

PRACTICAL ISSUES IN DATA COLLECTING: OBSERVATION METHODS

Chapter: 10

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Discuss the role of observation as a business research method
2. Describe the use of direct observation and contrived observation
3. Identify ethical issues in observation studies
4. Explain the observation of physical objects and message content
5. Describe major types of mechanical observation
6. Summarize techniques for measuring physiological reactions



INTRODUCTION



OBSERVATION IN BUSINESS RESEARCH

Observation

- The systematic process of recording the behavioral patterns of people, objects, and occurrences as they are witnessed

OBSERVATION IN BUSINESS RESEARCH

- The observation serves a formulated research purpose.

- The observation is planned systematically.

- The observation is recorded systematically and related to general propositions, rather than simply reflecting a set of interesting curiosities.

- The observation is subjected to checks or controls on validity and reliability.



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

WHAT CAN BE OBSERVED?

Observation research cannot provide an explanation?

- Why a behavior occurred?
- What actions were intended?



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

Unobtrusive observation minimizes respondent error



RESEARCH DESIGN

Task details

Who?

What?
(event or
time)

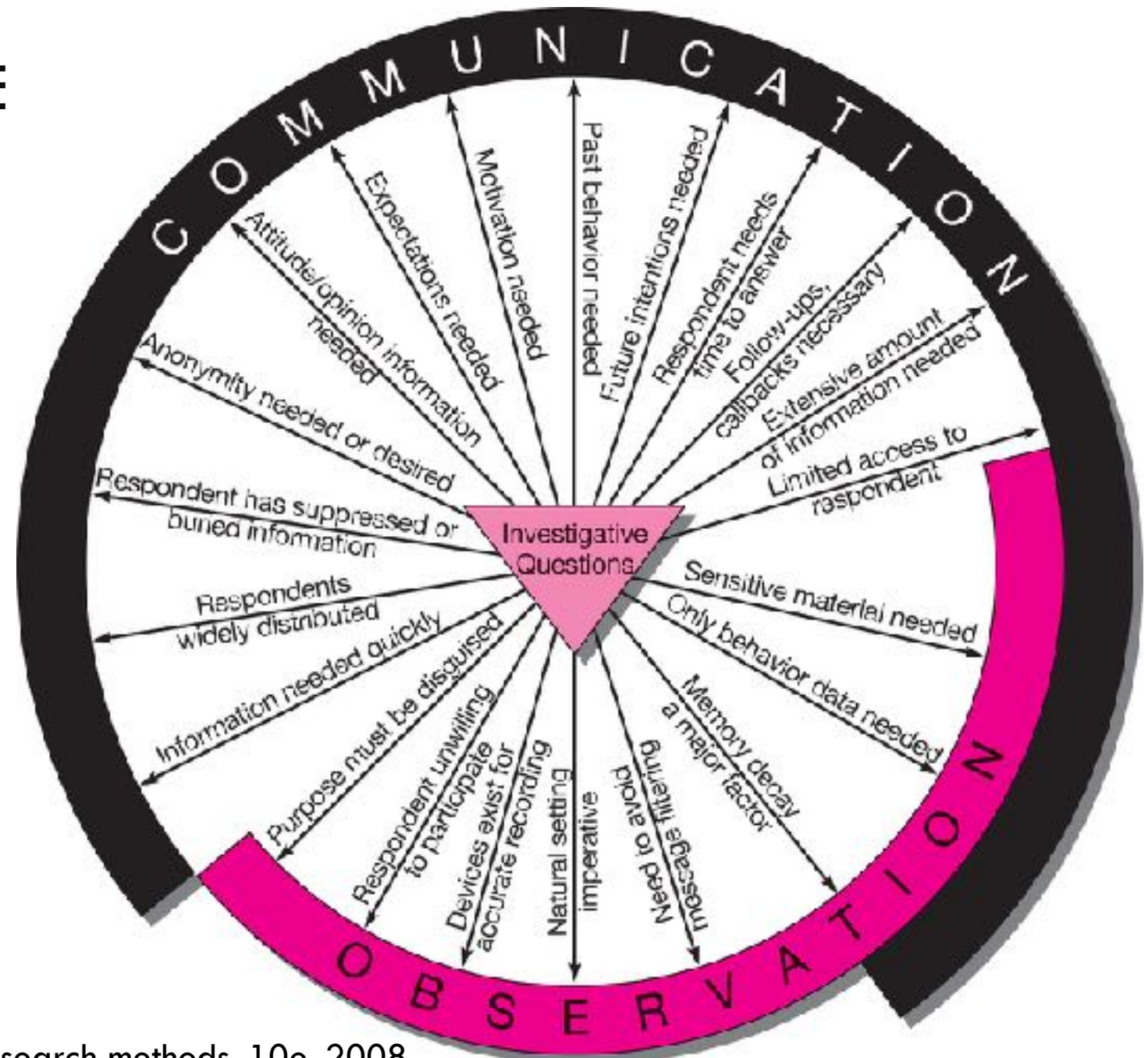
When?

How?

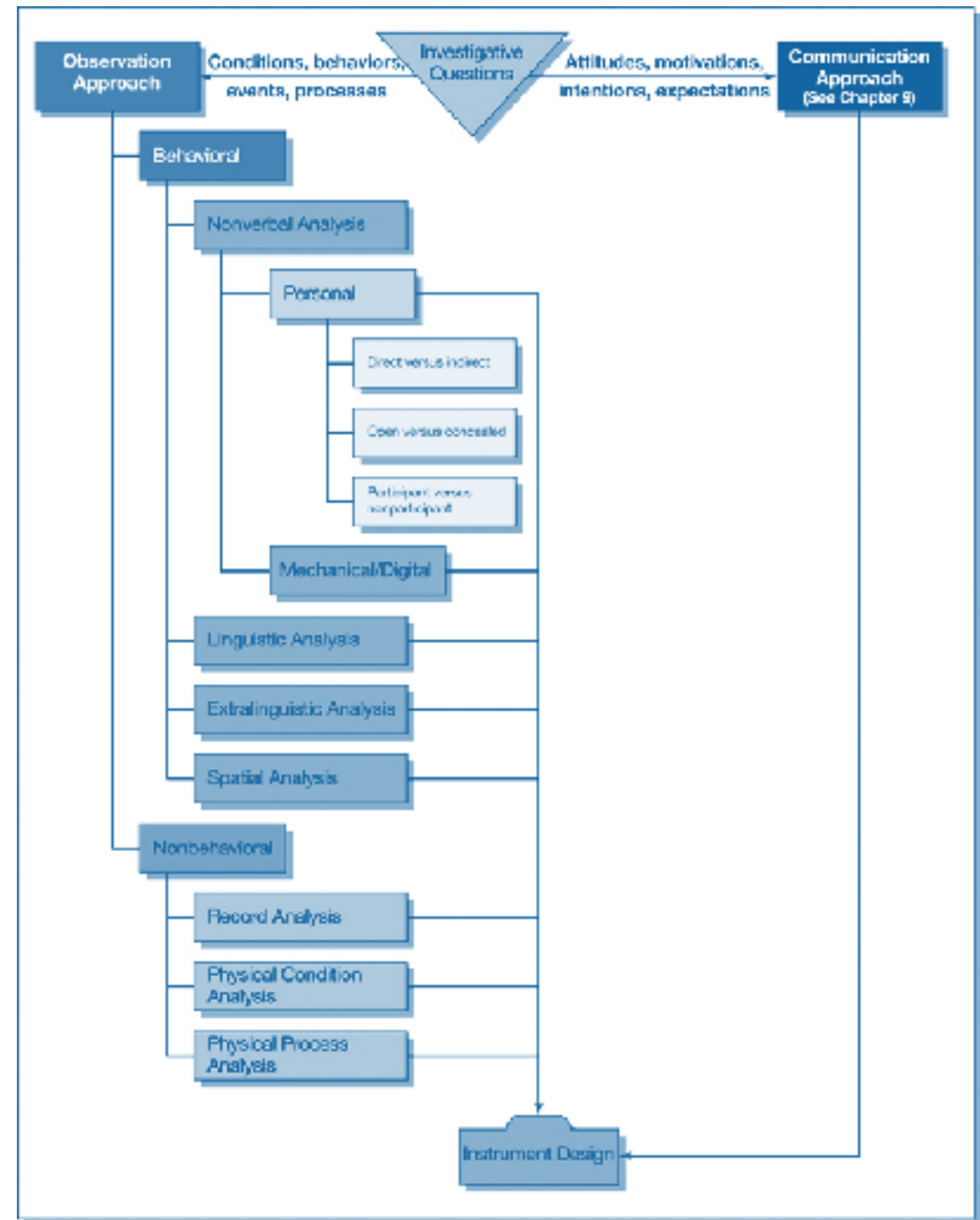
Where?



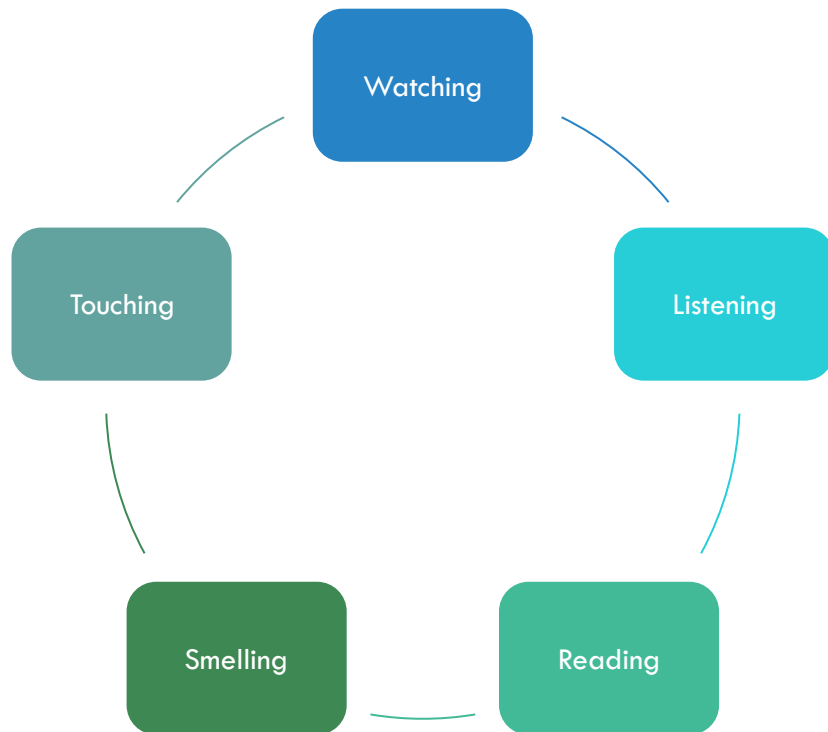
SELECTING THE DATA COLLECTION METHOD



SELECTING AN OBSERVATION DATA COLLECTION APPROACH



DATA COLLECTION



USING OBSERVATION

Systematic planning

Properly controlled

Consistently dependable

Accurate accounts of events



OBSERVATION CLASSIFICATION

Nonbehavioral Observation

- Record analysis
- Physical condition analysis
- Physical process analysis

Behavioral Observation:

- Nonverbal analysis
- Linguistic analysis
- Extralinguistic analysis
- Spatial analysis



NONBEHAVIORAL OBSERVATION



Record analysis

- involve historical or current records and public or private records
- they may be written, printed, sound-recorded, photographed, or videotaped



Physical condition analysis

- typified by store audits of merchandise availability
- studies of plant safety compliance, analysis of inventory conditions
- analysis of financial statements



Process or activity analysis

- includes time/motion studies of manufacturing processes
- analysis of traffic flows in a distribution system paperwork flows in an office, financial flows in the banking system

BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATION

Nonverbal behavior

- includes body movement, motor expressions, and even exchanged glances

Linguistic behavior

- the observation of human verbal behavior during conversation, presentation, or interaction

Extra linguistic behavior

- is the recording of vocal, temporal, interaction, and verbal stylistic behaviors of human participants.

Spatial relationships

- the recording of how humans physically relate to one another



ETHICAL ISSUES IN THE OBSERVATION OF HUMANS

Observation methods introduce a number of ethical issues. Hidden observation raises the issue of the respondent's right to privacy. If the researcher obtains permission to observe someone, the subject may not act naturally.



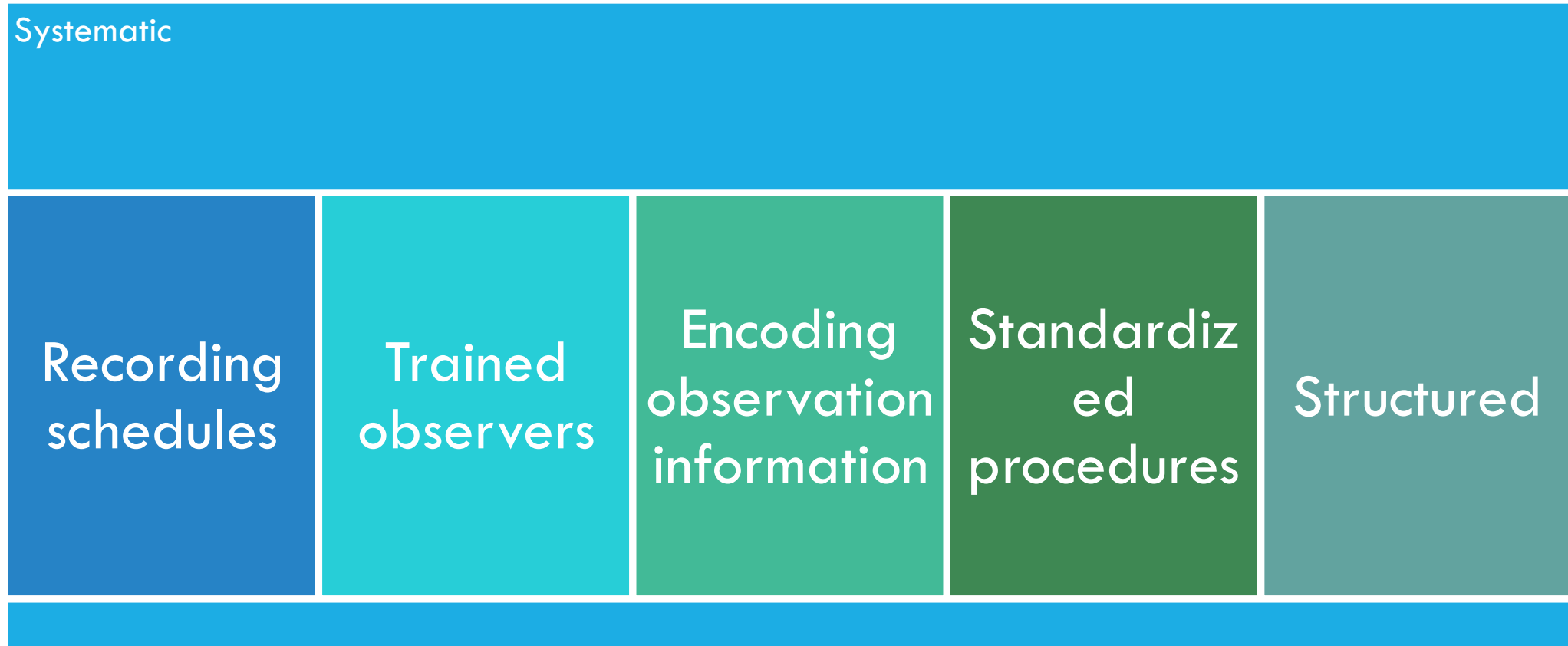
ETHICAL ISSUES IN THE OBSERVATION OF HUMANS

1. Is the behavior being observed commonly performed in public where it is expected that others can observe the behavior?

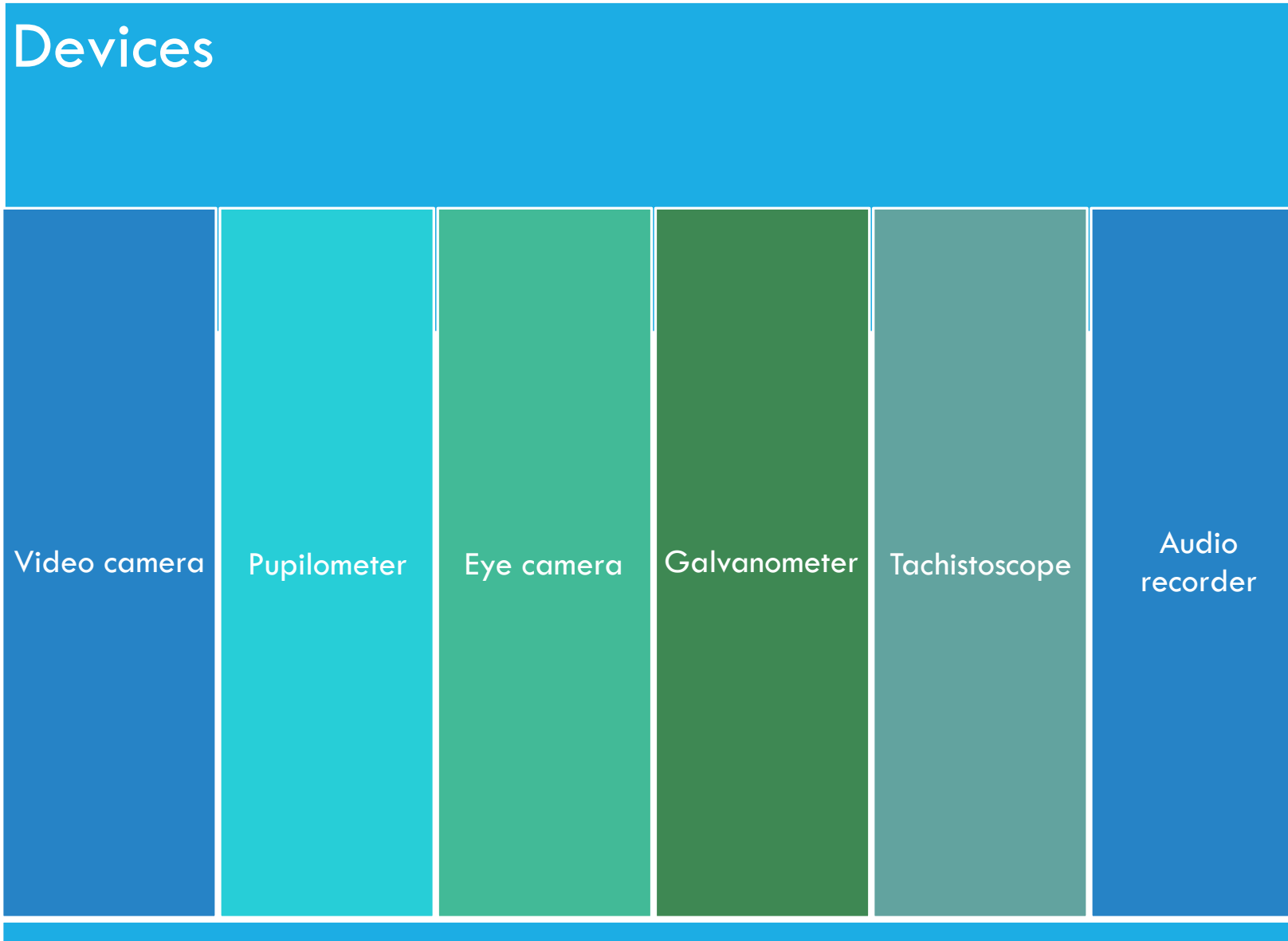
2. Is the behavior performed in a setting in which the anonymity—meaning there is no way to identify individuals—of the person being observed is assured?

3. Has the person agreed to be observed?

TYPES OF STUDY: SYSTEMATIC OBSERVATION



MECHANICAL/ DIGITAL BEHAVIORAL OBSERVATION



EVALUATION OF THE OBSERVATION METHOD

The only method available to gather certain types of information

We can collect the original data at the time they occur

We can secure information that most participants would ignore either

It alone can capture the whole event as it occurs in its natural environment



LIMITATIONS

Impossible to predict where and when the event will occur

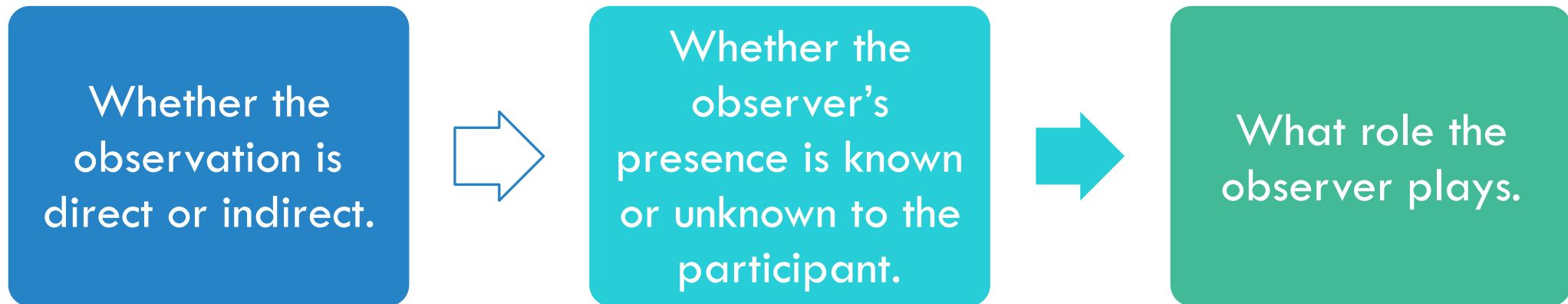
A slow and expensive process

Most reliable results are restricted to information

Research environment is suited to subjective assessment and recording of data



THE OBSERVER–PARTICIPANT RELATIONSHIP



THE OBSERVER–PARTICIPANT RELATIONSHIP: DIRECTNESS OF OBSERVATION

Indirect observation

- observation occurs when the observer is physically present and personally monitors what takes place
- it allows the observer to react to and report subtle aspects of events

Direct observation

- occurs when the recording is done by mechanical, photographic, or electronic means



THE OBSERVER–PARTICIPANT RELATIONSHIP: CONCEALMENT

Concealment

- Observers use concealment to shield themselves from the object of their observation



THE OBSERVER–PARTICIPANT RELATIONSHIP: PARTICIPATION

Participant

- Observer is involved in the activity being observed
- makes a dual demand on the observer



ADVANTAGES OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

It is good at explaining 'what is going on' in particular social situations

It heightens the researcher's awareness of significant social processes

It is particularly useful for researchers working within their own organisations

Some participant observation affords the opportunity for the researcher to experience 'for real' the emotions of those who are being researched

Virtually all data collected are useful

DISADVANTAGES OF PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

It can be very time consuming

It can pose difficult ethical dilemmas for the researcher

There can be high levels of role conflict for the researcher (e.g. 'colleague' versus researcher)

The closeness of the researcher to the situation being observed can lead to significant observer bias

The participant observer role is a very demanding one, to which not all researchers will be suited

Access to organisations may be difficult

Data recording is often very difficult for the researcher



THANKS FOR YOUR
ATTENTION |