OBSERVATION MICROSTUDY

Encouraging Participation in Remote Meetings

TWC505: Research in Tech and Appl Comm (2021 Spring - A)

Jeri Miller

February 22, 2021

Observation Context

This project is based on the exercises at the end of the Spinuzzi reading. Since I am studying how to encourage participation in remote meetings, I chose to observe a remote meeting in my workplace.

Observation Protocol

The meeting I chose to observe is called "Scrum of Scrums." It is a daily meeting for all the scrum masters on the project to discuss challenges, dependencies, and any blockers their teams may have. There is one person which coordinates the activities of the Scrum Masters and he facilitates the meeting. I did not tell anyone I was observing and taking notes during the meeting. Due to my choice of topic, my focus was on participation. This is a fully remote meeting with most participants calling in from their homes via Skype. During this meeting one person was in their car driving to an appointment. The meeting has a set cadence with the facilitator calling each participant when it is their turn. At times someone speaks up out of order in response to something someone else has said and the meeting can deviate from the regular pattern when that happens. Because the facilitator reminds everyone of the reason for the meeting and the topics to focus on, there is quite a bit of repetition.

Spinuzzi Exercises

1. *Go to a public place and observe a cyclical activity again. This time, try taking detailed notes. How much detail did you capture? Were you writing constantly, or waiting around for something to happen?*

   Instead of going to a public place, I took notes during a remote meeting I attended. I captured a lot of detail, mostly the things people said and how the participants interacted with each other. I was typing in Word the entire time trying to keep up. The only time I stopped typing was when it was my turn to speak. I did not note what I said because I was unable to talk and type at the same time.

2. *Look at your field notes the next day. How much can you reconstruct of the scene? What's missing?*

   When I reviewed my notes the next day, I was able to reconstruct a lot of the scene. This may be partly due to this meeting happening daily in much the same format. What I notice is missing is information to support my original intent of observing the meeting for participation. Everyone participates because there is a facilitator that calls on each person.

3. *As you look through the field notes, circle the information resources and tools people used and underline the actions they took. What patterns do you see?*

   Because the meeting was remote with audio only, I was unable to see what information resources were used. The only tool used was Skype. As I underlined the actions, most of them were Andy calling on the next person. However, there were several times where someone interrupted the speaker. The pattern I see is Andy does a brief introduction, then starts going down the list calling on each of the Scrum Masters. People interrupt when they have a response

or something to add to what another person is saying at the time, but the pattern is the same throughout the meeting. Andy calls on someone, they give their update, others respond, Andy calls on the next person.

4. *Finally, as you look through these field notes, you might find yourself wondering about details that you didn't capture. Using a different color of pen, mark those questions in your field notes.*

The main thing I thought that I did not capture was the level of participation since the meeting is facilitated by Andy calling on people. Rather than mark the questions in a different color of pen, I chose to highlight the things related to participation. I used green for someone talking more, yellow for someone talking less, and red for someone interrupting or talking out of turn. Once I started highlighting, I realized that I may have documented more about participation than was immediately obvious. The main thing I noticed was Andy interrupts people a lot. There was only one person, Josh, that Andy did not interrupt. Only one person spoke more than the others. Andy let him talk, but finally interrupted him to call on the next person. Keanna was the one driving and her update was shorter than the others. Amanda also did not talk much because Andy interrupted her and never went back to let her finish. Taylor was very succinct and did not really give much of an update.

Further Research

This was an observation of only one short meeting that has a regular cadence and a facilitator that calls on each person to speak. My research will benefit from observing longer, less frequent meetings with different leaders and participants. It will also be strengthened by observing other meetings with most of the same participants to see if they respond differently to different leaders. In this case, all the attendees also lead many meetings. Observing the meetings they lead will give me insight into their perspectives on how to encourage participation in a remote meeting and I will be able to gather more data about what works to get attendee participation and what does not from several perspectives.

Preliminary Tips

Despite this observation being of only one, somewhat structured short meeting, I was able to identify two potential tips to add to my guide. The first one is the leader should not interrupt the attendees when they are trying to give their updates. In this case, at least two of the attendees never really got a chance to give their update. I attend this meeting daily and until I did this observation, I did not realize how often the leader interrupted and how much it affected the participation of the attendees. The second potential tip is to know who is on the call, especially if you are going to call on each attendee in turn. Asking if you missed someone has the potential to make someone feel undervalued. On the other hand, it does not encourage participation if the person who was missed does not like to talk anyway and does not volunteer that they were missed.

Reflection

This exercise was very educational. Going into it I thought observation would be a great way to gather data for my project. I still think that, but I can now see how difficult it will be to take detailed notes.

Despite thinking I did not get much information to support my original intent of documenting participation, it turns out I did. Highlighting participation was rather enlightening.

As a leader, I was able to see behaviors and patterns that will help me in leading my own meetings. In turn these observations will aid me in creating my guide to encouraging participation in remote meetings. Looking at the highlighting, you can see that people stop talking when they are interrupted and do not attempt to continue. The assumption that I have made all along about there being people who talk a lot in meetings, but others that do not participate much holds true even in a meeting where people are called on to speak.

I think observation of meetings will be a great addition to my research. Using all the techniques we have learned in this class will give me a better understanding of the dynamics of a remote meeting. From survey responses, I can craft interview questions. By observing meetings, I can see how everything fits together and refine the tips I will include in the guide.

Peer Reviews

Based on the peer reviews, I made the following changes to my final document.

Review 1

Hi Jeri, this is really interesting. I love that you color coded and noticed a pattern of interruption. it is possible that "Andy the Interruptor"doesn't even realize that he is doing this, or to this extent. It could be interesting to compare your notes from this session to the same one the next day, and/or a week or a month later.

It seems to be, in this case, a clear point to express on how to be a successful meeting leader would be to not interrupt. The other thing I notice is that while people do seem to have things to say, no participated in the the Questions section at the top of the meeting. Maybe this is best for the end? How can people be encouraged to speak up and ask questions? Is it this leader? or perhaps, this is just what happens when you have a a daily rather than a weekly meeting. Can participation with similar people in a different less-frequent meeting be compared?

Also, I am thinking that an "effective leadership" idea/suggestion for leading a team or group call could be to not say "who did I miss?" as this may lead those who have been accidentally missed feel less important to the team. Leaders should reference a participant list of some sort to ensure they've gotten to everyone.

I think you can come up with some great material based on this single observation but of course, a few others could help you figure out if someone was just having an 'off' day, etc. Super interesting! good luck!

Revisions

Change 1
Future Research section added.

Improvement 1
I need to observe several more meetings of different kinds to gather enough information to help me determine what tips to include in my guide. As the reviewer suggested, people may not participate in this meeting because of the leader and the frequency of the meeting.

Change 2
Preliminary Tips section added.

Improvement 2
From this observation, I discovered two tips I can potentially add to my guide:

1. Know who is on the call.
2. As a leader, do not interrupt others.

Review 2

It looks like you did gather a good amount of information through your observation. I would be curious if there is ever an opportunity for you to experience and observe a meeting with video used if that might change the information you can get to see if engagement levels change. That would be difficult

to probably set up if that isn't regularly done in your meetings, but it could be an interesting comparison to this meeting.

I really like your color coding method as that gives an easy visual to hard data points you would want to capture. I think a top question that comes to my mind about your observation is how you are planning to draw conclusions about what is effective and what is not? It seems from what Andy is saying in the interrupting and way he approaches calling on people may not be great for getting willing participation, but how are you planning to analyze that to include in your research?

I also think it would be beneficial to have some background on the people since you have context on them. Is this meeting always run this way, same time, same day? Is it understood that everyone just gets called on and has their brief moment to share, or does the structure change depending on the projects and needs? Are there other meetings that take place throughout your day that run differently that you could also compare to in order to have even more potential data to pull from? These could all help give robust data points for you to analyze for your finished product.

This looks like a good start to observing though, especially if you've never done it before!

Revisions

Change 1
Future Research section added.

Improvement 1
I need to observe several more meetings of different kinds to gather enough information to help me determine what tips to include in my guide. As the reviewer suggested, people may not participate in this meeting because of the leader and the frequency of the meeting.

Change 2
Preliminary Tips section added.

Improvement 2
From this observation, I discovered two tips I can potentially add to my guide:

1. Know who is on the call.
2. As a leader, do not interrupt others.

Peer Review Summary
Both reviewers had similar questions and suggestions. Because the questions and suggestions were similar, it was not hard to prioritize revisions. I chose to rank the Future Research section higher than the Preliminary Tips section because, as both reviewers mentioned, I should observe different meetings to get the best data. I learned a lot from observing this one meeting about the mechanics of observing. I was surprised that I gathered enough data from a short meeting to make a preliminary list of tips for my guide. Both reviews pointed out some shortcomings of my study and helped me identify ways to improve my research.

References

Saldana, J. (2015). The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.