IAEA 60 Years
Atoms for Peace and Development

Observations

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Types of observations

Task observations where the focus is on noticing the flow and execution of work activities relative to prescribed expectations and standards

These are NOT part of cultural observation

Types of Observations

Two types of Cultural observations

Naturalistic observations where people are observed in their normal settings performing activities without any manipulation or interference by the observers

Participant observations where the assessor is, to a greater or lesser extent, immersed in the day-to-day activities of the people being observed.

Advantages of Observations

- Do not require an underlying hypothesis that can introduce bias
- Visible manifestations of culture
- What you see is factual – whether it should have happened or not!
- A self-assessment should involve a large number of observations in different areas and with different people across the organization to ensure the validity of the findings

Advantages of observations
(cont'd)

- The process of observing provides opportunities to interact with the people and provides insight on intentions, motifs and contextual information
- Can gain important information for the interpretation of data

Risks

- Presence can affect what is happening - need to minimise distractions from observer presence
- Focus on individual rather than cultural issues
- Potential to over-generalize from too few observations
- Untrained/unskilled observers may miss things or misunderstand

Role of the observers

- Self-assessments involve organizational members shifting from being:
  - ‘members’ engaged in the normal flow of their assigned work activities, to
    - ✓ ‘participant observers’ that are actively noticing what, when, where and why from the perspective of seeing organizational patterns as cultural expressions, and where possible, to
    - ✓ ‘naturalistic observers’ in areas that may otherwise fall outside their normal role.

Role of observers (cont'd)

- Observations are more focused on relational dynamics and thinking styles than on the specific content of interactions
- Important for the assessors to be mindful of the impact of their presence

Degrees of participation

- *Passive participation* (where the observer is a passive bystander, recording the activities, sometimes unknown to those interacting)
- *Moderate participation* (where the observer is identified by those interacting as an observer, but interaction between observer and personnel to be observed is limited),
- *Active participation* (where the observer actively takes part in the activities at hand)
- *Complete participation*, where the observer actually becomes part of the group studied
- In SCSA, participation will most likely be moderate or active

Forms of information

- *Descriptive information* where the assessor notes what was seen.
- *Inferential observations* whereby the observer makes inferences about underlying dynamics.
- *Evaluative observations* where the assessor both makes an inference and a judgment about the behaviour.

- When documenting observations, they become narrated, losing some of their initial objectivity

Preparing for Observations

- Select the activity to be observed
- Ensure that the person(s) being observed are comfortable with it
- Understand any risks or hazards associated with the activity
- Adhere to all safety requirements

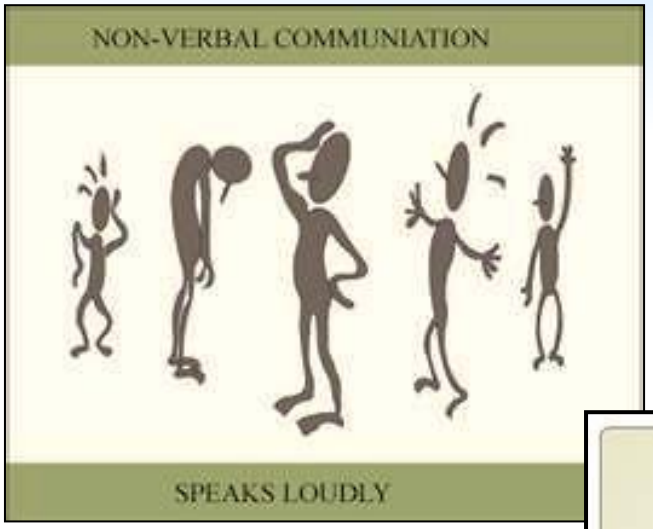
Observer ethics

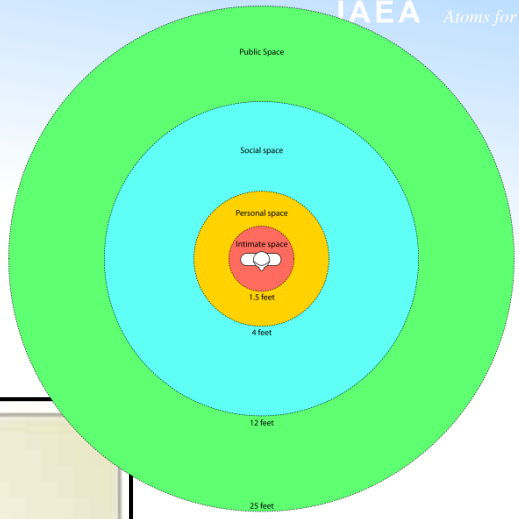
Inform those to be observed:

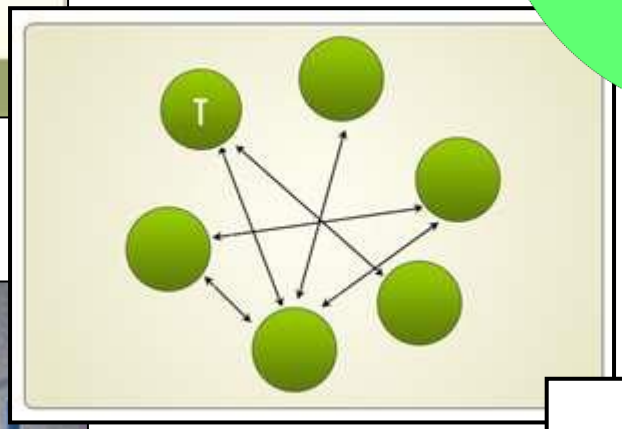
- Need to take notes
- Nothing personal included in notes
- No names or dates
- Looking at *cultural indicators* not *individuals*
- Aim is not to distract them
- If they have concerns they can ask you to leave

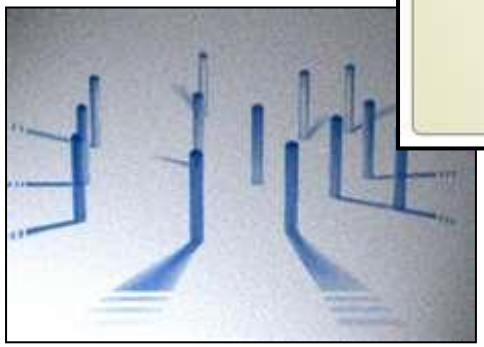
Selecting situations

- Meetings – management review meetings; strategic planning meetings; interactions with licensees, policy/regulation development meetings; hearings; corporate oversight; decision-making
- Field activities – licensee site visits; interactions with government, media, members of the public;
- Other – training, work space distribution and housekeeping, informal situations such as breaks, lunches, and celebrations.









Things to notice

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- *Body language* - non-verbal communication which consists of body postures, gestures, facial expressions.
- *Constellations* are patterns of positioning that give insight into where people experience themselves relative to others.
- *Interaction mapping* provides a view on how information and support flow between parties. Noting the prevalence of speakers and the types of contributions they make increases understanding of how particular cultural expressions come about.

Observations of meetings

- Opportunity to observe:
  - the types of issues that are raised
  - who is present
  - how decisions are made
  - the communications that occur
  - the teamwork exhibited
- What meetings?
  - Daily production meetings
  - Management meetings
  - Planning meetings
  - Accountability reviews, etc.

Observation and Reporting

- Objective statements of what was actually seen or heard without own ideas or opinion
- Clear and complete statements to allow the reader to understand the significance and extent
- Include quotes or opinions provided on why observed conditions or behaviours may exist
- Produce a written summary as soon as possible after the observations

Summary

- Observations provide factual information on how people behave in the organization
- Important to capture what and where…like a camera
- Be alert for group dynamics and non-verbal messaging
- Avoid influencing situations more than is necessary to conduct the observation
- Avoid introducing personal biases and interpretations – stay descriptive

Thank you!