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Description

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Description of an observed phenomenon in empirical research is a kind of communication process. There is always an object of description and an activity consisting in describing it for a receiver. What is needed in order to get closer to objectivity is an unambiguous exchange of experience. Other researchers need the opportunity to take a stand on the validity of the described observations and to decide if they want to replicate the experiment. That is why descriptions in research have to be reflective, precise, careful, consequent, honest and sincere.

The process of description is a sequence of impressive and expressive subprocesses: observation, perception, identification and classification, as well as verbalization and reception. An important goal of description in research is cognitive clarification, which entails finding the most precise expressions in order to facilitate optimal perception of the phenomenon under study. In this connection, it is of crucial importance that the sender's impressions are expressed in a manner such that the receiver understands exactly what is meant. This means that description processes are not static, but constantly influenced by pragmatic conditions.

Description processes can consist of two complementary modes of description: an analytic mode and a synthetic mode. The analytic mode is a series of discriminating procedures and choices which aim at isolating the object of description systematically and at identifying and categorizing the phenomenon, so that there is no doubt as to the issue under focus. This dividing and categorizing procedure has its price, however, because the result of the description of an isolated object may be in contradiction to the way the object is experienced in its natural surroundings. As soon as we isolate, we risk losing the object, because it is taken out of its real mental connections. This explains why it is an advantage to complement the analytic mode with the synthetic mode of description. The synthetic mode of description regards the phenomenon as one among others in larger units and investigates it in connection to other phenomena or processes from its surroundings.

Through a series of analytic and synthetic processes, the description becomes clearer and closer to adequately portraying the phenomenon. It is important to note that the process of description is *dynamic* and that both modes of description can be used complementarily through different kinds of classification and categorizations into new patterns, in an attempt to constantly improve clarity. As soon as one mode of description proves insufficient to characterize a phenomenon, the other mode can take over.