

Research Methods

Nature & Dimension of Research

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Learning Outcomes

- 1) Identify a theoretical or applied research problem, set objectives related to its solution and design a logical structure for a research project related to the problem;
- 2) Identify appropriate methods of research, techniques, and tools useful for the analysis and successful completion of a research focused dissertation;
- 3) Demonstrate the ability to respond well to the realities and complexities of empirical research particularly as to the sourcing, collection, analysis and interpretation of data;
- 4) Demonstrate problem solving and decision making skills; analyse and present research results;
- 5) Provide evidence of written presentation skills by writing the Master's dissertation proposal.

Introduction

1. What research is
2. What research is not
3. Research versus consultancy
4. The consultancy process
5. The structure of research
6. The research process
7. What researchers should do and be

What research is

A studious inquiry or examination, especially a critical and exhaustive investigation or experimentation having for its aim the DISCOVERY of new facts & their correct INTERPRETATION, the revision of accepted conclusions, laws, or theories in light of newly discovered facts or the practical APPLICATION of such conclusions, theories or laws.

What research is not

- Consultancy
- Merely finding facts/information
- Merely transferring facts/information
- Merely comparing facts

What research is

- **Basic (pure) research:** *adding to existing knowledge*
- **Applied research:** *solving immediate, practical problem*
- **Obtrusive research:** *researcher influence*
- **Non-obtrusive research:** *no researcher influence*

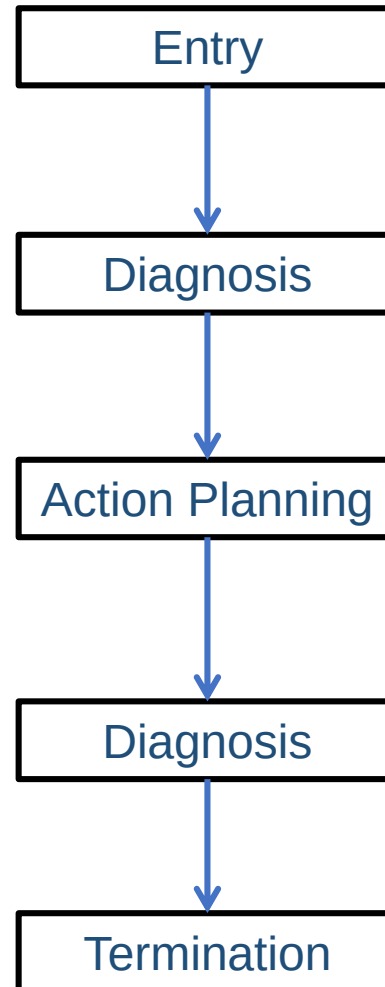
Research Characteristics

- Data are collected systematically
- Data are interpreted systematically
- There is a clear purpose: to find things out

Research activity v consultancy activity

Factor	Research	Consulting
Problem	Mainly fashioned by researcher; more open-ended; especially in exploratory research	Mainly fashioned client, sometimes on joint basis
Timescale	Usually flexible	Tighter and more rigid
End product	New knowledge and new theories, plus better practice	Better management practice
Ownership of information	Usually publicly available	Often confidential
Decision-making	Focus main change at researcher's discretion subject to plan	Discretion limited to main task only
Academic rigour	Methodology tight	Minimum level appropriate to problem
Evaluation	External ,by peers in scientific community, policymakers	Internal, by company

The consultancy process



First contacts with clients
Preliminary problem diagnosis
Assignment planning
Assignment proposals to clients
Consulting Contract

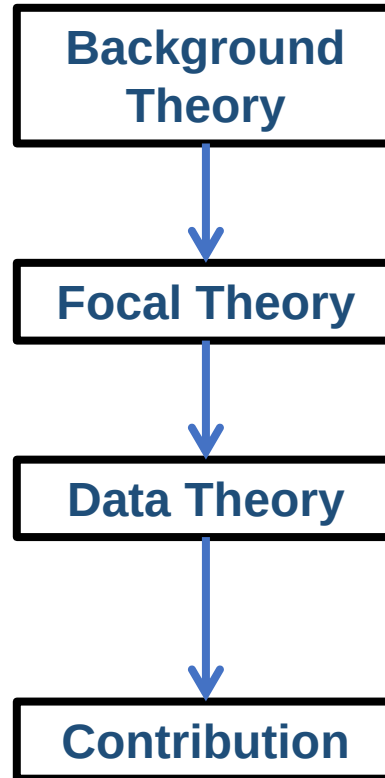
Purpose analysis
Problem analysis
Fact finding
Fact analysis and synthesis
Feedback to client

Developing solutions
Evaluating alternatives
Proposals to clients
Planning for implementation

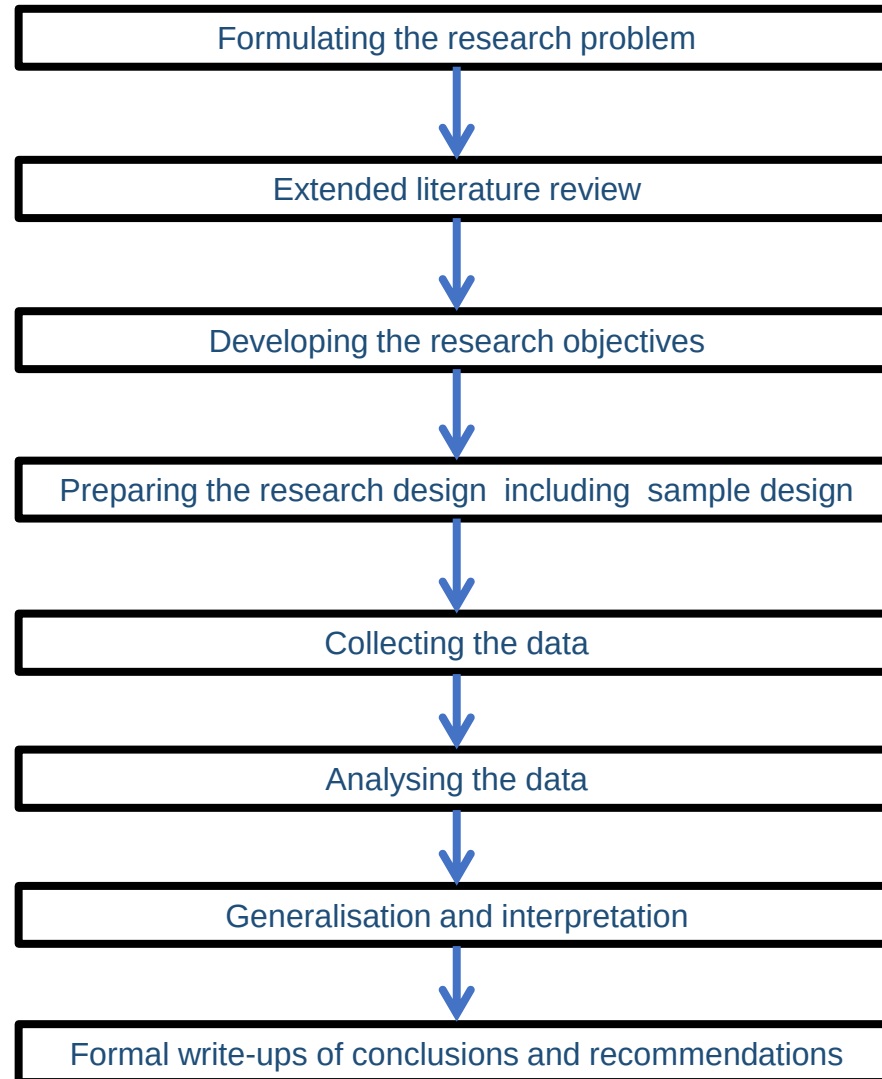
Assisting with implementation
Adjusting proposals
Training

Evaluation
Final report
Setting commitments
Plans for follow-up
Withdrawal

The Structure of Research



The Research process



The process of research

- Largely circular in configuration
- Begins with problem
- Obtaining *secondary* data relating to the problem
- Making a rational guess (hypothesis)
- Assessing *primary* data in terms of hypothesis
- Confirming/rejecting hypothesis
- Resolution of the problem

What the researcher must ensure

- Identify/form relevant question
- Make research plan and assumptions
- Execute, control, reassess & refashion the initial research plan
- Obtain and observe (related data)
- Data must be specific and measurable
- Give research direction by hypotheses
- Interpret findings against hypotheses

Attributes of a good research topic

- Is the topic something with which you are really fascinated?
- Do you have, or can you develop within the project time frame?
- Is the research topic achievable within the available time?
- Will the topic still be current when you finish your project?
- Is the topic achievable within the financial resources?
- Are you able to access to data that you are require to the topic?

Appropriateness: Is it worthwhile?

- Does the topic meet the standards set by institution?
- Does your topic contain issues that have a clear link to theory?
- Are you able to state your RQ and objectives clearly?
- Will your proposed research be able to provide fresh insights into this topic?
- Does the topic match your career goal?

Techniques for refining research ideas

Rational Thinking	Creative Thinking
Examining your own strengths and interests	Keeping a notebook of your ideas
Examining staff research interests	Exploring personal preferences using past projects
Looking at past project titles	Exploring relevance to business using the literature
Discussion	Brainstorming
Searching the literature	
Scanning the media	

Exploring personal preferences using past projects

- Select 4 projects that you like
- Note down your first thoughts in response to
 - What appeals to you about the project?
 - -What is good about the project?
 - -Why is the project good?

Select three projects that you do not like

- -What do you dislike about the project?
- What is bad about the project?
- -Why is the project bad?

Key qualities of the researcher

- An enquiring mind
- A respect of but healthy scepticism for existing knowledge
- A passion for the research topic
- A willingness to learn by experimentation
- A 'never give up' mentality
- Single-minded in pursuit of the research topic

Example of research ideas

Research Idea	Research Questions
Advertising and share prices	How does the running of a TV advertising campaign designed to boost the image of a company affect its share price?
Job recruitment via the internet	How effective is recruiting for new staff via the internet in comparison with traditional methods?
The use of internet banking	What effect has the growth of internet banking had upon the uses customers make of branch facilities and why?

Criteria to devise useful Research Objective (RO)

Criteria	Purpose
Transparency (what does it mean?)	The meaning of the RO is clear and unambiguous
Specificity (What I am going to do?)	The purpose of the RO is clear and easily to understand
Relevancy (Why I am going to do this?)	RO links with RQ
Interconnectivity (How will it help to compete the research project?)	The RO illustrate the steps in the R process from its start to its conclusion
Answerability (Will this be possible?)	The RO is achievable
Measurability	The intended product of the RO will be evident when it

Key questions to evaluate your proposal

- What am I going to do?
- Why am I doing this? Why is it worth doing?
- How does it relate to what has been done before in my subject area?
- Which theory will inform what I am doing and how will I use it?
- What is my RO, RQ?
- How shall I conduct my research?
- What is my research design?

Continue...

- What type of data do I need?
- Who will be my participants?
- How will I gain access?
- How will I collect my data?
- How will I analyse my data and use this to develop theoretical explanations?
- What ethical issues of my research?

Summary

- Research differs from consultancy
- Research is structured in terms of four key elements
- The research process consists of eight steps
- But it does not operate in a step-wise, but circular fashion
- Successful researchers must cultivate a unique skills-set and specific personal traits.