

Portfolio: A Reflective and Critical Analysis of the First-year Doctoral Research Journey

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Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. THE BACKGROUND AND EVOLUTION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM	4
3. THE JUSTIFICATION OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES, QUESTIONS AND SCOPE	10
4. THE EVALUATION OF THE CHOSEN DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS METHODS.....	12
5. THE POSITIONALITY AND REFLEXIVITY OF THE RESEARCHER	16
6. THE FUTURE IMPLICATIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH	18
6.1 <i>Strengths and potential contributions</i>	18
6.2 <i>Limitations and Risks</i>	18
7. CONCLUSION	19
REFERENCES.....	21
APPENDIXES.....	25

Table of Figures

FIGURE 1 EVOLUTION OF BACKGROUND IN FOUR ASSIGNMENTS.....	5
FIGURE 2 KÜBLER-ROSS CHANGE CURVE MODEL.....	7
FIGURE 3 AN EXAMPLE OF REFERENCE NOTE.....	10
FIGURE 4 RESEARCH DESIGN MAP	13

Table of Appendixes

APPENDIX 1 ACADEMIC POSTER.....	25
APPENDIX 2 REFERENCE NOTE.....	26
APPENDIX 3 INTERVIEW CONTENT CODING	30

1. Introduction

2. The background and evolution of the research problem

Revealing the background of the research problem is fundamental to ensuring the originality and rationale of the research (Majid, 2017). Researchers systematically engage in comprehensive literature reviews to assimilate insights into antecedent findings and extant challenges in the field of study, thereby identifying new research opportunities (Frank and Hatak, 2014). The research background establishes a contextual environment for the reader's basic understanding of the research field and better explains to them why this problem is worth studying (Grant and Osanloo, 2014). By exploring the social, economic, historical and environmental impacts related to the research problem, the significance of the research and its contribution to academic value and practical reality can be clearly demonstrated.

A core topic of my research is an in-depth understanding of the conflicts and resolution mechanisms between xxxxx . Fortunately, this research topic did not change significantly during my entire year of doctoral studies. In the four doctoral course assignments I have completed, I have always insisted on choosing this research topic as the starting point for the assignment. I laid the initial foundation through the first assignment, that is, Research Principles and Philosophy, and each subsequent assignment is the result of my further optimisation or addition to the previous assignment. Therefore, there is a strong correlation between the four assignments. Compared with those researchers who changed the topic (actively or passively) during

the course of their research, the coherent and complete research actions I developed during my first year of doctoral study clearly demonstrated the process of my thinking about this topic as a researcher. Regarding the background of the research problem, I used Figure 1 to show the background presented in the four assignments and point out the changes.

Figure 1 Evolution of Background in Four Assignments

Module Name	Completion Date	Research problem background	Changes
1 . Research Principles		✓ Use government documents to emphasise that the focus of	
			management. (5) Removed impact of conflict on university operations and students.
4. Quantitative Research Methods	October 2023	✓ Based on the third assignment, provide more sufficient theoretical and practical evidence to illustrate each point. ✓ How conflict affects university operations and student.	(1) To further clarify the relationship between management change and conflict generation within universities. (2) Increased impact of conflict on reform and management effectiveness within universities.

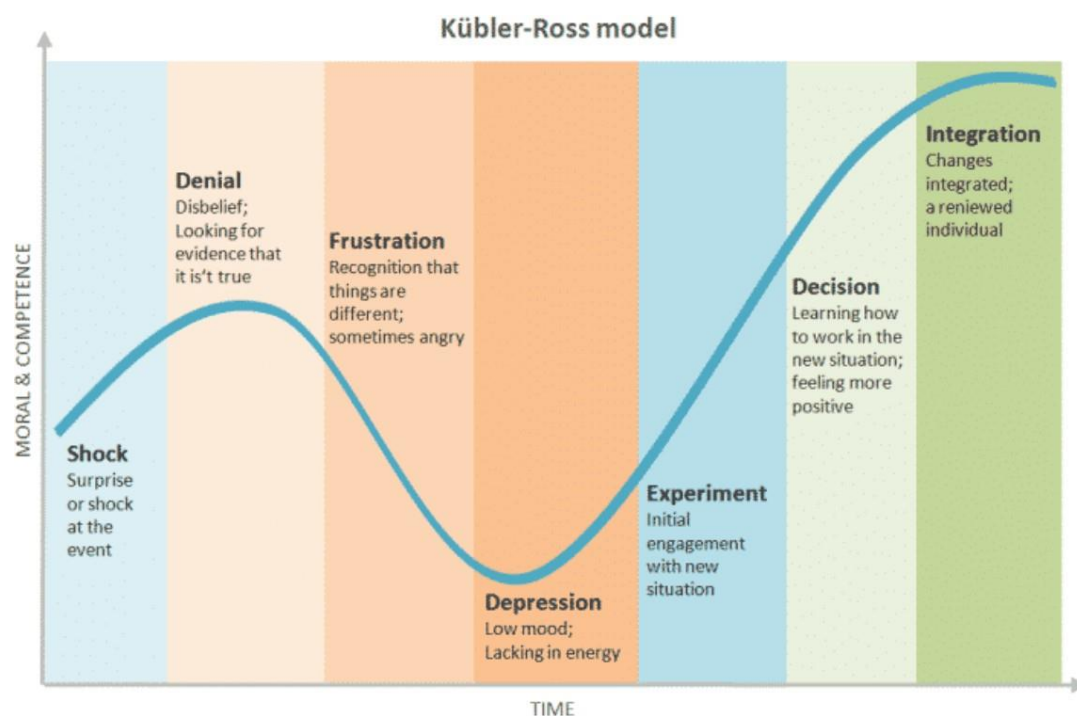
The quality of higher education will be a hot debate in xxxx in the next xxxx. The public attention is caused by the government document. From my first assignment, I was initially thinking about how conflict between xxxxxxxx can lead to internal disunity that hinders shared goals of higher education quality, then reinforcing the need for conflict resolution. The second assignment was completed immediately after the first assignment, so I did not have enough time to think critically about how to refine the background of the research problem. I retained most of the content and added a discussion of how conflicts between administrators and academics impact on the university operations and student, but not in depth. I polish sentences and add coherence to enhance the logical flow of the presentation rather than abrupt conclusions. As can be seen from Figure 1, there was a gap of 4 months between my second assignment and my third assignment. During this period, the doctoral course study and literature reading enhanced my exploratory thinking.

Therefore, the third assignment made more changes. After an in-depth study of the x" document, it listed specific measures in Chapter 43 for the quality

The government intends to guide universities to change existing management structures and establish new systems and regulations to promote the potential for internal change actions in universities. Under the influence of the power of the government, an external stakeholder, internal management change of universities has become an imperative trend (Bie, 2021). In the context of changing or establishing new rules, administrators are often seen as change makers and academics as passive adherents (Lee and Yin, 2011). According to the change curve model (Figure 2) proposed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross in 1969,

the emotional changes of academics facing changes are explained.

Figure 2 Kübler-Ross Change Curve Model



(Source : <https://cleverism.com/understanding-kubler-ross-change-curve/>)

Individual transitions can be challenging, encompassing factors like the loss of power, prestige, identity, workload, and facing uncertainties (Simpson, 2022). Contrary to a linear progression, as

depicted in the change curve diagram, individuals don't necessarily proceed through each stage sequentially (Belyh, 2022). Instead, they may enter a particular stage at random and, at times, return to a preceding stage. The duration of stay at each stage varies among individuals, with some potentially becoming stalled at a specific stage, hindering their progression forward (Bregman, 2017). In Figure 2, I cannot assume which stage academics will enter when faced with internal changes, but it can be seen from the figure that academics in the three stages of Denial, Frustration, and Depression will experience uneasiness and resistance. In the Experiment stage, if xxxx can adapt well to the new situations, they will positively enter the new stage. On the contrary, if they fail, they are likely to return to the Depression stage, and even use their failure experiences more firmly to support their views on resisting change (Simpson, 2022). In the process of change, uneasy and resistant academics may see administrators (change makers) as imaginary enemies, and the conflict between the two is magnified (Andersen, 2006). Therefore, in my third assignment, in addition to acknowledging that conflicts arise from differences, I also added internal management change as a driving factor in the formation of conflicts. xx

Although the four assignments are constantly demonstrating my attempts to dig deeper into the research question, there are many factors that I have overlooked. Firstly, the influence of the government as an external stakeholder is immense. As I mentioned earlier, guiding policies issued by the government are usually relayed by the government and given directives for

implementation (Bie, 2021).

3. The justification of research objectives, questions and scope

Figure 3 An Example of Reference Note

NO	Author	Year	Type	Title	Aim/Objective	Notes	Key Words
1	Abdullah., Khan, S. I., Saleem, M. M. & Ahmad, N.	2022	Article	Analysis of Procedural Justice and Its Association with University Teachers' Level of Job Satisfaction	investigate the effects of Procedural Justice on Teaching Faculty's Job Satisfaction	Control theory: individuals seek control over their efforts outcomes. Participate but bad outcome VS Not participating but favorable outcome. Causes of dissatisfaction: highly correlated with procedural fairness. Suggestions	procedural justice; job satisfaction
2	Razmaité, D. and Dagys, D.	2014	Article	Are the Requirements for Teacher's Competence set by University Administration and Students Similar?	the Requirements for teacher's competence set by university administration and students, and whether these requirements are similar.	the conflict may arise from the definition of teacher requirements. The university management is based on the relevant national higher education regulations, and the requirements for teachers are at the national level. Social scientists define teacher requirements as a theoretical or scientific research result. However, students set psychological expectations for teachers' teaching, technical and other abilities.	academics ability requirements
3	Kathryn Rai and Rajinder Singh	2021	Article	Conflicts in Schools: Causative Factors and Resolution Strategies	reviewing and assembling the research findings of different researchers on the factors that cause conflicts in schools and the strategies adopted by schools for conflict resolution.	structural factors: the nature of organisation, resources, exercise of authority, workload, jurisdictional ambiguities personal factors: one's ability and skills, individual differences, perceptions, opinions, personal problems solutions: 5 ways	conflict cause; conflict resolution ;
4	Aliyu, A. A., Singhry, I. M., Adamu, H. A. R. U. N. A., & AbuBakar, M. A. M.	2015	Article	Ontology, epistemology and axiology in quantitative and qualitative research: Elucidation of the research philosophical misconception.	Explain the content of ontology, epistemology and axiology in qualitative and quantitative research	Definition of paradigm; The definition of ontology, epistemology and axiology; Paradigm classification: constructivism, postmodernism, criticism; Qualitative and quantitative applications of paradigms	ontology ; epistemology ; axiology ;
5	Bryman, A.	2003	Book	Quantity and quality in social research	Introduction to qualitative and quantitative research	The nature of quantitative and qualitative research; Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research	quantitative ; qualitative

Figure 3 is an example of Reference Note. Reference notes serve as a mnemonic tool, aiding researchers in the collection and documentation of literature, particularly during prolonged doctoral studies (Ridley, 2012). Systematic literature review and background explanation of research problem require researchers to have a large amount of literature reserves and daily accumulation (Randolph, 2019). Whenever I finish reading an article or book chapter, recording it in Reference Note can help researchers organise and classify the content of the literature. In Figure 3, my reference notes include basic information of the literature, notes and key words. Notes record the parts that I think are useful for my research. Key words were used to assist me in categorising the literature. If I prepare to write a literature review about the causes of conflict, I can filter out the literature with keyword "Conflict Causes" for review reading. However, I stopped adding new content to my Reference Note in August. Part of the literature I subsequently read was recorded in a separate Word document, and part of it was collected in a memo on my computer. This resulted in my records being fragmented and difficult to find. Developing the habit of taking Reference Note is something I need to reconsider. In the next step, I first entered all the reference lists used in the six assignments into Reference Note for integration and continued to record the references for the subsequent doctoral research journey.

From the 60 pieces of literature read in Appendix 2 on conflict between xxxxx s. This gap in the literature serves as the focused outcome of my academic poster (Appendix 1) and established the objectives, questions, and scope of my research. Filling the gap is a clear research direction, so choosing a xxxx as a case

study object, evaluating the effectiveness of its implementation of conflict resolution methods and proposing optimisation suggestions became my research objectives. Regarding the drivers of conflict, I prefer to set the research scope o best match the xxx cultural and ideological background. Regarding conflict resolution methods and their effects, I will expand to the world to find more optimisation suggestions and reference.

4. The evaluation of the chosen data collection and analysis methods

Data collection and analysis methods directly affect the reliability and validity of the research (Abowitz and Toole, 2010). Data collection methods involve techniques or methods for collecting information required for research (xxx) . Common data analysis methods include statistical analysis, qualitative analysis, and mixed methods. The choice of these methods depends on the research question, research design, data type, and researcher preference (Ghr and Aithal, 2022).

In the early stages of the research (June-July), based on the literature gaps and research objectives, I drew a research design map on the poster (Figure 4). Under the assumption that conflicts are prevalent between xxxx 1

Academic Poster). If the conflict is successfully resolved, the conflict resolution method used is proven to be effective and recommended for generalisation. If the conflict is mitigated but not resolved, the method needs to be optimised. If the conflict is not resolved or even escalates, it proves the ineffectiveness of the existing method and the need to seek a new resolution.

Figure 4 Research Design Map



This research design map exposes three problems: First, xxxxxxx

The interviews were transcribed into text and the content was coded (see Appendix 3). Analysis findings include:

- (1) The participants exhibited a higher level of acceptance towards the term "conflict" than anticipated, facilitating the successful completion of the interview.
- (2) Building upon the conflict causes identified in the literature review, two additional contributing factors, unreasonable systems design and management deficiencies, were introduced.
- (3) The object of the case study lacks a specialised conflict resolution department, and there is an absence of a well-defined conflict resolution mechanism and procedure. Resolution primarily relies on internal communication channels, but it lacks adequate protection of personal privacy.

This pilot study transformed the research design of the two course assignments of "Research Principles and Philosophy", and "Critical Literature Review for Doctoral Research" into practice, which test the feasibility of my chosen research methods and analysis methods. The first attempt at designing interview questions, recruiting participants, completing ethical forms, conducting and transcribing interviews provided practical experience building and confidence in the execution of the final thesis. Impressively, coding the interview content was a huge amount of work, with only

xxx participants generating xxxx codes. Therefore, more time needs to be reserved for coding and categorisation when finishing the interviews of final thesis. It is easy to miss information by rushing the coding, and small discrepancies may lead to different analysis results (Elliott, 2018). Concurrent with the pilot study was a quantitative assignment. I did poorly on this assignment, mainly because I subjectively rejected quantitative research methods. During the pilot study, I thoroughly enjoyed the entire process and often felt a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment over small findings that were different from what was expected. On the contrary, in quantitative research, data output errors and obscure data results from SPSS software hindered my analysis and thinking. This also stems from my research paradigm, constructivism. Conflict is constructed by the meaning individuals give to it (Willig, 2016). When confronted with the same event, some people perceive it as a conflict, while others do not. Therefore, I strongly believe that conflict does not exist independently of people. I use this lens to view my research topic so that quantitative and numerical methods to crudely measure conflict are not desirable. The quantitative assignment made me more certain that qualitative would be my research methodology.

5. The positionality and reflexivity of the researcher

familiar with the role of administrators and academics in the daily operations of xxx. Unlike an external observer, I benefit from a more comprehensive insight into the university's

narrative descriptions to acquire an understanding of the conflict dynamics. Concurrently, through the reflective journal kept by the researcher, I plan to critically assess the impact of my positionality on the research, aiming to mitigate biases through an etic lens (Oliphant and Bennett, 2020).

6. The future implications and applications of the research

6.1 Strengths and potential contributions

By conducting a comprehensive examination of conflicts between xxxxx , the findings are expected to provide universities with practical recommendations to improve internal communication, collaboration and management, thereby enhancing overall organisational effectiveness. A deeper exploration into the root causes of conflicts can furnish universities with valuable insights, potentially cultivating improved workplace environments, reducing underlying tensions, and boosting employee satisfaction. However, the successful implementation of these recommendations necessitates a xxx willingness to embrace change, a task that may encounter challenges, including organisational inertia (Seyed et al., 2021).

6.2 Limitations and Risks

The researcher's own background and identity may introduce a degree of positional bias, potentially limiting the objectivity of the research findings (Berger, 2015). Transparent research design and reflexivity are essential to mitigating this effect (Flick, 2022). Furthermore, participants might withhold information due to personal relationships or cultural considerations, impacting the authenticity and reliability of the research data. Different nature and levels of xxxxx may have different conflict patterns, and the reference value of the research results will be reduced.

The management of risks poses challenges for researchers, particularly given the sensitive nature of the conflict topic. The protection of interviewees' personal privacy during data processing and reporting is crucial to prevent potential information leaks (Shabtai et al., 2012). The research results may have a certain impact on the participants and xxxx , especially when it comes to issues involving personal reputation and the image of the xxxx . Researchers need to handle it carefully to minimise negative impacts. The dynamic nature of ethical standards requires continual attention and adjustment in future research endeavors, ensuring their adaptability to evolving ethical challenges (Artal and Rubinfeld, 2017).

7. Conclusion

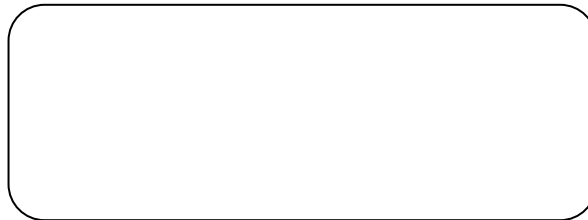
In reflecting on xxxxx , I have gained a lot that I was not aware of. The background of the research problem was initially xxxx and led to thoughts on resolving the conflict between administrators and academics for the purpose of higher education development. With the completion of 4 assignments, the context increases the drivers of change within the university's internal management under the influence of external stakeholders——government. And use the Kübler-Ross change curve model to connect the relationship between internal management changes and conflict generation. The three driving factors of power structure, culture, communication and trust building and the impact of conflict on universities and students will be supplemented during part 2 of doctoral study. The preliminary literature review and the research gaps on the evaluation of the practical effectiveness of conflict resolution methods in xxxxx set the foundation for the research objectives, questions, and scope, but they are still not clear enough. During the part 2 study journey, I will re-cultivate the habit of taking Reference Note,

integrate the literature, and revise the research objectives through a systematic and extensive literature review. Critical analysis of the early research design map in academic posters enabled me to discover significant improvements in my abilities as a doctoral researcher. Subsequent insights from pilot study and quantitative assignments solidified the preference for qualitative research methods. As a xxxx with an overseas educational background, I acknowledge the inherent insider advantages and inevitable biases. Not having experienced ideological education xxx may have created obstacles for me to understand the research topic. During part 2, I will conduct research from an emic perspective and conduct reflexive analysis of positionality from an etic perspective to expand the objectivity of the research. Finally, the ongoing research has made potential contributions to improving internal communication and management of xxx fostering a conducive working environment, mitigating tensions, and elevating employee satisfaction. However, the inherent sensitivity of conflicts places researchers in the sphere of data leakage risk, an intricate facet demanding meticulous risk management strategies. This reflective portfolio serves not only as a testament to the growth achieved but also as a roadmap for the continued exploration of my research.

References

Appendixes

Appendix 1 Academic Poster



Appendix 2 Reference Note

NO	Author	Year	Type	Title	Aim/Objective	Notes	Key Words
1	Abdullah., Khan, S. I., Saleem, M. M. & Ahmad, N.	2022	Article	Analysis of Procedural Justice and Its Association with University Teachers' Level of Job Satisfaction	investigate the effects of Procedural Justice on Teaching Faculty's Job Satisfaction	Control theory: individuals seek control over their efforts outcomes. Participate but bad outcome VS Not participating but favorable outcome. Causes of dissatisfaction: highly correlated with procedural fairness. Suggestions	procedural justice; job satisfaction
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3	Kathryn Rai and Rajinder Singh	2021	Article	Conflicts in Schools: Causative Factors and Resolution Strategies	reviewing and assembling the research findings of different researchers on the factors that cause conflicts in schools and the strategies adopted by schools for conflict resolution.	structural factors: the nature of organisation, resources, exercise of authority, workload, jurisdictional ambiguities personal factors: one's ability and skills, individual differences, perceptions, opinions, personal problems solutions: 5 ways	conflict cause; conflict resolution ;
4	Aliyu, A. A., Singhry, I. M., Adamu, H. A. R. U. N. A., & AbuBakar, M. A. M.	2015	Article	Ontology, epistemology and axiology in quantitative and qualitative research: Elucidation of the research philosophical misconception.	Explain the content of ontology, epistemology and axiology in qualitative and quantitative research	Definition of paradigm; The definition of ontology, epistemology and axiology; Paradigm classification: constructivism, postmodernism, criticism; Qualitative and quantitative applications of paradigms	ontology ; epistemology ; axiology ;
5	Bryman, A.	2003	Book	Quantity and quality in social research	Introduction to qualitative and quantitative research	The nature of quantitative and qualitative research; Comparison of quantitative and qualitative research	quantitative ; qualitative
6	Chapleo, C., & Simms	2010	Article	Stakeholder analysis in higher education: A case study of the University of Portsmouth	A specific understanding of stakeholders and the nature of university stakeholder management	Using a British university as a case study - Interview; Outline the stakeholders in higher education	stakeholder
7	John W. Creswell & J. David Creswell	2018	Book	Research design : qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches	Comparison of qualitative, quantitative, and hybrid methods of research design	key authors in qualitative and quantitative research ; detailing research methods and applications	quantitative ; qualitative
8	Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N.	2016	Book	Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches	Guidance: Design qualitative research and data collection according to research philosophy	Five qualitative approaches introduction	Five qualitative approaches
9	Davidson, J., & Wood, C.	2004	Article	A conflict resolution model	A large number of experimental studies on students and school-age children. Conflict resolution outcomes improved significantly after receiving training in the listening, assertiveness and problem-solving skills identified in the model.	Listening, build confidence and problem-solving skills help resolve conflict	conflict resolution

Appendix 3 Interview Content Coding

NO.	CODE	CATEGORY	THEME
1	This is a problem of insufficient mutual understanding	Cause	Existing Conflicts
2	academics and administrators lack communication and understanding.	Cause	Existing Conflicts
3	The positions are different, so the perspectives are also different.	Cause	Existing Conflicts
4	Full academic freedom, flexibility in teaching, diversity in scientific research, greater autonomy and room for free play in all aspects	Cause	Existing Conflicts
5	The administrator feels that the process needs some monitoring and management	Cause	Existing Conflicts
6	Academics hope that administrative staff can provide more and better services to support their teaching and research. Being more proactive and proactive can create a better teaching and research environment.	Cause	Existing Conflicts
7	Academics hope that universities can pay more attention and invest more resources so that they can better train, continue to learn, and improve academically. Administrative staff will feel that training a person takes a long time and a lot of resources, so it is better to recruit some people from outside, which will be faster and easier to achieve the goal.	Cause	Existing Conflicts
8	I hope that the administrative side will not control too much or be too strict, but also provide more	Cause	Existing Conflicts

