

Qualitative Research

The Research Process & Problem

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Research - A Cyclical Process

1. Research begins with a problem:
 - An unanswered question in the mind of the researcher.
2. Define the goal in terms of a clear statement of the problem.
 - 1 question becomes formally stated as a problem.
3. Subdivide the problem into sub-problems.
 - Several simpler, more specific problems.

Research - A Cyclical Process

4. Pose tentative solutions to the problem through reasonable hypotheses.

- These direct the researcher to appropriate data, collect preliminary data , a guess is made.

5. Look for data directed by the hypotheses and guided by the problem.

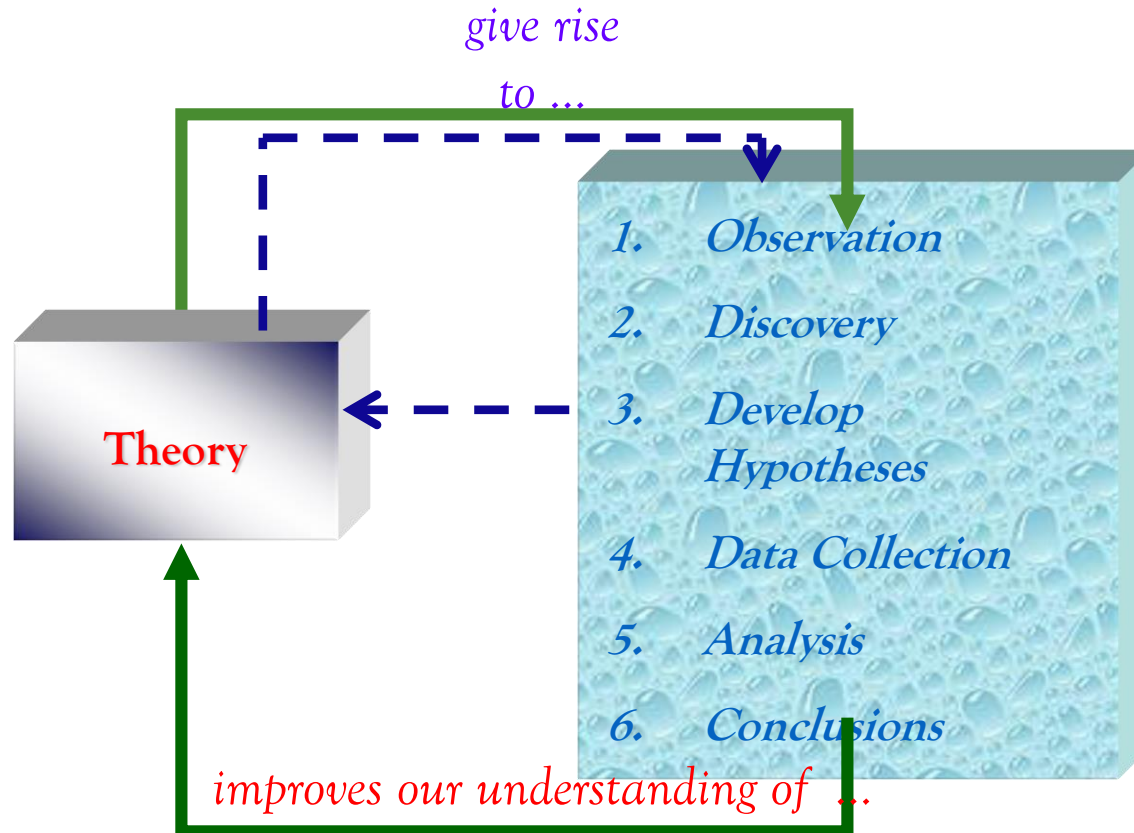
- Data is collected and organised systematically.

Research - A Cyclical Process

6. Interpret the meaning of the data, resolve the problem, draw conclusions.

- Hypotheses supported or rejected, provide an answer or not, to the original question.
- One or more new research problems may emerge.
- Cycle complete.

Research - A Scientific Process



Business & Management Research

- Is distinct because:
- Managers & researchers draw on knowledge from other disciplines
- Research should provide commercial advantage
- Research needs a practical consequence

Choosing a Research Topic in BM:

Two factors are important here:

- a) You must have an interest in the topic you choose;
- b) The research must be feasible within constraints of time, cost, access to data, your own expertise etc.

Identifying Research Questions (RQ)

Well structured RQs can make the rest of the research project much easier!

It is suggested that there are three broad areas to be considered in writing good RQs:

- 1) Narrowing your topic into specific and researchable questions;
- 2) What makes for a good research question;
- 3) Getting ideas for research questions.

1 - Narrowing Your Topic

First attempts at RQS are often too broad to be of real value.

Example 1:

“What are the benefits of Information Technology to business”

Three general words stand out in this question.

“What are the **benefits** of **Information Technology** to **business**”

1 - Narrowing Your Topic

Ask yourself a question:

"What do I mean by each of the words in **RED**?"

Benefits:

From which perspective? Staff, managers, HR, finance, customers, marketing ...

What type of benefits - financial, personal, reputational, business processes, staff morale, etc.

1 - Narrowing Your Topic

Information Technology:

What type? Personal, LAN, internet, social media, etc.

Which applications? Finance, CRM, HR, stock control, etc.

What purpose? Communication (Email, blogs), document storage, decision support, information presentation etc.

1 - Narrowing Your Topic

Business:

Which sector? Public, private, third sector.
Manufacturing, education, health, finance
etc.

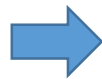
Within a business which function?
Marketing, HR, production, support
services etc.

1 - Narrowing Your Topic

Answering these questions will help to narrow your topic down and also begin to point you towards a particular research approach.

Example 2:

What is diabetes and how can it be avoided?



What is the difference between Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes and how can they be avoided?



What is the difference between Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes and how can British citizens reduce their risk of getting these diseases?

2 - What is a Good Question?

- a) How well grounded is the question in existing theory or literature?

Can you draw on the work of other people to help you structure your research?

- b) How "researchable" is it?

Is it easy to identify the data needed, the variables that are important, the type of analysis required?

- c) How important is the question?

3 - Getting Ideas

Some ways of generating ideas for RQs:

Theory: confirming, refuting, comparing, merging, contextualising;

Practical problems: understanding causes, finding solutions;

Prior research: extending to a new context, adding variables, overcoming observed problems, confirming findings, alternative explanations.

3 – Getting Ideas

Analogy: looking for similarities between problems in different contexts.

Your own experience: what problems have you observed or been part of that would benefit from further research?

Consult your tutor or supervisor: Ask questions about whether your questions are sufficiently clear and crisp.

Situations to avoid

- 1. Research projects should not be a ruse for achieving self-enlightenment.
 - 'the problem of this research is to learn more about the way in which the Panama canal was built'
- Leads to satisfaction but no new knowledge.
- 2. A problem whose sole purpose is to compare two sets of data is not suitable.
 - 'this research will compare the increase in the number of women employed over 100 years - from 1870 to 1970 - with the employment of men over the same period'
- Trip to the library will solve this.

Situations to avoid

- 3. Calculating a correlation coefficient between two sets of data to show a relationship is not acceptable research.
 - This is a proposal to perform a calculation that a computer can do more quickly.
 - Correlation coefficient tells nothing of why the relationship exists.
 - Only a tool of research, no research problem.
 - Cause of relationship? - suggests a problem for research.

Situations to avoid

- 4. Problems that results in a yes or no answer not suitable.
 - 'is homework beneficial to children?'
 - The research issue is not whether homework is beneficial, but what components are giving the benefit?
 - Which are counterproductive?
 - Then could structure homework with more purpose.

Find a legitimate problem

1. Read the literature!

- Your project might:
 - Address suggestions for future research another researcher has offered.
 - Replicate a research project in a different setting or different population.
 - Consider how various subpopulations might behave differently in the same situation.
 - Apply an existing perspective or explanation to a new situation.

Find a legitimate problem

- Explore unexpected or contradictory findings in previous studies.
- Challenge research findings that seem to contradict what you know or believe to be true.
- Scan the media.
- Reading also gives a theoretical base on which to build a rationale.
- 2. Attend guest lectures, conferences, CIBS.
 - Share ideas, what's hot and what's not.

Find a legitimate problem

- 3. Seek advice of experts - ask your tutors.
- 4. Choose a topic that interests you.
- 5. Choose a topic others will find worthy of attention.

Attributes of a good research topic

- Capability - is it feasible?
 - Personal interest?
 - Have necessary research skills?
 - Language, stats.
 - Achievable in time frame?
 - Project current when finished?
 - Financially feasible?
 - Access to data required?

Attributes of a good research topic

- Appropriateness: is it worthwhile?
 - Fit our requirements of IS dissertation?
 - Research topic have a clear link to theory?
 - Can you state RQs & objectives clearly?
 - Provide fresh insights into the topic?
 - Does the topic relate to the idea/goal given to you?
 - Finding symmetrical? i.e. Of similar value whatever the outcome?
 - Does the research topic match career goals?

Research: More than just Facts

Research that is just aimed at finding out numerical facts and figures is very limiting in scope. But facts can be a useful starting point.

Better is to try and define a research project that tries to uncover the reasons, views, opinions or causal relationships behind the facts.

Research: More than just Facts

Fact	Possible Research Questions
The UK Government has introduced increased university tuition fees as of September 2012.	1. What has driven the Government's agenda on tuition fees since they were first introduced in 1998? 2. What has been the impact of tuition fees on student numbers at UK universities since they were introduced? What prompts students to want to attend University? 3. What is the likely impact of tuition fees on student numbers over the next 10 years?
Over the last 60 years, the average number of daily newspapers bought per day has dropped from 1.5 to 0.4 per household.	1. How has the landscape of news media changed over the last 60 years? 2. How do consumers prefer to engage with news outlets? 3. How are publishers responding to the changes in consumer preferences?

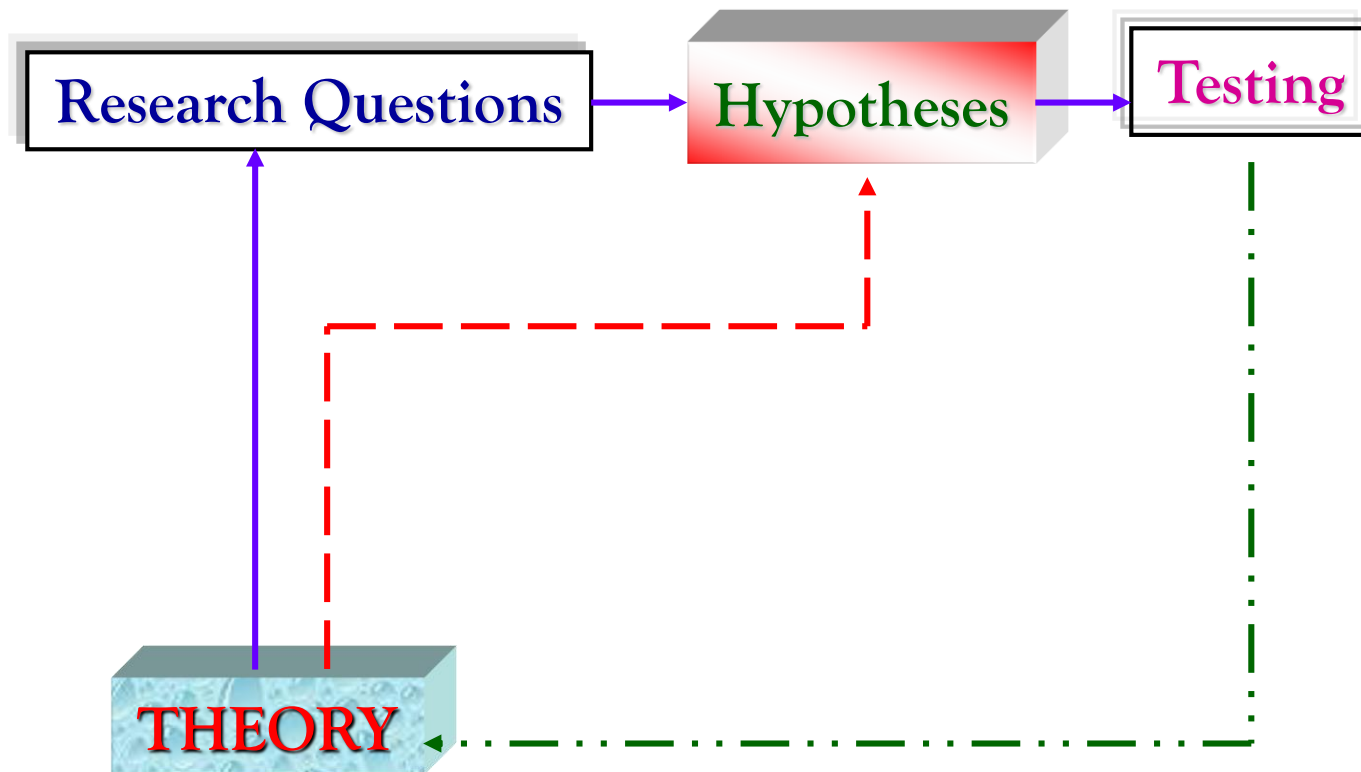
Research: More than just Facts

Fact	Possible Research Questions
A number of recent studies have revealed that as many as 70 Percent of all projects end in failure.	1. To what extent does a project manager's lack of people skills contribute to project failure? 2. To what extent is a weak work breakdown structure implicated in the failure of projects. 3. How far is the effective management of client expectations a key determinant of whether or not a project fails? 4. To what extent is project complexity a key determinant of whether or not a project fails 5. How far does the balance of skills and capabilities in a project team affect project success?

Hypotheses & Research Questions

Hypothesis	A corresponding Research Question
Project failure is positively and instantaneously impacted by the lack of skills of the IS project manager.	To what extent does an IS project manager's lack of skills contribute to project failure?
Advertising is positively related to sales.	Does advertising influence sales?
Sales territory size is negatively related to customer service ratings.	Is sales territory size related to customer service ratings?
Business units using flex-time have lower unit labor costs than do those using standard schedule procedures.	Do flexible schedules create increased labor efficiency?
Consumers rate products with blue packages as higher in quality than products in orange packages.	Does package color affect product quality ratings?
Project success is positively related to the balance of skills within the project team.	How far does the balance of skills and capabilities within a project team determine projects success or failure
People living in countries near the equator drink more beer per capita than do people from the countries further from the equator.	Is region related to beverage consumption?
Female employees report higher job satisfaction than do male employees with the same job.	Is an employee's gender related to job satisfaction?

Research Questions and Hypotheses



Writing an Research Proposal

Writing a research proposal is a crucial part of
The research process; the proposal shows :

- what you plan to do in the future;
- how you are going to do it and
- when you plan to do it.

Purpose of the Proposal

- Organising your ideas into a coherent statement;
- Clarifying your thoughts;
- Convincing your tutor/audience that the research
 - Is doable
 - Relevant
 - Worth the time
 - Worth the money

Framework for the Proposal

- Title
- Introduction
 - Problem definition - 'what to do'
 - Research aim & objectives
 - Hypotheses, research questions
 - Background
- Literature review
 - Theoretical underpinning/hypotheses/concepts
 - Wide variety of academic sources and opinions

Framework for the Proposal

- Methodology - 'how to do it'
 - Primary and secondary data sources
 - Data collection techniques
 - Data analysis techniques
 - Outline of research methods and sampling techniques
- Bibliography
- Dissertation Plan

- Reference
- Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012, Research Methods for Business Students, 6th edition, Pearson.