

Comparison of Traditional Socio-Behavioral Research and Human-Centered Design Approaches

The table below comes from an article by Betsy Tolley, which contrasts human-centered design (HCD) with “traditional socio-behavioral research” (SBR). It resists over-simplification like: “HCD looks for solutions, SBR looks for theories”, while also giving a sense of the differences between formal, protocol-driven SBR and a commerce– and private sector-derived methodology, now proving its worth in public health.

	TRADITIONAL QUALITATIVE SBR	VS	HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN RESEARCH
Overall objective	Generate information and theories about behaviors that could be used to inform design or intervention goals		Arrive at new solution-based immersive experience of end-user and context
Recruitment	Priority on defining participants, categories to ensure data saturation		Priority on identifying a wide range of experiences using rapid, flexible processes
Proximity to field	Immersion by researchers, often “behind the scenes”, to reduce participants’ “reactivity”		Immersion by multidisciplinary research team, allowing for immediate feedback
Data capture	Audio-recordings and verbatim transcriptions preferred		Field notes and rich media assets preferred
Synthesis of findings	Step-by-step “auditable” process, with emphasis on scientific rigor		Rapid and iterative review of data to generate creative insights
Outputs & dissemination	Text to convey the content with dissemination in peer-reviewed journals and other forms		Rich media collateral and a toolkit of assets that facilitate empathetic ideation

Source: FHI 360. Traditional Socio-Behavioral Research and Human-Centered Design. December 2017. Accessible at: www.theimpt.org/documents/reports/Report-HCD-BSS-Research.pdf.