Research Methods

**Framework Design and Ethics**

**Devising a conceptual framework – when and if appropriate.**

Is a bit abstract, may be relevant and helpful, especially to understand the context of a research project, but may easily become too complex and not helpful, especially for applied research

A conceptual framework involves abstract ideas or mental pictures about a situation

Is usually more used for explanatory research which usually involves establishing cause and effect. Dependent concepts or variables are the ones the researcher wants to explain their variation. They are influenced or changed by other concepts / variables

A conceptual framework can also be used to develop a mind map to better understand the situation context and supports the development of your research objective(s) and questions

A conceptual framework formally defines the concepts or ideas involved in a study and especially the relationships between the concepts. See Veal figure 3.3

Start by writing down and defining the concepts that appear relevant

Then group the concepts that seem related

Then indicate the perceived relationships with lines and arrows

See Veal Figure 3.4 & 3.5

Progressively develop a more complex conceptual / mind map or model based on your understanding and early literature review

The conceptual framework is then used to help the researcher;

Develop better research questions

(what is the relationship between advertising and sales)

Or develop a hypotheses to be tested with empirical data

(more advertising leads to more sales)

Good hypotheses need to be;

Statements about relationships between variables

Clearly stated

Testable

Use concepts / variables that are measureable

**Research process issues**

Getting too big a project, issues of scale and scope, usually a research project can only study one or two aspects of a wider problem, see Veal Figure 3.6

Are the questions actually answerable, for example, ‘was our advertising worthwhile?’ is not answerable, because other things may have influenced a change in sales.

Operationalization is deciding how concepts / variables might be measured if quantitative or identified / recognised and assessed if qualitative.

Also need to indicate possible information of data sources

See Veal Figure 3.7

Validity refers to the extent to which a question or concept / variable accurately explains what the researcher is actually looking for.

Reliability refers to consistency. A measure is reliable if it produces the same results when repeated at a different time, in a different place even when used by different researchers

**Key ethical principles**

Professional research groups will have set codes or ethics. Most academic institutes / Universities will have codes of ethics and an ethics committee

**Informed consent / free choice / voluntary participation**

The people involved must know they are participating in research and what it involves

The NZ case from National Woman’s Hospital’s ‘unfortunate experiment’ was that some woman did not get treatment for cancer and where not told they were part of a study.

Participants must give their consent / approval to take part in the research, usually sign a form that they agree to the research.

Need to have freedom / autonomy to not take part (but may be social or employer pressure to take part).

Raises issues for observation research, e.g. drug use at work

Sometimes providing detailed information about the research or getting written consent for quick surveys is not practical, but still OK if the researcher does not know which person completed which questionnaire; that is the respondents are anonymous

See Veal p 71 for guidelines for quick surveys

**No Deceit**

Usually cannot deceive respondents, but we do deceive animals with food .

Some OK use of deceit, placebos which are drugs with no effects given to the control group in medical research.

What about research about attitudes, for example on racism, then respondents may alter their answers

**Harm / Consequences**

Very important where people or animal health is at risk, medical / biological / mental health

For social research, it highlights issues of confidentiality and privacy.

Let respondents know if will be named or possibly could be identified by others ‘in the know’.

If staff member criticises their firm or manager, then if identified, they could face severe consequences.

**Anonymity and confidentiality**

Cannot offer both to participants

A respondent is anonymous when the researcher cannot identify a given response to an individual person

A respondent has confidentiality when the researcher can identify a person’s data but promised not to make the connection pubic. Difficult to do in focus groups.

Have to ensure confidentiality of any data collected, and that it is stored securely.

**Competence / Plagiarism / Falsification of results**

Do not use skills in research that you are not able to use well

Don’t copy other research or fail to acknowledge other sources of literature or information

Never ever make up data or make misleading conclusions or findings, but may have to reject some data with collection problems