they regard the opinion as accurate and valid.

If the research report is done well, it should be valuable to the organization and to the individuals who have been studied. If the results do not seem useful to the people with most knowledge of the situation, the researcher should wonder whether publication is appropriate. Obtaining clearance before publication, therefore, is not only a legitimate exchange for permission to conduct the research but also a valid check on the findings and the utility of the conclusions.

Occasionally there will be a disagreement between the researcher and members of the organizations studied as to whether publication of some of the findings will be useful. Organization members may feel that the findings, and the researcher's interpretation of them, put the institution in a bad light, but the researcher may believe, perhaps correctly, that publication will be useful in order to prevent other organizations from making the same mistake, and perhaps to prevent the studied organization from making similar errors in the future. Usually it is possible to agree on a form of publication and disguise that mediates effectively between these opposing opinions. Sometimes the organization may approve or even request publication of certain data that the researcher believes would harm some individuals in the organization. We believe a researcher should not publish data that will harm any of his informants even if, in terms of the formal contract, he has permission to do so.

Research and intervention

The clinical field research process itself is an intervention that inevitably alters to some extent the state of the social system being studied. The behavior observed and the attitudes recorded are unavoidably different, in ways that are not easy to define, from the behavior and attitudes that would have existed without the researcher's entry into the system he or she is trying to understand.

The extent of change in the system varies, because certain research procedures are more obtrusive than others. But *some* change in the preexisting state will probably be produced by the researcher's presence. The exact nature and extent of the change is quite difficult to determine accurately. The knowledge that gestalt research methods provide about behavior in real organizations is therefore knowledge about organizations that are being influenced by the fact that they are being studied. One consolation or rejoinder to this sobering thought is that knowledge about organizations responding to the inevitable intervention of field research is much better than no knowledge about real organizations at all.

There is, of course, an important exception that apparently avoids the problem: research may be conducted by a participant observer who conceals the fact that the purpose of his or her presence is research. For instance, one way of studying behavior in a factory is to get a job there and then use conversations and observations during work as data for a research study. There are obvious practical difficulties involved with this approach. Furthermore, we believe that deliberately hiding one's identity and purpose is unethical. People who are being studied for research purposes have a right to know that this is happening. Several important contributions to the literature of organizational behavior have been based on experience as a bona fide member of an organization. But in these cases the research contribution was a by-product of experience as a member of the organization, not its purpose, and hence no unethical concealment was involved.

Since data in the behavior of organization members should only be collected with their knowledge and permission, the research process will always influence the behavior being studied. Thus a primary requirement for competence as a gestalt researcher is a sensitive awareness of how one's presence and procedures interact with the data of interest. How a social system responds to outside influence is often the key to understanding the system's functioning. We believe that responses to the researcher's intervention are themselves data highly relevant to the researcher's purpose, *provided* he or she stays aware, of and carefully records the nature of, that response. For example, Whyte's observations of how different members of the groups he studied reacted to him in his acknowledged role as a researcher were essential data for his study. Similarly, the so-called "Hawthorne effect," far from being a flaw in research design, was in fact the central finding of the relay-assembly-test-room study at Western Electric.

To some critics, the most serious problem in clinical-field-research methodology is the contamination of the system studied by the researcher's intervention in it. But this inevitable circumstance can be turned to advantage. The important point to emphasize is that this kind of research paints a picture of a dynamic system responding to an outsider's presence. For this reason it is very

important that the nature of the intervention, how it was arranged and responded to, should be an essential part of the report on the research results.

Involvement and bias

The best and most influential reports on field research have been made by researchers who spent months or even years inside the organizations they studied. The longer and more intense the time spent interacting with members of an organization, the more inevitably the researcher becomes personally involved with the behaviors and attitudes he studies. He comes to know people, make real friends, find some members more congenial than others, sympathize with certain attitudes and react negatively to others, and perhaps find his own opinions modified by these experiences. It is important to remember that the researcher's role is to be an observer, not a group member. Of course, a certain level of personal involvement is an inevitable consequence of frequent and prolonged interaction.

What should researchers do about the danger that their involvement may bias their findings? Again, the most important advice that experienced field workers can give is not to pretend to have been uninvolved, but to remain as aware as possible of the nature of the involvement and to take this into account in reaching conclusions and reporting the results. As a practical matter, it can help if the researcher avoids continuous immersion over a long period in the same research site. It is important to alternate site visits with time in another site or back in the office, working on field notes and engaged in other kinds of work. It is also useful to exchange experiences and ideas with others engaged in the same or similar research projects. Discussions with an interested colleague about the meaning of observed events and how they interacted with the researcher's own feelings can be extremely valuable in understanding how those feelings are influencing and being influenced by what is heard and observed during field research. The relationship between what is going on inside the researcher and what is going on inside the organization he or she is studying is usually difficult to understand without the help of continuing conversations with others who share the problem and react to it in different ways.

Do results constitute generalizable knowledge?

Many of the considerations we have discussed in this chapter can lead one to question how the results of clinical field research contribute to a body of knowledge that can be generalized outside the particular setting in which the research is conducted. As a rule, this kind of research is not useful for testing specific propositions of a general theory of behavior. Its contribution to knowledge is much more likely to be generating ideas that may later be used to develop propositions that can more adequately be tested through experimental or survey methods. Most of the studies we have cited earlier in this chapter illustrate this role—perhaps a necessary but not sufficient function in the development of theoretical knowledge.

Finally, by contributing to practice, clinical field research has a power quite distinct from its ability to generate scientifically testable propositions. When well conducted and presented, a detailed case study of how an organization functions teaches the reader a useful way of understanding behavior in other organizations. Clinical research may influence practice less through its verifiable contribution to "knowledge" than through its direct contribution to the understanding and wisdom of practitioners. This power to influence practice in many situations underlines the importance of conducting gestalt or clinical research with professional responsibility and care.

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