

Qualification: CIPD Diploma in Applied Human
Resources

Module Name: Using Research in Human Resources

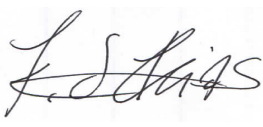
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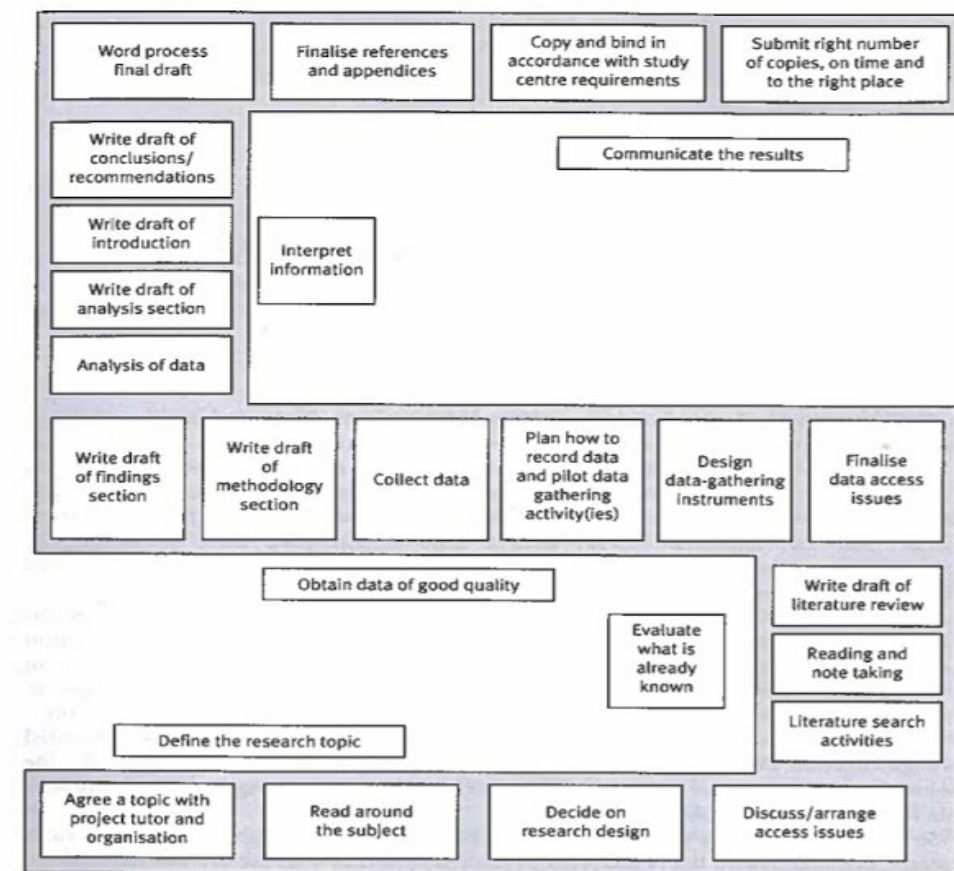
1. Explain the nature of research and the stages of the research process

Research is a systematic method of investigation for a purpose, usually in order to find answers to questions or to increase knowledge. Bryman & Bell (2015), believe all research needs to be reliable, replicable and valid so conclusions can be drawn consistently from the data.

The 'research project journey' was created by Anderson (2013) which maps out the stages of the research process. Figure 1 shows the multiple steps. All steps may not be applicable to every research project.

Figure 1

The research project journey



Source: Anderson 2013, p71

First, an area of research needs to be identified. Horn (2012) suggests four main strategies in which to approach this. There is the 'burning desire' which Horn (2012) believes comes from a personal interest in a particular subject or borne from a problem one wishes to investigate.

The 'replication strategy' relates to repeating an area of already published research and changing the context to fit your organisation (Horn, 2012, p13). This is often a popular choice as it has already been tried and tested.

In every organisation there lies problems, hence there is the 'practical problem' strategy. This is another popular choice, as pre-existing problems that need addressing, are frequently being highlighted by the organisation and/or employees.

Finally, Horn (2012) outlines the 'convenient access strategy' which simply relates to fitting research around a topic where there is easy access to relevant data.

Following on from the various strategies a research question may become apparent. Collis, J & Hussey, R (2014) state that "a research question is the specific question that the research is designed to investigate", in order to provide a focus to the research.

Researchers should use appropriate methods for collecting data. These can come in the forms of primary, secondary, quantitative and/or qualitative data.

Primary data is 'new' data that has not been captured previously. Secondary data is pre-existing information that has been discovered already, via previous research or academia (Perkins, G and Woodhams C, 2016, p93). Researchers should start by reviewing secondary data before progressing to capturing primary data. Qualitative data refers to the quality of the data usually referring to words and meanings. Quantitative is the quantity or the numbers. This type of data is useful for discerning patterns.

2. Compare and contrast different approaches to research

Anderson (2013) states that there are four research approaches, these are;

- Cross-sectional design
- Case study design
- Action design
- Comparative design.

Cross-sectional is data gathered from a single point in time, which is helpful for making comparisons and uncovering patterns. This approach is often inexpensive and provides a lot of broad information. However, quantity is often not quality. If data collection methods such as questionnaires are poorly planned, they can provide inferior data.

The case study design is a detailed investigation based on one or a small number of related cases, often in a real-life setting. The 'case' can refer to a number of different things, ie. a person; group, organisation, etc (Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2016, p 184). Methods of collecting data can be mixed, ie. a combination of questionnaires, interviews and observation will provide qualitative data. This can help to gain a deep understanding as the data produced tends to be complex and detailed, but it can mean that the results may be difficult to analyse as the data is so specific to one context.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, (2016) state that the purpose of action research is to promote learning and produce practical outcomes through identifying issues, planning, taking action and subsequently evaluating the action taken. This approach is about problem-solving, usually a specific organisational problem, in order to promote positive change and is, therefore, a continual cycle. This can be a very collaborative approach as people from different backgrounds can be invited into the planning stages. This may help with evoking understanding, change peoples thinking and potentially lead to positive change. Focus groups would be beneficial for this approach as they promote dialogue and helps the researcher understand current attitudes and opinions (Perkins, G and Woodhams C, 2016, p100). Sometimes the problem is the main focus and the root cause is not investigated. This approach can be time consuming and it may be difficult to measure any value added.

The comparative design draws comparisons between different situations or groups, usually on an international scale (Anderson, 2013). Standardised data collection methods are used to compare and contrast the findings. Collection methods could be surveys or interviews. This approach is good for comparing practices and how they work in different settings but can be challenging to organise and it may be challenging to make valid comparisons.

3. Give examples of how research can be used in researching HR

Research can be applied to an inexhaustible list of HR topics, eg. a company may have issues retaining staff and is considered a 'practical problem'. Secondary data could be reviewed regarding recommended ways of retaining employees. Primary data such as exit interviews or questionnaires can be implemented to produce qualitative data to highlight reasons why people leave the company and make improvements.

Another example could be that an organisation may wish to review productivity through the company appraisal process. The researcher could use the action approach by using focus groups and observations of appraisal meetings, to produce data to draw conclusions.

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