ASSESSING AND IMPROVING VALIDITY

Essentially, validity is the extent to which **measures what it says it measures**. There are many types of validity, but two of the most basic are **internal validity** and **external validity**.

Internal validity: In an experiment, this refers to whether the results can be attributed *only* to the independent variable. Note that internal validity is also known as **experimental validity**. Things that can affect the internal validity of a study include:

- **Poorly operationalised variables**
- **Demand characteristics**
- **Investigator effects**
- **The nature of the sample**
- **The instructions that participants are given**

Internal validity can be improved in the following ways:

- **Poorly operationalised variables** – Use measures or scales that have been validated in *other* studies
- **Demand characteristics** – Use single blind control
- **Investigator effects** – Use double blind control
- **The nature of the sample** – Use a sampling method that ensures representativeness
- **The instructions that participants are given** – Use standardised procedures and instructions

External validity: There are several kinds of external validity:

- **Ecological validity** (Can the results be generalised *beyond* the setting in which the investigation took place?)
- **Population validity** (Does the sample studied *reflect* the population to whom we wish to generalise the results?)
- **Historical validity** (Would the results of a study conducted *earlier on* still be obtained today?)
- **Cultural validity** (Would the same results be obtained if the study was conducted in another culture?)

Laboratory experiments are generally considered to be *low* in ecological validity. A way of improving this is to conduct a **field experiment** or

natural experiment. Population validity can be improved by using a **representative sample**. Historical and cultural validity are, for obvious reasons, difficult (if not impossible) to improve.