

#### **Box 1.4 Strengths and weaknesses of different methods**

Interviews, group discussions and conversations are useful for accessing:

- authentic voices and language
- verbal as opposed to written information
- depth of insights (perceptions, reasons, experiences)
- sensitive information
- information through dialogue
- unexpected information

but:

- they're costly/time consuming to undertake, write up and analyse
- audio/video recording can be inhibiting
- the data is not simple to analyse, and not easily quantifiable
- it's a skilled activity
- what people say is not always what they do.

Questionnaires, proformas and checklists are useful for accessing:

- large numbers of people's views
- anonymous views
- specific information
- comparative data
- information about many performance indicators at once
- quantifiable data

but:

- they're costly/time consuming to design, process and analyse

- questions can be misinterpreted or left blank
- response rates can be low
- responses may be superficial
- questions may not elicit the reasons behind a response.

Observation (structured or unstructured) is useful for accessing:

- insights into actions, interactions and processes
- non-verbal behaviours
- images or events to explore with participants
- rich descriptions or images

but:

- can inhibit those who are observed
- can alter the dynamics of what is being observed
- is costly/time-consuming to undertake and analyse
- can be difficult to analyse.

Journals and essays are useful for accessing:

- researchers' and participants' views and experiences during the process
- personal self-evaluative and reflective insights

but:

- can be demanding for researchers and participants
- can vary in the depth of insight provided.

*Source: Adapted from Morris and Twitchin (1990, pp. 15–20)*