

Empirical Social Research

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Agenda

- Learning objectives
- Quantitative data collection tools
- Qualitative data collection tools
- Q&A

Learning objectives

Students are able to

- ✓ ... summarize ways researchers gather information through interviews.
- ✓ ... compare the advantages and disadvantages of conducting different types of interviews.
- ✓ ... evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of distributing questionnaires through the mail, the Internet, or other means.
- ✓ ... discuss the importance of pretesting questionnaires.
- ✓ ... understand different approaches to qualitative data collection.

Interviews as interactive communication

Interactive survey approaches

- Those that allow spontaneous two-way interaction between the interviewer and the respondent.
- Can be either personal or electronic.

Non-interactive media

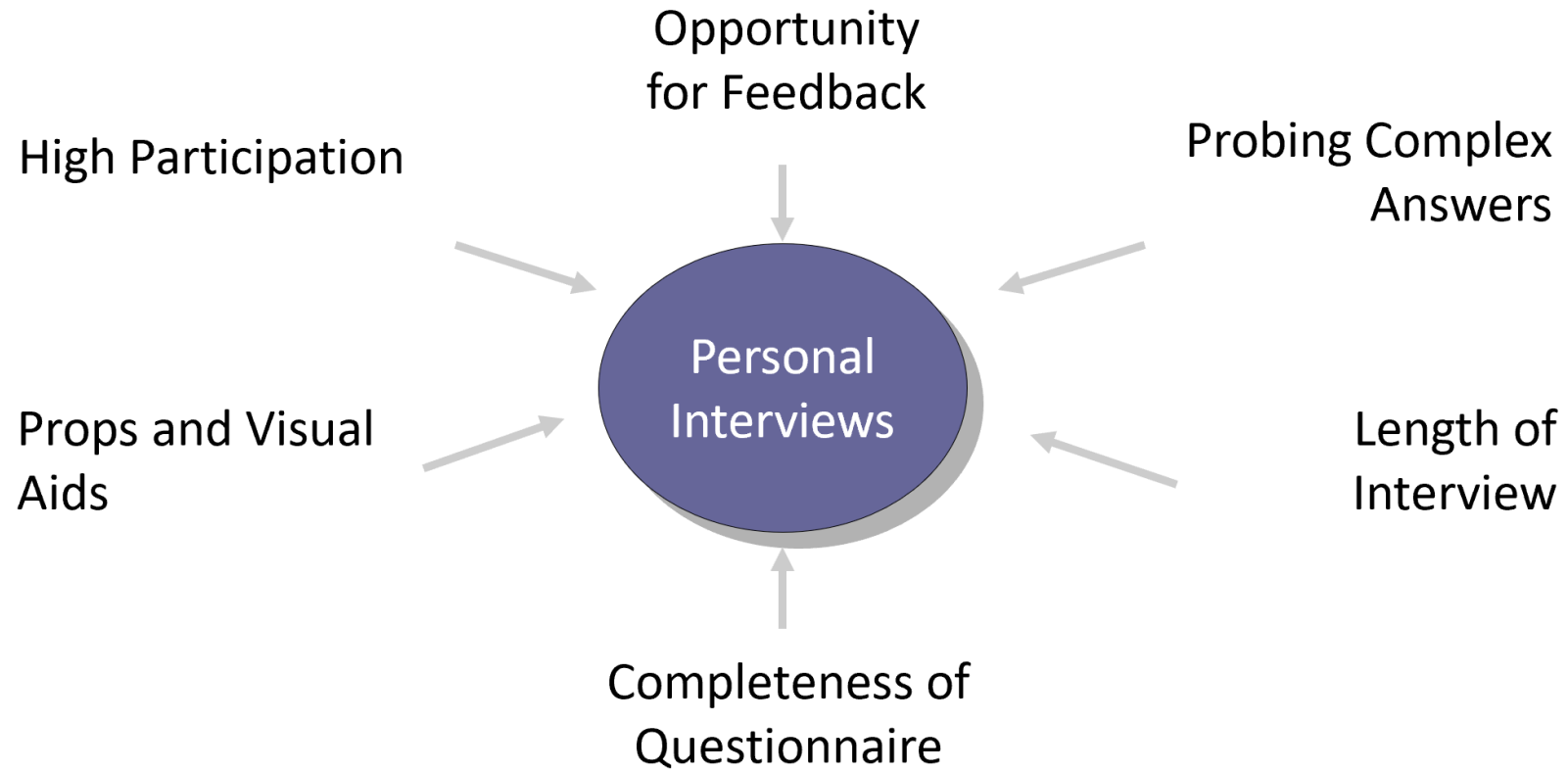
- Those that do not facilitate two-way communication and are largely a vehicle by which respondents give answers to static questions.
 - Traditional forms with less flexibility
 - Self-administered mail and Internet surveys

Personal interviews

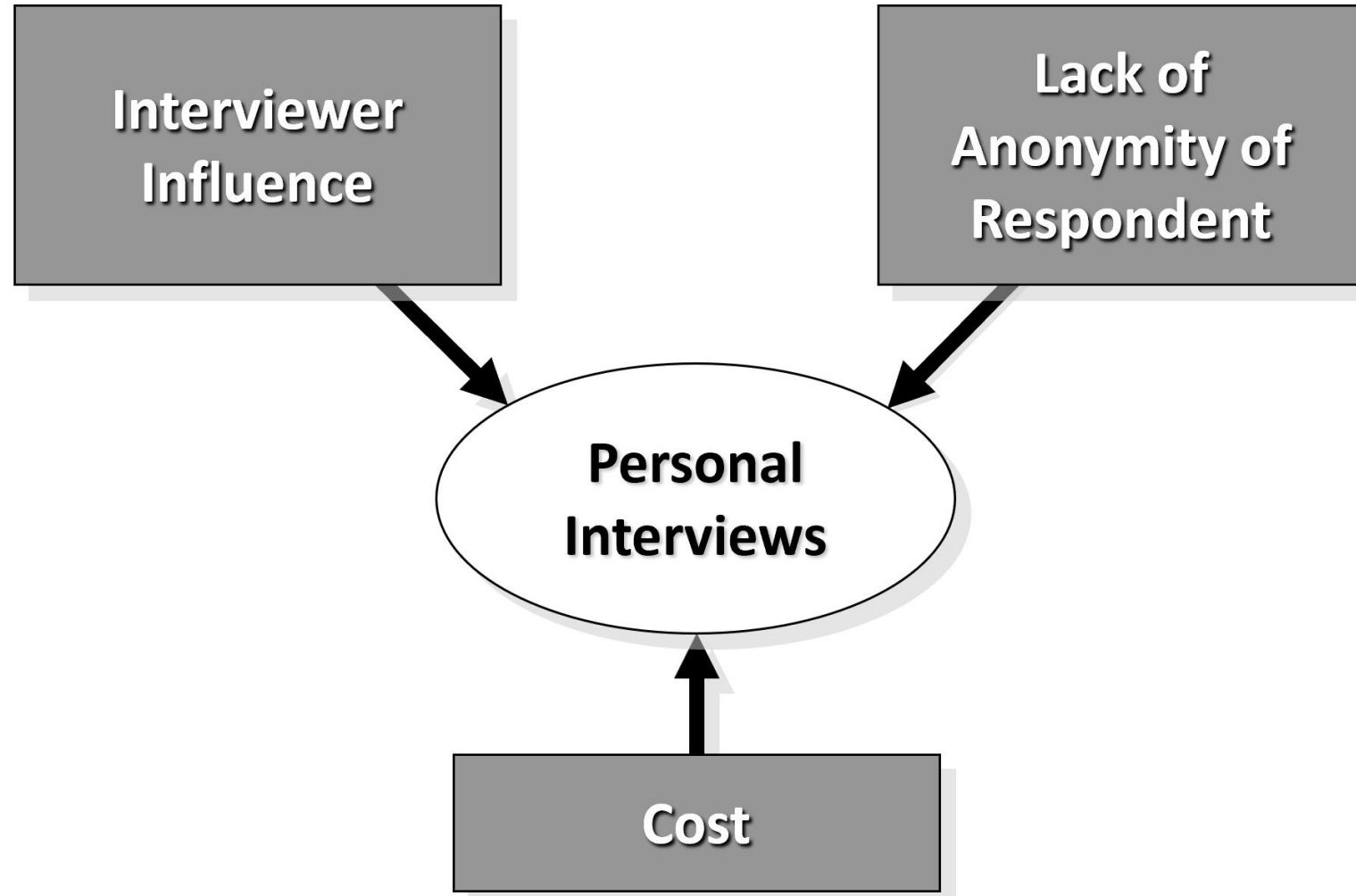
A personal interview is a form of direct communication in which an interviewer asks respondents questions face-to-face.

- Versatile and flexible
- Truly interactive

Advantages of personal interviews



Disadvantages of personal interviews



Telephone interviews

Telephone interviews

- Personal interviews conducted by telephone.
- The mainstay of commercial survey research.
- “No-call” legislation has limited this capacity.

Mobile phone interviews

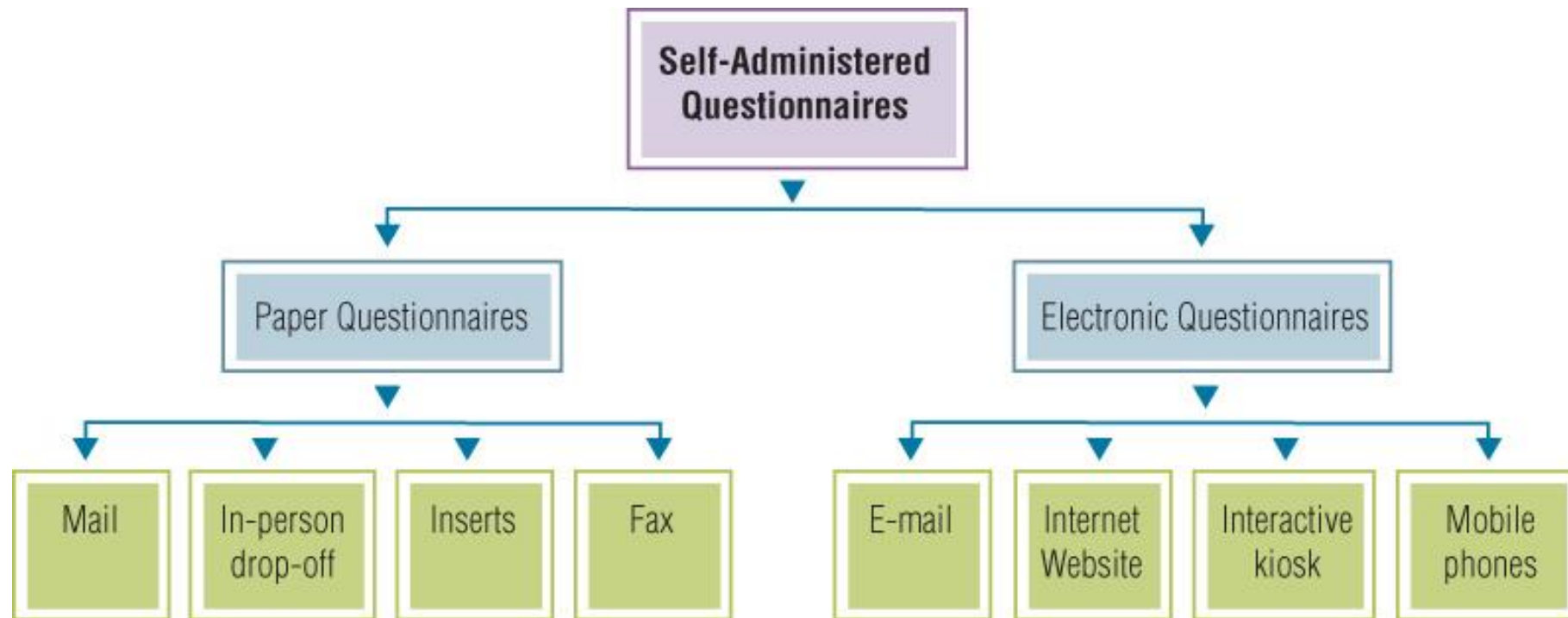
- In U.S., no telemarketing can be directed toward mobile phone numbers.
- Recipient of call is even more likely to be distracted.
- Area codes not necessarily tied to geography.
- Phones have varying abilities.

Phone interview characteristics

- Speed
- Cost
- Absence of face-to-face contact
- Cooperation
- Incentives to respond
- Representative samples
- Callbacks
- Limited duration
- Lack of visual medium



Self-administered questionnaires



Mail questionnaires

Characteristics of mail questionnaires

- Geographical flexibility
- Cost / Time is money
- Respondent convenience
- Anonymity of respondent
- Absence of interviewer
- Standardized questions
- Length of mail questionnaire

Self-administered questionnaires

Response rate

- The number of questionnaires returned or completed divided by the number of eligible people who were asked to participate in the survey.

Factors that bias the response rate

- Persons who will complete questionnaires versus those persons who will not.
- Person filling out survey is not the intended subject.

Activity

You want to do research with Swiss Students. For this, you send your questionnaire (2 pages) via mail to them for completion.

How can you increase the response rate?

Discuss with a partner and write your findings down in the chat room.

Email surveys

Surveys distributed through electronic mail.

Ways to contact respondents:

- Include a questionnaire in the body of an e-mail.
- Distribute questionnaire as an attachment.
- Include a hyperlink within the body of an e-mail.

Advantages

- Speed of distribution
- Lower distribution and processing costs
- Faster turnaround time
- More flexibility
- Less handling of paper questionnaires

Disadvantage

- Not all e-mail systems have the same capacity

Internet surveys

A self-administered questionnaire posted on a web site.

- Respondents provide answers to questions displayed online by highlighting a phrase, clicking an icon, or keying in an answer.
- E.g. surveymonkey

Internet survey characteristics

- Speed and cost effectiveness
- Visual appeal and interactivity
- Respondent participation and cooperation
- Representative samples
- Accurate real-time data capture
- Callbacks
- Personalized and flexible questioning
- Respondent anonymity
- Response rates
- Security concerns

Other approaches

Kiosk surveys

- Placed in high-traffic locations (e.g., airports).

Mixed-mode survey research

- Employs any combination of survey methods.

Text-message surveys

- May use SMS (short-message service) or MMS (multi-media service).

Selecting the appropriate survey approach

Questions to be answered:

- Is the assistance of an interviewer necessary?
- Are respondents interested in the issues being investigated?
- Will cooperation be easily attained?
- How quickly is the information needed?
- Will the study require a long and complex questionnaire?
- How large is the budget?

Pretesting survey instruments

Pretesting

- Screening procedure that involves a trial run with a group of respondents to iron out fundamental problems in the survey design.

Basic ways to pretest:

- Screen the questionnaire with other research professionals.
- Have the client or the research manager review the finalized questionnaire.
- Collect data from a small number of respondents.

Qualitative data collection tools

Qualitative business research

- Research that addresses business objectives through techniques that allow the researcher to provide elaborate interpretations of phenomena without depending on numerical measurement
 - Its focus is on discovering true inner meanings and new insights.

Researcher-dependent

- Researcher must extract meaning from unstructured responses such as text from a recorded interview or a collage representing the meaning of some experience.

Qualitative data collection tools

Qualitative research is useful when:

- The research objective is to develop a detailed and in-depth understanding of some phenomena.
- The research objective is to learn how a phenomenon occurs in its natural setting or to learn how to express some concept in colloquial terms.
- The behavior the researcher is studying is particularly context-dependent.
- A fresh approach to studying the problem is needed.

Qualitative data collection tools

Qualitative data

- Data that are not characterized by numbers but rather are textual, visual, or oral.
 - Focus is on stories, visual portrayals, meaningful characterizations, interpretations, and other expressive descriptions.

Qualitative data collection tools

Tool	Description	Key Advantages	Key Disadvantages
Focus Group Interviews	Small group discussions led by a trained moderator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can be done quickly• Gain multiple perspectives• Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Results do not generalize to larger population• Difficult to use for sensitive topics• Expensive
Depth Interviews	One-on-one, probing interview between a trained researcher and a respondent	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gain considerable insight from each individual• Good for understanding unusual behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Results not meant to generalize• Very expensive per each interview
Semi-Structured Interviews	Open-ended questions, often in writing, that ask for short essay-type answers from respondents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can address more specific issues• Results can be easily interpreted• Cost advantages over focus groups and depth interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lack the flexibility that is likely to produce truly creative or novel explanations
Observation	Recorded notes describing observed events	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can be inobtrusive• Can yield actual behavior patterns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can be very expensive with participant-observer series

Focus group interview

An unstructured, free-flowing interview with a small group (6-10 people) led by a moderator who encourages dialogue among respondents.

Advantages:

1. Relatively fast
2. Easy to execute
3. Allow respondents to piggyback off each other's ideas
4. Provide multiple perspectives
5. Flexibility to allow more detailed descriptions
6. High degree of scrutiny

Focus group respondents

Group composition

- 6 to 10 people
- Relatively homogeneous
- Similar lifestyles and experiences



Planning a focus group outline

Discussion guide

- Includes written introductory comments informing the group about the focus group purpose and rules and then outlines topics or questions to be addressed in the group session.



Interactive media and online focus groups

Online focus group

- A qualitative research effort in which a group of individuals provides unstructured comments by entering their remarks into an electronic Internet display board of some type.

Focus blog

- A type of informal, “continuous” focus group established as an Internet blog for the purpose of collecting qualitative data from participant comments.

Disadvantages of focus groups

Focus groups:

- Require objective, sensitive, and effective moderators.
- May have unique sampling problems.
- May not be useful for discussing sensitive topics in face-to-face situations.
- Cost a considerable amount of money, particularly when they are not conducted by someone employed by the company desiring the focus group.

Depth interviews

Depth interview

- A one-on-one interview between a professional researcher and a research respondent conducted about some relevant business or social topic.

Conversations

Conversations

- An informal qualitative data-gathering approach in which the researcher engages a respondent in a discussion of the relevant subject matter.

Semi-structured interviews

- Written form and ask respondents for short essay responses to specific open-ended questions.
- Advantages
 - An ability to address more specific issues
 - Responses are easier to interpret
 - Without the presence of an interviewer, semi-structured interviews can be relatively cost effective

Observation

- Field notes
 - The researcher's descriptions of what actually happens in the field.
 - These notes then become the text from which meaning is extracted.
- Advantageous for gaining insight into things that respondents cannot or will not verbalize.

Observation

- The systematic process of recording actual behavioral patterns of people, objects, and events as they happen



What Can Be Observed

Phenomenon	Example
Physical action	A worker's movement during an assembly process
Verbal behavior	Statements made by airline travelers while waiting in line
Expressive behavior	Facial expressions, tones of voices, and forms of body language
Spatial relations and locations	Proximity of middle managers' offices to the president's office
Temporal patterns	Length of time it takes to execute a stock purchase order
Physical objects	Percent of recycled materials compared to trash
Verbal and pictorial records	Number of illustrations appearing in a training booklet

Limitations of observations in general

- Observation can describe the event that occurred but cannot explain why the event occurred.
- Observation over long periods is expensive or even impossible.

The nature of observation studies

Visible observation

- Observation in which the observer's presence is known to the subject.

Hidden observation

- Observation in which the subject is unaware that observation is taking place.

Advantages of observation over surveying

- Data are free from distortions, inaccuracies, or other response biases.
- Data are recorded when actual and nonverbal behavior takes place.

Errors associated with direct observation

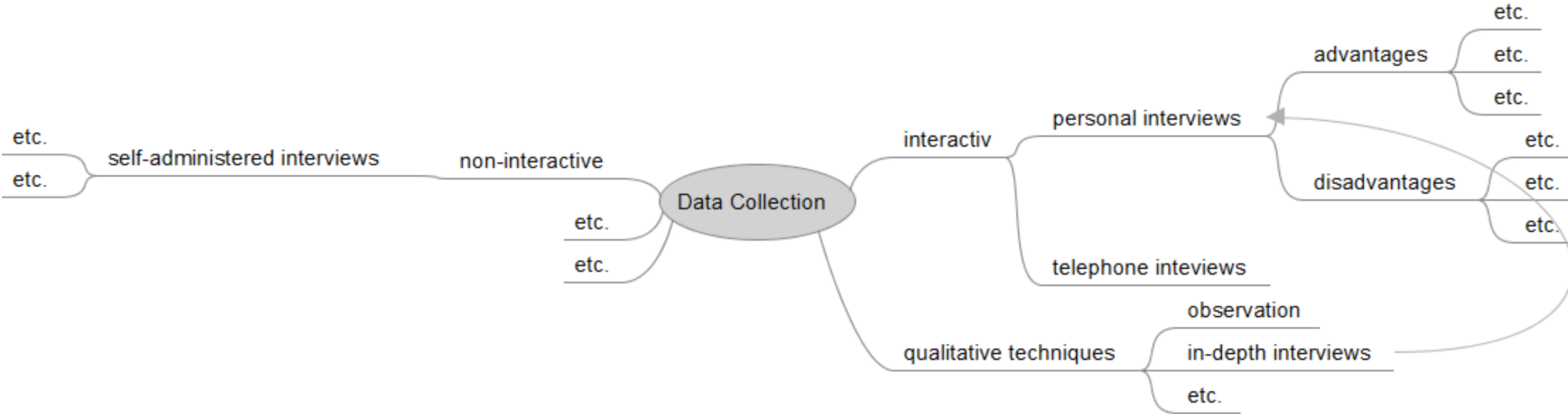
Observer bias

- A distortion of measurement resulting from the cognitive behavior or actions of a witnessing observer.
 - Recording events subjectively
 - Recording events inaccurately
 - Interpreting observation data incorrectly

Activity

In your group: Create a mind map structuring today's input.

E.g.:



Wrap-up

Students

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