

Chapter 3
Topic 2 Qualitative research methods
Page 184
Activity: Research
Comparing research methods

Learning objectives

At the end of this activity you should be able to:

- Compare and contrast research methods to determine their relative reliability, validity and representativeness in relation to one another.

- A. Divide into groups of four. You are going to produce three continuum lines to demonstrate how sociological research methods compare in relation to the key theoretical concepts of reliability, validity and representativeness.

You will need:

- One sheet of flipchart paper
- Some small cards or pieces of paper in two colours.

- B. Make a card for each of the following methods. Use two colours: one for quantitative methods and another for qualitative.
1. laboratory experiments
 2. questionnaires
 3. structured interviews
 4. official statistics
 5. unstructured interviews
 6. participant observation
 7. documents

- C. Put your sheet of flipchart paper into 'landscape' layout (where it is wider than it is long). Now draw three horizontal lines across the sheet. Put the first line a quarter of the way down the sheet, the second halfway down, and the third line three-quarters of the way down the sheet.

Now label the left hand end of the first line 'Low reliability' and the right hand end 'High reliability'.

For the second line, put 'Low validity' on the left and 'High validity' on the right.

Mark the third line 'Low representativeness' and 'High representativeness' in the same way.

Now take your 'methods' cards and place them in appropriate places on the first line. Once your group has agreed on the position of all the methods on the first line, mark on the sheet where each method was placed (e.g. if you put participant observation at the far left end of the 'reliability' line, write 'PO' at that point on the line).

- D. Now repeat the process twice: once for validity and once for representativeness.
- E. Individually, use your three continuum lines to write your own summary paragraph comparing quantitative and qualitative methods.