Chapter 6
Vignette Methodology:
An Illustration From Conflict Research

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ABSTRACT

This chapter initially introduces vignette methodology and explains the use of it in social research. It clarifies the various methodological challenges while designing the vignette. Drawing on the experience, while designing vignette for conflict research, this chapter provides a detailed presentation of the procedural and pragmatic issues that need to be considered when using vignette. Categorizing the design of vignette in three stages—predesign, design, and post-design—provides complete clarity in understanding this process. This chapter can help budding researchers get a perfect insight into the entire process of vignette development.

INTRODUCTION

Atzmuller and Steiner (2010, p. 128) define a vignette as "a short, carefully constructed description of a person, object, or situation, representing as text or live events". Hill (1997, p. 177) defines it as "short scenarios in written or pictorial form, intended to elicit responses to typical scenarios." Miles (1990, p. 99) describes it as "a snapshot or a mini-movie of a practitioner at work. It reflects a recent episode of practice in two dimensions: describing the practice and evoking thoughtful explanation". Finch (1987, p.105) describes vignettes as "short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond".

The vignette is basically a short story or scenario that, when precisely built and pre-tested, recreates real-life occurrence. A Vignette is generated from various sources such as previous research finding, literature reviews or real-life experiences. The source could differ, but the content of the vignette consists of at least two important aspects namely (1) experimental aspects which can be systematically manipulated across vignettes to assess their effects on the dependable variables (2) controlled aspects which are kept similar /identical across the vignettes in order to eliminate extraneous variables. Thus, it provides a consistent and controlled backdrop against which researchers can vary key independent variables to address their research questions. A vignette enables the researcher to define the situation in their own term and enable the respondent to frame their mind for the given context. Vignette enable controlled studies of mental processes that would be difficult or impossible to study through observation or classical experiments. This unique feature of vignette facilitates and provides very useful methodologies in investigating individuals' beliefs, insights, and implications about particular circumstances, and is particularly valuable for subtle parts of analysis that may not be promptly assessable through other means.

Once the vignette is designed, the participants are asked to read it and respond to a few directed questions to further involve them in creating meaning. Thus, the response of the vignette could be measured through self-administered questionnaires or captured through face-to-face interviews audiotape, videotape, etc. and thus can be used as both qualitative and quantitative techniques.

VIGNETTE METHODOLOGY

Quite a bit of social research is related to analysis and understanding of behavioural aspects such as attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, and values. Thus, these research methodologies intend to capture as much as viable the reality of individuals' lives and their discernment. Storytelling features of vignette and framing the context for the respondent leads to various advantages in using vignettes. Various advantages include:

1. To Capture General Attitudes, Beliefs, and Values: Attitude is the overall judgment of peoples towards certain event or person. Measuring attitude, beliefs or values are very important as its predicts person behavior. Generic attitude can be captured to a certain extent by questionnaire, but to capture specific attitude towards event or situation, creating vignette would be ideal as this leaves little room for the respondent to interpret the background of the

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