

Diving in: Rapid Appraisal and its Applications

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The Roots of Rapid Appraisal

- Rural mapping
- Development projects
- 1970's presentation at Sussex
- Marketing
- Systems approaches
- Also called Rapid Rural Appraisal or Rapid Assessment Procedures

Three Ingredients

- Systems Perspective
- Triangulation of Data Collection
- Iterative Data Collection and Analysis

Mix well with....

- A team that works well together
- Diverse, interdisciplinary perspectives
- Flexibility
- Positive Attitude, oriented towards learning

How Rapid is Rapid?

- Beebe (1995) recommends that RAP teams spend at least 4 days in the field
- Teams can, in some cases, spend up to two weeks in the field
- It is possible to take 'breaks' in between more intensive periods of fieldwork
- The goal is to get a broad snapshot of institutions, social structures, and key individual actors within a system
- Allow at least 12 to 15 days to collect data, write fieldnotes, debrief, and compile a report

Systems Perspective

- Go after a variety of perspectives, inclusive of varied mix of social actors, include those more central and also those on margins of a system
- Have a handful of key informants
- Talk to 'the troublemakers'
- Goal is gain 'emic' (insider) understandings
- Semi-structured interview guides work well, some teams use general topics
- It can also be much more open-ended
- If possible in short time frame, do observations and write up fieldnotes

Triangulation of Data Collection

- Data sources: Focus Group discussions, In-Depth interviews, Participant Observation, Media and/or written materials and records
- Examining different sources of data and comparing
- Debriefing time: Compare what you are hearing
- Determine patterns of similarities and differences, elucidate unexpected findings
- Allow for flexibility in interview guides and topics, so you can pursue new directions
- Fact check with new informants

Iterative Data Collection and Analysis

- Collect data—analyze—collect more data
- Debriefing is essential, allow extra time
- Theoretical Sampling—as you learn new things, you may need to recruit people who have particular kinds of knowledge
- Be prepared to ask new questions, have flexibility as interviewers and fieldworkers to move the area of inquiry
- Be persistent to get the kinds of data you need to ‘fill in the blanks’

Similarities and Differences

The Same

- Ethnography: Fieldnotes, it's iterative, combining different data collection techniques and kinds of informants
- Grounded Theory: Theoretical sampling, analyzing data whilst in the field and using preliminary findings to target additional data collection activities
- Hypothesis generating

But Different

- RAP fieldwork lasts only a few days. Not able to go in-depth, broader 'snapshot' of complex realities
- Intensive, long days of fieldwork and group analysis
- Relies on a team and will only function as well as the team does

Investigating the impact of the HIV-related state budget cuts

- Part of a larger grant from CHRP to the CAPS Policy Center and the San Francisco AIDS Foundation
- The center was tasked with a 'Rapid Response' component to answer pressing questions
- Policy Research Advisory Committee, included 'gatekeepers' who could facilitate contact
- Rapid Appraisal involved a team of investigators
- Looking at 3 counties: Alameda, LA, and Fresno
- Multi-level examination of the impact of cuts

Investigating the impact of the HIV-related state budget cuts

- In-depth interviews covered CBOs, ASOs, Planning Committees, Clinicians, Local AIDS offices, patient/consumer perspectives
- Participant observation at planning committee meetings (where possible)
- Reviewing local media and minutes from public meetings, etc.
- Collecting additional written materials from informants

Investigating the impact of the HIV-related state budget cuts

Broad Topics for RAP included:

- What programs cut or scaled back at CBOs, ASOs, Clinics, Training institutions
- Impact on services and staffing, morale
- The process through which funds were cut, reallocated, or restored
- What are challenges of general fiscal environment?
- How have cuts impacted lives of clientele?

Keys to Success

- Good team communication
- Interdisciplinary team, coming from different perspectives, include 'locals' if possible
- Good interpersonal skills for rapport building
- Ability to 'hit the ground running'
- Line up interviews, observations, ahead of time
- Flexibility and determination
- Good listening skills, not having an *agenda*
- Internet access and ability to do online 'sleuthing'

Challenges

- Scheduling in appointments with key informants ahead of time, yet keeping flexibility
- Debriefing time needs to be adequate
- Transportation issues
- Adequate time for writing fieldnotes, process lessons learned from data collection that day
- Compiling necessary documents beforehand, sometimes you don't know what is available
- Long days in the field

Specific Tales From the Field

- The “I don’t want to talk to you” informant, ie. the troublemaker
- Debriefing in the car
- Doing Rapid Assessment where you live
- The “I’m too busy to talk to you” interview
- Establishing rapport in a short amount of time

Potential Uses for RAP

- Determining the needs of earthquake-displaced people
- Rolling out HIV testing in an emergency room setting
- Impact of HIV-related discrimination laws (international settings)
- Nutrition and exercise habits of youth
- Other ideas? Other experiences with RAP?