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Using Research in Human Resources – Activity 1

This assignment will look at the nature of research and the stages of the research process. A comparison and a contrast of the different approaches to research will be explored with examples of how research can be used in researching HR.

According to (Anderson, 2013, p. 89) research is a **systematic process of investigation to increase knowledge on a certain issue**. Research can be used to support decision making, provide solutions to a problem and can help with improvement of the organisation. Research should be evidence based where information is based on sound research and not opinion (Mark Allen Group, 2017).

(Anderson, 2013, p. 137) proposes four components to the research process. These include, **identifying HR issue/ defining the topic** by agreeing on a topic, reading around the subject, deciding on a research design and to discuss/arrange access issues. **To evaluate what is already known** by looking at the literature and writing a draft of literature review. **To obtain data of quality** by designing data-gathering instruments, planning how to record data, collecting data, and writing a draft of methodology and findings. **To interpret information** by analysing the data, writing a draft of analysis section and conclusion/recommendations.

Producing a Gantt chart will enable researchers to plan and assess how long a project will take and help monitor progress (The Economic Times , 2016).

There are four ways to identify an area of research (Horn, 2009, p. 90). Burning desire strategy (researchers are born with an interest for the area). Replication strategy (when researchers apply previous research in a new context). Practical strategy (where managers highlight an issue that needs solving), and convenient access strategy (where researchers select an area of research due to access they have to specific data).

Before conducting research, the researcher needs to identify their Stakeholders. They need to consider who the recipient of the report is, what they will be looking for and how it will impact them (Freeman, 2009).

According to (Perkins & Woodhams, 2016, p. 92) data can be primary, which is data collected first hand (questionnaires/interviews) or secondary which is data that is already published (journals/online databases). Data can also be qualitative where data is based around words/feelings, or it can be quantitative where data contains statistics.

There are four different approaches to research (Anderson, 2013, p. 96). These approaches must be reliable, replicable and valid according to (Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 96).

Cross sectional is “*data collected in a standardised form from groups/individuals at a single point in time*” (Perkins & Woodhams, 2016, p. 96). The advantage is that it’s inexpensive, the researcher can gather plenty of information quickly and it’s useful to see patterns/make comparisons between groups/scenarios. Surveys and interviews are methods used here. The disadvantage is that poor designed questions can lead to poor quality data, different

individuals interpret questions differently and there is a lack of control over how people answer. It also requires a large number of participants which is hard to organise. An example of a cross sectional approach is a researcher distributing a questionnaire on sickness absence to employees and analysing the results for data and trends (Sedgwick, 2014).

Case study approach is a “*detailed investigation into a situation which might be a single case/small number of related cases*” (Perkins & Woodhams, 2016, p. 97). Observations/interviews are typical methods used. The advantage is that it’s “*useful where issue is hard to separate from the wider context*”. It allows the researcher to focus on one issue at a time, and data is detailed. A drawback is that it can produce too much qualitative data which is hard to study, difficult to cross check and it can be time consuming and learning from one context to another is limited. Example includes researching about an organisation’s culture by interviewing/observing employees (Perkins & Woodhams, 2016, p. 97).

Action is about problem-solving to promote change (Perkins & Woodhams, 2016, p. 97). The researcher is in a repeated process of planning, taking action and observing the results. The advantage is that it can be used to solve a problem. The downside is that it can be too descriptive rather than explaining why, it can be resource intensive and time consuming. An example of this approach is when a HR professional involves employees in creating a new system to promote employee participation. Involving others can change patterns of thinking by bringing different ideas and solutions.

Comparative research is comparisons made between different groups/situations for instance, comparing levels of staff engagement in the same organisation that is in the UK and Ireland. Data collection methods used here are surveys/interviews. The advantage is that you can see how HR practices work in different environments and make comparisons. The disadvantage is it can be hard to organise and hard to make valid/accurate comparisons due to differences (Perkins & Woodhams, 2016, p. 98).

To conclude, research is a systematic process of investigation to increase knowledge on an issue. The stages of the research process highlights what order each stage should be conducted and what stages need to be included in a research report. The four different approaches to research also helps a researcher identify the advantages/disadvantages and what data collection methods are commonly used for each one.

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