

INFORMANTS IN ESTABLISHMENT STUDIES

Abstract

Survey data in sociological studies often refer to establishments—workplaces, religious congregations, schools, medical practices, voluntary/social movement organizations—rather than to individuals. Since establishments cannot “respond” to a survey instrument, such analyses necessarily rely on “informants” for data. The question of variation in data across alternative possible informants, or of inter-informant reliability, therefore arises. Studies in which establishments are described by multiple informants can offer insight into it.

This presentation examines issues of inter-informant reliability in organizational measurement, drawing on two multiple-informant data bases: a 1988 study of large employers in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, and a 2000-01 study of Title III clinics providing HIV care to underserved groups. Among the questions considered are the following:

- Is there significant variation in reports of organizational properties across informants?
- What organizational properties are more and less reliably reported by informants?
- How much can informant reliability be improved by measuring organizational properties using multiple-item scales rather than single survey items?
- How much can organization-level measures be improved by aggregating across reports of multiple informants, rather than relying on single informants? How many informants are required in order to obtain a reliable organizational measure?
- Is reliability higher among some kinds of informants than among others (e.g. for long-tenure rather than short-tenure informants)?
- Are some kinds of organizations more difficult to measure reliably than others (e.g. large rather than small organizations, spatially dispersed rather than single-site organizations)?