

Lecture 1: Introduction to Applied research methods

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Basic research

Purpose:

- expand knowledge of processes of business and management
- results in universal principles relating to the process and its relationship to outcomes
- findings of significance and value to society in general

Context:

- undertaken by people based in academia
- choice of topic and objectives determined by the researcher
- flexible timescales

Impact:

- initially academic community and researcher
- may also impact policy and practice

Applied research

Purpose:

- improve understanding of particular business or management problem
- results in solution to problem
- new knowledge limited to problem
- findings of practical relevance and value to manager(s) in organisation(s)

Context:

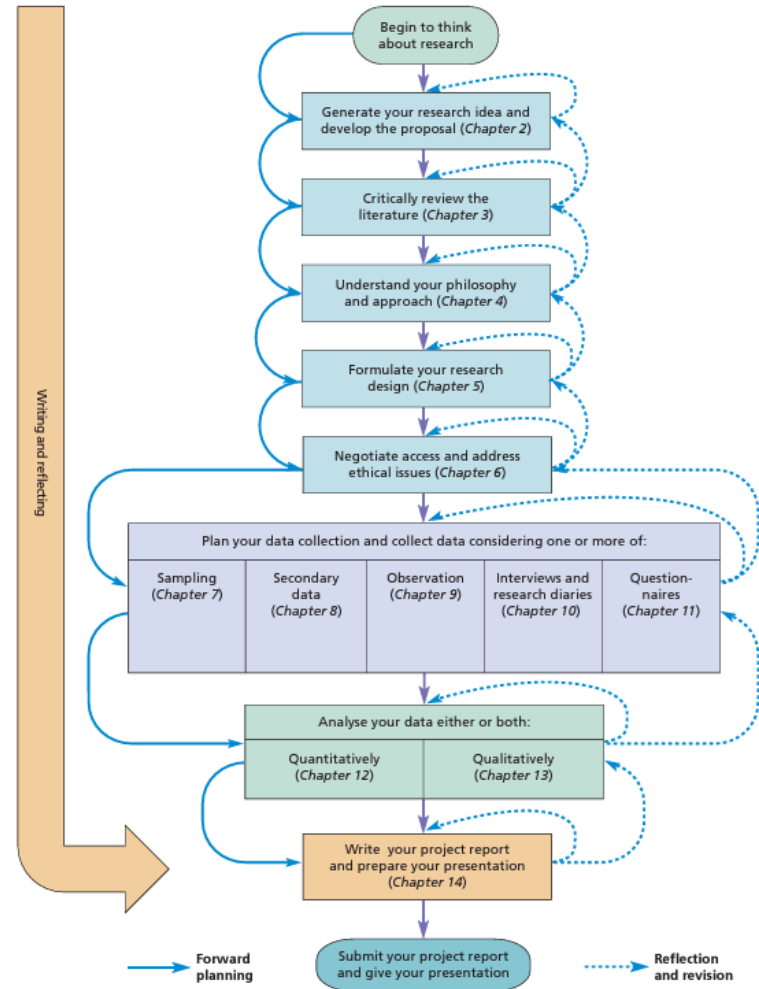
- undertaken by people based in a variety of settings including organisations and academia
- objectives negotiated with originator
- tight timescales

Impact:

- initially policy and practice community and researcher
- may also impact academia

The research process

- Research portrayed as a multi-stage process.
- Stages include formulating a topic, literature review, research design, data collection, analysis, and writing up.
- Reality is messier than depicted, with initial ideas sometimes lacking relevance.
- Stages overlap, requiring revisiting and continuous reflection.
- Textbooks present stages linearly, but actual research is concurrent and iterative.
- Recognized in academic research, student research, news reporting, and case studies. Emphasis on formulating one overarching research question or aim.
- Continual reflection and revision of ideas stressed throughout the research process.



The relevance gap

- Concerns resulting from the separation of knowledge producers and users, introducing a 'relevance gap.'
- Emphasis on the 'research–practice gap,' urging the adoption of evidence-based management.
- Challenges in Knowledge Transfer:
 - Struggles in the effective transfer of research findings to the workplace, leading to a reliance on personal experience.
 - Ongoing debate on the feasibility of bridging the gap, with differing perspectives on academic research and managerial practices.
 - Differing Perspectives:
 - Categorized differences between academics and practitioners, encompassing orientations, methodological approaches, key outcomes, and mutual perceptions.
 - Tensions arising from divergent foci of interest, methodological imperatives, and mutual perceptions.
 - Perceptions of the 'Relevance Gap':
 - Argued that ignoring the 'relevance gap' in management research would be unthinkable in fields like medicine or engineering.
 - Management research viewed from both social science and design science perspectives, the latter emphasizing solution-oriented research for practical problem-solving.
 - Balancing Research Purposes:
 - Debate on the purpose of management research, with a design science perspective emphasizing solution-oriented research.
 - Counter argument stresses the need for a balance between different research purposes, considering the ambiguity of organizational phenomena in management practice.



- Reflective Diary or Journal: Maintain a reflective diary or journal to document events and extract lessons from both successful and challenging aspects of the research process regularly.
- Learning Journal Structure: Some researchers prefer a free-flowing learning journal structure, providing space to describe, analyze, and evaluate occurrences during the research project.
- Integration with Research Notebook: Researchers may integrate reflections into a research notebook, capturing chronological details of the project, including articles read, discussion notes, and emerging thoughts.
- Reflexivity in Research: Reflection involves observing and examining your research methods, while reflexivity is a more intricate, recursive process that includes interpretation and constant awareness of your impact on the research. It helps critically reflect on oneself as a researcher.



Box 1.3 Focus on student research

Keeping a reflective diary as part of a research notebook

As part of her master's research project, Amanda's project tutor had encouraged her to incorporate her reflective diary into a research notebook. Over time she began to realise that her diary entries were providing her with a useful way of not only recording her experiences but also questioning her research practice. An extract from her reflective diary follows.

Monday 6 April 7:30 p.m.

I did my first observation today in a shop, watching and recording what people did when they came in, browsed the shoes and then, perhaps, made a purchase and left. Following what the textbook had told me, I sat as unobtrusively as possible in the corner on one of the sofas and used my tablet to make notes about the customers' and the sales assistants' behaviours. I'd prepared a checklist of what I was looking for. It all seemed to go well and, using the checklist, I made some interesting observations about the sorts of interactions customers were having with the sales assistants when they purchased shoes. Also I feel my position was unobtrusive and I was not really noticed. What went less well was the fact I could not hear precisely what was being said. I was too far away from the sales assistant and the customer. I need to make adjustments and be closer next time, while still being unobtrusive.

10:00 p.m.

I have just watched a television documentary on retail shopping and the changing nature of such shops. I'm

feeling worried that I might not have really observed all of what was happening. The programme makers had filmed the same purchase in a shop from three different views, presumably using different cameras. One camera filmed the purchase from low down and appeared to be quite a distance from the purchase. It seemed as if the camera operator was sitting on a sofa, rather like my observation. Another had filmed it more closely from behind the sales assistant so you could see the expressions on the customer's face and easily hear the conversation. The final camera had filmed from behind the customer and this time you could see the sales assistant's face; she looked really disinterested. I had never really thought about the impact of my position in the shop on what I would see and the data I would be able to collect until I saw that programme. I definitely need to think this through.

Tuesday 7 April, 7:30 a.m.

On reflection I really need to think more carefully about where would be the best place from which to observe and collect my data. I have already thought about the data I need, but given my emphasis on the interaction with customers, I think I was not in the right place to collect it for my first observation. I need to be able to see both the customer and the sales assistant and to hear what is being said and the tones of the voices. But, at the same time, I need to be unobtrusive as well, so my presence does not influence the interaction. Also, there is also only one of me, so I cannot be in three places at once! However, if I remember correctly, there was a place to sit and try on shoes next to the sales desk. Perhaps that would be a better place to observe. I cannot use videography to record what is happening as, if I ask for permission to do this, it will completely change the way the people react with each other. However, I could note down what I saw and heard immediately afterwards. I'll talk to my project tutor.



Box 1.4

Checklist of questions to ask yourself when making reflective diary entries

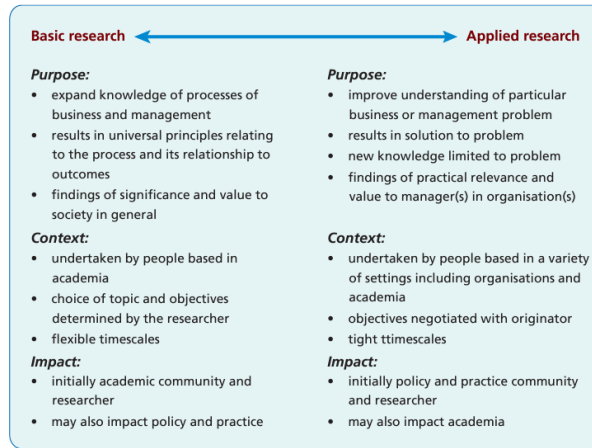
In relation to each experience. . .

- ✓ What has gone well?
 - Why has it gone well?
 - So what does this mean in relation to my research?

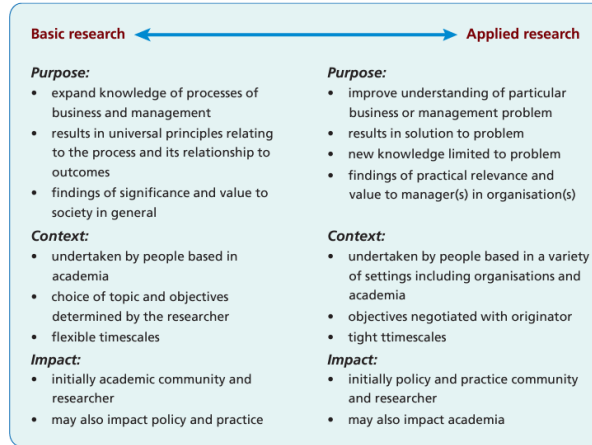
- ✓ What has not gone so well?
 - Why has it not gone so well?
 - So what does this mean in relation to my research?
- ✓ What adjustments will/did I make to my research following my reflection?

Looking back. . .

- ✓ How could I have improved on the adjustments made?
 - Why?
- ✓ What key themes have emerged over several entries?
- ✓ How will I apply what I have learnt from each experience to new situations?



- **Purpose Variety in Research Projects:** Research projects can have diverse purposes, ranging from understanding and explaining the impact of policies to exploring organizational differences or conducting in-depth investigations within a broader context.
- **Continuum of Business and Management Research:** All business and management research projects can be placed on a continuum based on their purpose and context, ranging from understanding processes to impactful research for practitioner communities.
- **Seven Principles of Responsible Research:** Tsui (2021) discusses the 'necessary interdependence' of rigour and relevance, outlining seven principles of responsible research. These principles guide studies of responsible leadership, emphasizing credibility in terms of rigour and usefulness in terms of relevance.
- **Application of Responsible Research Principles:** Responsible research aims to shift focus from researchers to ultimate users, including managers, policymakers, and students. Applying responsible research principles increases the probability of research findings being credible and useful for positive change.



- **Applied Research and Consultancy Similarities:** Applied research, situated towards the impactful end of the continuum, is likened to consultancy when conducted thoroughly. It involves research that is direct and immediately useful to managers, addressing issues important to them.
- **Undertaking Research with Rigour:** Regardless of the project's position on the basic-applied continuum, and considering different orientations, undertaking research with rigour is crucial. A careful attention to the entire research process ensures the quality and reliability of the research.
- **Role of Research in Academic and Practitioner Communities:** The extreme ends of the continuum involve research largely for academic impact and research impactful for practitioner communities. The latter focuses on immediate use for managers, addressing their concerns and presented in ways they can understand and act on.

1. Stakeholder Involvement:

- Involving diverse stakeholders without compromising research independence.
- How are stakeholders engaged, considering their perspectives while maintaining research autonomy?

2. Valuing Plurality and Collaboration:

- Embracing diversity in research themes, methods, and interdisciplinary collaboration.
- How does the research incorporate diverse themes and methods to address complex societal and business issues?

3. Valuing Basic and Applied Contributions:

- Recognizing contributions from both basic and applied research.
- How does the research integrate theoretical and practical insights for comprehensive contributions?

4. Improving Rigor and Relevance:

- Aiming for improved rigor while ensuring relevance in research design.
- How is the research designed to balance rigor and relevance, ensuring credible and useful findings?

5. Impact on Stakeholders:

- Focusing on research impact for diverse stakeholders and a better world.
- In what ways does the research contribute to positive change and meaningful impact on stakeholders?

6. Broad Dissemination:

- Valuing diverse knowledge dissemination beyond academic circles.
- How does the research plan to disseminate knowledge broadly, reaching varied audiences?

7. Sound Methodology:

- Employing sound scientific methods in quantitative and qualitative domains.
- How does the research ensure methodological soundness, aligning with scientific best practices?

1 What is the primary purpose of basic research?

- A. Immediate application in practice
- B. Exploration and understanding of fundamental concepts
- C. Solving real-world problems

2 Applied research is characterized by its emphasis on:

- A. Generating new theoretical frameworks
- B. Immediate usefulness and application
- C. Investigating fundamental principles

3 What distinguishes applied research from basic research?

- A. Theoretical orientation
 - B. Impact on practitioner communities
 - C. Rigorous methodology
4. Academic Community Impact:

4 Basic research often contributes significantly to which community?

- A. Practitioner communities
- B. Academic communities
- C. Both equally

5. Principles of Responsible Research:

Which aspect is crucial in responsible research according to Tsui's principles?

- A. Rigorous methodology
- B. Direct and immediate use for managers
- C. Academic orientation

Applied research is likened to consultancy when:

- A. It focuses on generating new theories
- B. It is conducted thoroughly and is directly useful to practitioners
- C. It is exploratory in nature

What is an example of a purpose for research projects on the applied end of the continuum?

- A. Understanding and explaining fundamental concepts
- B. In-depth investigations within a broader context
- C. Exploring organizational differences

Regardless of the research project's position on the continuum, what is essential?

- A. Rapid application of findings
- B. Attention to the entire research process with rigour
- C. Sole focus on academic impact

5 Who are the ultimate users emphasized in responsible research?

- A. Researchers and academics
- B. Practitioners, policymakers, and students
- C. General public

6 Basic research primarily focuses on:

- A. Immediate problem-solving
- B. Understanding and exploring fundamental principles
- C. Direct application in practice

Write up a reflection 100-200 words based on this class



Box 1.4 **Checklist of** **questions to ask** **yourself when** **making reflective** **diary entries**

In relation to each experience. . .

- ✓ What has gone well?
 - Why has it gone well?
 - So what does this mean in relation to my research?

- ✓ What has not gone so well?
 - Why has it not gone so well?
 - So what does this mean in relation to my research?
- ✓ What adjustments will/did I make to my research following my reflection?

Looking back. . .

- ✓ How could I have improved on the adjustments made?
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up next....

Lecture 2:

Generating a Research Questions

identify the characteristics of a good research idea;

- **generate your own research ideas;**
- **refine your research ideas;**
- **express your research idea as a clear overarching research question, a research aim and research objectives or investigative research questions;**
- **recognize the relationship between the overarching research question, research aim and research objectives or investigative research questions;**
- **recognize the role of theory in developing the overarching research question, a research aim and research objectives or investigative research questions;**
- **develop a research proposal that outlines your proposed research project**