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Editorial Ann Brown

This issue comprises research originally submitted to the 14th European Conference on Research Methodology for Business and Management Studies. The eight papers introduce an extra-ordinary range of issues on four key aspects of research methods –

1. Research process (3 papers)
2. Action Research (1 paper)
3. Mixed Methods (2 papers)
4. Qualitative Research (2 papers)

1 Research process

The three papers on research process cover a wide ground! Anthony Storey addresses the vexed question of data fabrication and falsification. He is severe in his judgement as to the adverse consequences that this behavior entails, but shows us how easy it is for large scale research projects to fall into such errors through an uncritical handling of the data collection process. The examples of data falsification detection he presents, are fascinating. But perhaps the most significant part of his paper is the research protocol he proposes to militate against falsification and fabrication. Any business research student who is wrestling with the literature review for the first time will find the paper by Kambidima Wotela valuable. It not only explains how the results of the literature review process are embedded in all aspects of a research project, but offers a detailed guide to carrying out the literature review for students, new to the business discipline. The third paper by Lesley Gill, Philip Ramsey, Sarah Leberman and Stephen Atkins focuses on the issue of trust. Creating the trust of colleagues, interviewees and fellow trainees is an important ingredient of success for research projects and this paper presents the concept of a World Café as a technique for building trust.

2 Action Research

The paper by Gertjan Schuiling and Derk Jan Kiewiet describes an important and significant development made by the Dutch universities of applied sciences in applying Action Research methods. The concern that research should have both rigour and relevance has led to an intense focus on the Action Research process. The proposed triple process structure presented in the paper offers a promising way to achieve both, although it makes major demands on the various groups likely to be involved in the research project.

3 Mixed Methods

Two papers illustrate how effective a Mixed Methods approach can be. Razali Rozilawati, Fares Amwar Marfizah Abdul Rahman and Fatin Filzahti Ismail show us it’s value for researching the Requirements Engineering (RE) step of systems engineering (SE), while Udeni Salmon makes the case for using this method when investigating innovation in family run manufacturing SMEs in the UK. Both papers present empirical case research to illustrate and support their claims.

4 Qualitative Research methods

Qualitative Research methods present challenges at all stages of the research. These two papers offer guides to two separate stages - the methodology stage (Tar Rooney, Katrina Lawlor and Eddie Rohan) and the data elicitation stage (Efrider Maramwidze-Merrison). Tar Rooney and colleagues make a good case for story-telling as a methodology, distilled from their own experience in the consumer banking sector. Efrider Maramwidze-Merrison focuses on the knotty problem of getting access to interviewees in the business elite. The paper makes interesting reading as the methods presented are based on the author’s PhD work in obtaining interviews with the business elite concerned with investment in the South African banking sector.
Militating against data fabrication and falsification: A protocol of trias politica for business research

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Abstract: Data fabrication and falsification are clear breaches of research ethics, but have been shown to be insidious factors in various research disciplines. It would be naïve to believe that data fabrication and falsification do not affect the validity and reliability of business research. It behoves all users of such research to militate against these unethical practices and ensure that they do not go undetected. This paper briefly reviews the motivations for researchers, interviewers or surveyors to falsify or fabricate research data. This is followed by a discussion of techniques in the literature for detecting such unethical and fraudulent practices. Typically, these rely on the premise that falsification or fabrication of data results in anomalies in the dataset that cannot be attributed to sampling or methodology.

A number of business case studies are discussed involving subtle data anomalies that could be attributable to fabrication or falsification or data. It is demonstrated that tried and tested parametric or non-parametric statistical tests are often more than sufficient to identify these anomalies that characterise bogus data. However, data fabrication and falsification are not necessarily self-evident and it may therefore require an unconventional and innovative approach to determine the appropriate variables of analysis. Analysis of the phenomenon leads to the conclusion that data fabrication and falsification are most easily detected by carrying out analyses on apparently extraneous variables, as these would tend to be neglected by the errant interviewer or surveyor. This leads to proposing a generic approach to detecting bogus data and a corresponding protocol to militate against it.

A protocol is proposed that separates the essential research functions by adopting the trias politica principle, or separation of powers, analogous to the three branches of government: the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The protocol requires the three functions of research design plus substantive analysis, data collection, and data verification to be separated. Suggestions for presenting data analyses and research findings that will ensure greater transparency, militate against data fabrication and falsification, improve reliability, and promote research integrity are included. The paper concludes with a specific recommendation to academics, consultants, reviewers, examiners, and other users of business research to hold researchers more accountable for their validity and reliability of their research outputs.

Keywords: Data falsification; Data fabrication; Bogus research data; Research protocol; Separation of responsibilities; Trias politica.

1 Background

In the context of research, data fabrication is the creation of bogus data that either supplements or substitutes for genuine research data, while data falsification is the deliberate altering of research data (Herndon, 2016) and is symptomatically no different from data fabrication. Data fabrication or falsification – sometimes euphemistically referred to as data “curbstoning” (e.g. Birnbaum, Borriello, Flaxman, DeRenzi, & Karlin, 2013; Clark & Moul, 2004; Kennickell, 2015) – can occur at various stages in the research process, and can be perpetrated by interviewers, enumerators, surveyors, researchers, respondents, or any others participants in the research. There can be no debate that data fabrication and falsification fall within the definition of research misconduct or questionable research practices (Banks, Rogelberg, Woznyj, Landis, & Rupp, 2016) and there can be no justification or rationale for tolerating them in business research.

It is worth reflecting on the potential impact of data fabrication or falsification on other researchers, and research users. The most direct consequence is that the users of the research (and potentially the researchers themselves) are likely to be misled to assume validity and reliability that the research does not merit. Depending on the extent and nature of the fabrication or falsification, results may be obfuscated, exaggerated, or entirely erroneous. Strategic and operational business decisions, as well as future academic research activities will be misinformed while stakeholders and decision makers remain obliviously vulnerable.
It is acknowledged that measures to detect and militate against data fabrication and falsification are most effective when implemented ex ante or during the data collection process, for example through call-backs and face-to-face re-interviewing (Bredl, Storfinger, & Menold, 2011). However, such measures are not always practicable due to timing, logistical and outsourcing arrangements. The focus of this research is on ex post analysis to detect bogus data, and measures to militate against fabrication and falsification in the dataset under analysis. This research will not consider data fabrication in clinical research as the protocols and consequences are typically different from that of business research.

In the remainder of this article, prior research pertaining to data fabrication are reviewed, case studies illustrating data anomalies indicative of data fabrication or falsification are presented, specific statistical tests that could be used to identify data anomalies are highlighted, and a research protocol to militate against data fabrication and falsification in business research is recommended and discussed.

2 Literature review

It may be useful to begin by discussing the relationship between outliers, extreme values, and fabricated data. An outlier has been defined as data “that appears to deviate markedly from other members of the sample in which it occurs” (Grubbs, 1969, p. 1). Grubbs (1969) is specific that an outlying value may either be a legitimate, extreme value that has occurred as a result of the inherent variability of the variable in which case the value must be retained, or may be an anomaly or error in which case the value may be omitted from the dataset. It is noted that fabricated or falsified data may or may not appear as outliers or extreme values, and therefore procedures for detecting outliers (e.g. Grubbs, 1969) are not appropriate for detecting fabricated or falsified data.

2.1 Motivation for fabricating or falsifying data

Bredl et al. (2011) refer to a number of reasons why interviewers might be inclined to falsify survey data. For example, typically interviewers are not involved in the data processing, and do not have a vested interest in the quality of the data and the research output. Interviewers may not be knowledgeable in research design, sampling protocols and research ethics (American Association for Public Opinion Research, 2003) and may not appreciate their impact on the research. Typically, interviewers’ performance and remuneration are evaluated not in terms of data quality, but rather by the number of completed interviews (Kennickell, 2002), thereby creating a perverse incentive to falsify data. Other possible reasons for fabricating data include avoiding asking sensitive questions which could provoke abusive responses, visiting risky interview locations, travelling time to locations, and lengthy interviews (Winker, Menold, Storfinger, Kemper, & Stukowski, 2013).

2.2 The first digit phenomenon

The counterintuitive observation that the first significant digits of numbers comprising large datasets often do not occur with equal probability is referred to as the first digit phenomenon. The phenomenon was first analysed by (Newcomb, 1881) and then independently by Benford (1938), after which it become commonly referred to as Benford’s Law. Benford’s Law is applicable to variables that are logarithmically distributed, and has been used to detect anomalies in data that is expected to follow logarithmic distributions (e.g. Diekmann, 2007; Judge & Schechter, 2009). The diagnostic potential of the first digit phenomenon was clearly recognised by Newcomb is his concluding observation that: “It is curious to remark that this law would enable us to decide whether a large collection of independent numerical results were composed of natural numbers or logarithms” (Newcomb, 1881, p. 40).

2.3 Metadata and missing data

Metadata (i.e. data about the data) can indicate potential data quality issues. Examples of survey metadata include date- and time-stamps, interview “hit rate”, interviewer identifier, interview location, language, and medium of data collection – e.g. pencil and paper, computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI), computer-assisted telephonic interviewing (CATI), computer aided web interviewing (CAWI). Bredl et al. (2011) point out that if date and time stamps are available, then interview lengths and the completion rate of interviews can be analysed for anomalies.
Similarly, Schraepler and Wagner (2005) show that those who fabricate or falsify data tend to avoid skipping survey items on the incorrect assumption that genuine participants respond to all survey items. Therefore, analysing patterns of missing data may also reveal anomalies indicative of bogus data.

2.4 Dataset content

Anomalies in the dataset content are not only damaging to results of the data analysis, but may also be diagnostic of data fabrication or falsification. Schraepler and Wagner (2005) found that perpetrators can reasonably accurately replicate the central tendency of a legitimate sample of responses, but that they tend to underrepresent the variability of responses to specific survey questions.

Similarly more complex relationships within a dataset, such as correlations, are also difficult to fabricate and anomalies can then be identified by analysing interrelationships among variables using techniques such as factor analysis or regression analysis (Bredl et al., 2011). Other multivariate techniques, such as cluster analysis and discriminant analysis, have also been used by Bredl, Winker, and Kötschau (2012) to detect bogus data.

3 Case studies

Research into methods of ex post detection of data fabrication and falsification is ongoing (e.g. Simmons, Mercer, Schwarzer, & Kennedy, 2016). The following case studies, focusing on identifying anomalies in a dataset that provide prima facie evidence of data fabrication or falsification, are used for illustrative purposes and are by no means intended to be exhaustive or representative. The analysis itself does not constitute proof of dishonesty and further investigation would typically be required to confirm who may be responsible for such anomalies. Once fabrication or falsification is confirmed then such anomalous data would necessarily be filtered from the dataset for analysis.

3.1 Response distributions

A large independent study was carried out to determine perceptions of 30 organisations among the general public using a battery of 29 survey items. Participants were contacted telephonically by 20 interviewers who then coded and captured the responses using a 7 point Likert-type response format. Interviewers were randomly assigned participants, and each participant was randomly allocated up to 5 organisations to rate, provided they were sufficiently familiar with the organisations. There were some concerns regarding the face validity of the results of the initial analysis of the survey data. Therefore the survey data were subjected to further analysis.

It can be shown that a normal distribution can be used to approximate a binomial distribution, for a large number of binomial trials. The reciprocal implication of this is that if a single outcome is dependent on a large number of independent stimuli, then the probability distribution of that outcome variable will be approximately normal. Hence the normal distribution being suitable to analyse many variables including portfolio returns, employee performance, process variations, and inventory forecasts. This would also apply to attitudes and perceptions of survey participants towards the organisations in this study. Therefore, not only should the distributions of participants’ responses to the 29 survey items be normal, but because the participants and organisation have been randomly assigned to the 20 interviewers, the distributions of the responses captured by each of the interviewers should also be normal.

An analysis to test the fit of normal distributions to the response data captured by each of the interviewers was carried out using the χ² goodness of fit test (Stacey, 2005, 2012) the results of which a shown in Table 1. It is evident that in all instances, except Interviewers 12 and 17, at a 5% significance level there is no significant difference between the response data and a normal distribution, as expected. However, in the case of Interviewers 12 and 17, the data could not be fitted to a normal distribution, suggesting that the data captured by these interviewers does not correspond to the attitudes and perceptions of actual survey participants.
Table 1: Goodness of fit between response data and normal distributions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer ID</th>
<th>Number of ratings</th>
<th>$\chi^2$ statistic</th>
<th>$p$ value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>899</td>
<td>195.1</td>
<td>0.0746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>142.4</td>
<td>0.9241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>110.3</td>
<td>0.9998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>510</td>
<td>122.5</td>
<td>0.9966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>637</td>
<td>129.7</td>
<td>0.9872</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1008</td>
<td>139.9</td>
<td>0.9437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>101.1</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>133.7</td>
<td>0.9761</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>867</td>
<td>134.6</td>
<td>0.9727</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>99.4</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$Degrees of freedom = 168$

Figure 1 illustrates and compares the distributions of responses to a particular item for one interviewer whose response distributions fit normal distributions (on the left) and another whose response distributions are significantly different from normal distributions (on the right).

It is clear from Table 1 that only for interviewers 12 and 17 are the best fitting normal distributions significantly different from the response distributions. At a 5% significance level, there was not sufficient evidence to suggest that the response distributions for any of the remaining interviewers were anything other than normal. Because the participants and organisations have been randomly assigned to the 20 interviewers, this anomaly is evidence of possible fabrication of the data captured by interviewers 12 and 17.

3.2 Factor structure

In a context similar to that described in the previous example, two batteries of survey items are used to evaluate organisations’ reputations (7 items) and the strength of their branding (8 items). A principal component analysis (PCA) has been carried out in order to determine the underlying structure of the dataset. Two components have been extracted on the basis of the Kaiser criterion; the eigenvalues and factor loadings have been charted in Figure 2.
A well-defined underlying structure is evident in the data with the first dimension accounting for a large proportion of the overall variance. By contrast, a similar PCA has been carried out on the response data captured by one specific interviewer in order to compare the underlying structure of this sub-set of the data with that of the overall dataset. The eigenvalues and factor loadings have been charted in Figure 3. Two components have been extracted to facilitate the comparison.

Comparing Figure 2 and Figure 3, it is clear that the underlying structure of the data captured by the specific interviewer differs substantially from that of the overall dataset. Indeed, a parallel analysis (Hayton, Allen, & Scarpello, 2004; Horn, 1965) would show that the data captured by the specific interviewer differs very little from a dataset comprised of random numbers. This could be a strong indication of the specific interviewer fabricating the response data.

3.3 Distribution of response time intervals

The organisation in question operates a national chain of specialist retail outlets that operate daily between 08:00 and 23:00. In order to measure and track their customers’ service experience, the organisation has installed electronic customer feedback devices at all of their outlets. Using these devices, customers are able to provide feedback at the point of sale or service provision by responding to a few critical questions using the
customised keypad. Although there was no evidence of quality issues in the response data per se, the organisation’s executive wanted confirmation of the validity of the results in order to monitor continuous improvement of the customers’ service experience.

Analysis of the time-stamps corresponding to the responses, which were available in the raw data file from the electronic customer feedback devices, was particularly enlightening. The distribution of the responses received during the course of the operating hours of the retail outlets would show that the proportion of responses is highest during the daytime hours and declines during the evening through to when the outlet closes at 23:00. As such, there is nothing to cast doubt on the validity of the response data. However, if the assumption is made that customers provide feedback independently of one another, then this can be analysed as a Markov process. As such, the time interval between any two consecutive customers providing feedback will be a random variable with an exponential distribution. The distributions of the time intervals between responses at various outlets showed similar characteristics to an exponential distribution with the same mean; differences between the distributions of the time intervals between responses and the exponential distributions are not readily apparent when charted on linear scaled axes.

Figure 4 illustrates the distributions of the time intervals between responses for two outlets compared with an exponential distribution, using a logarithmic scale for the time interval rather than a linear scale.

![Figure 4: Distributions of the time intervals between responses (logarithmic scale)](image)

It is evident that the distribution of time intervals between responses for the outlet charted on the left is a satisfactory approximation to an exponential distribution. Therefore, the assumption that customers provide feedback independently of one another appears reasonable. In clear contrast, the distribution of time intervals between responses for the outlet charted on the right is substantially different from an exponential distribution. Therefore, the assumption that customers provide feedback independently of one another is clearly unreasonable. In this instance, 39.2% of responses were received within 1 minute 20 seconds of each other, whereas if the responses were indeed independent, it would have been expected that only 3.5% of the time intervals would have been less than this time.

Clearly the responses for which the time interval distribution is charted on the right of Figure 4 were not independent of one another. While there are arguments for some degree of interdependence of responses during the data gathering process, the magnitude of the data anomaly is evidence of data fabrication.

It is interesting to observe in Figure 4 that, in the anomalous dataset, if the responses with time intervals are less than 1 minute 20 seconds are ignored, then the distribution of the time intervals between responses closely approximates the exponential distribution as expected. Interestingly, analysis of the anomalous responses with time intervals of less than 1 minute 20 seconds showed a distinct negative bias. This suggests that dissatisfied customers may have been falsifying data by repeating their responses as a way of emphasising and reiterating their dissatisfaction.
3.4 Character counts of open ended responses

In this case, a telephonic survey included six open-ended questions; interviewers were required to capture participants’ responses as close to verbatim as reasonably possible. This textual data was then subjected to a thematic content analysis. An additional factor in the data gathering was that although the survey was compiled in English, some of the participants were not first language English speakers, and interviews may have been carried out partially in a vernacular language, requiring some translation by the interviewer.

As participants were randomly assigned to the eight telephonic interviewers, it would be expected that there would be no significant difference in the amount or the content of the qualitative data captured by the interviewers. A reasonable quantitative hypothesis would therefore be that there is no difference in the average string lengths of open ended responses captured by the interviewers. To obviate the need to make any assumptions about the distributions of string lengths of open ended responses, nonparametric one-way ANOVA tests have been carried out on the responses to the six open-ended questions, the results of which are tabulated in Table 2.

Table 2: Median character counts and results of Nonparametric One-Way ANOVA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
<th>Question 1</th>
<th>Question 2</th>
<th>Question 3</th>
<th>Question 4</th>
<th>Question 5</th>
<th>Question 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer A</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer B</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>129.5</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer C</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer D</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>129.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer E</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer F</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer G</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer H</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>81.5</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>80.5</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( \chi^2 ) value</td>
<td>140.03</td>
<td>124.05</td>
<td>98.90</td>
<td>82.25</td>
<td>91.96</td>
<td>119.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( p ) value</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
<td>&lt;0.0001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clearly evident that Interviewers A and C have consistently captured significantly shorter responses than, for example, Interviewer B. As respondents were randomly assigned, it may be inferred that this significant difference is attributable to the specific interviewers. This may indicate data falsification, or at least some variability of data quality.

4 Non-parametric statistics and bogus data

The underlying premise of applying inferential statistics to detect bogus data is that within any population there exists variability of demographics, perceptions, attitudes, opinions, etc. that are difficult for any single individual to emulate reliably in both magnitude and distribution (Mosimann, Wiseman, & Edelman, 1995; Schraepler & Wagner, 2005). Therefore, by hypothesising that the data are random, test statistics can be defined which have well defined confidence intervals for the case of random data. Then, should any given test statistics fall outside the predetermined confidence interval, provided the research design has been consistent with random sampling, it may be inferred that the data are not random and may be attributable to data fabrication or falsification. Well-established statistical tests are available to test such an hypothesis, some of which are identified below.

4.1 Wald–Wolfowitz runs test

Where a dataset comprises individual participants’ responses to a battery of survey questions or items, it is reasonable to hypothesise that consecutive records will be mutually independent of one another. Conversely, if consecutive records of the dataset are not independent of one another, a plausible explanation is that the data has not been captured from independent participants, and may have been fabricated.

The Wald–Wolfowitz runs test (Wald & Wolfowitz, 1943) can be applied to any dichotomous variable and tests the hypothesis that elements in a sequence are mutually independent of one another. For example, if males and females are being randomly sampled from a given population, then the expected number of “runs” (consecutive participants of the same gender) in a given sample can be calculated with a corresponding confidence interval, and the sample statistic follows an approximation to the normal distribution. If the
sample statistics (the actual number of runs) fall outside the confidence interval, then it can be inferred that consecutive records in the dataset are not mutually independent.

The attractiveness of the Wald–Wolfowitz runs test in the context of potentially bogus data is that it is distribution free and can be applied to categorical variables, numerical variables and missing data.

4.2 Siegel–Tukey test

It has been mentioned that it is difficult for an individual interviewer to emulate the distribution of a population variable (Mosimann et al., 1995; Schraepler & Wagner, 2005). The value of the Siegel–Tukey test (Siegel & Tukey, 1960) is that it is distribution free, and can be used on both ordinal level and numeric variables. It tests whether or not two groups of data have the same dispersion or variability of values. By testing the dispersion of data captured by each interviewer against the remainder of the sample data, the Siegel–Tukey test may be used to identify the lower variance of specific answers discussed by Schraepler and Wagner (2005).

4.3 Chi-squared goodness of fit test

If survey respondents have been selected at random from a given sample frame, then the distribution of demographic characteristics of the sample should closely match that of the sample frame. Where an interviewer has fabricated responses, it is unlikely that they will be able to replicate the demographics of the fabricated responses reliably.

Using the chi-squared goodness of fit test it would be hypothesised that the distribution of the demographics of each interviewer’s sub-sample would not be significantly different from that of the sample frame or population. Should the result of the test be statistically significant then it would be regarded as an anomaly and a possible indication of fabrication or falsification of the data. The discrimination of the test would be considerably enhanced by evaluating the bivariate goodness of fit (e.g. age category and gender) rather than the conventional univariate goodness of fit, as this would be more difficult for a perpetrator to fabricate.

5 Principles of detection of bogus data

5.1 Prerequisites and assumptions

A prerequisite for detecting bogus data is that there is a degree of consistency in the genuine data in order that anomalies due to fabrication or falsification will manifest. Such consistency would exist provided the sample is sufficiently representative of the research population, and therefore it is assumed that the data is derived from a representative sample. Should this not be the case, fabricated or falsified data may not manifest as an anomaly and the malpractice may go undetected.

If data equivalence is not ensured in the research design, then anomalies may arise that are due to some form of systematic bias in the data collection process rather than due to deliberate misconduct, and therefore it is assumed that issues that may affect equivalence (e.g. language, culture, and data collection medium) have been adequately resolved. If issues of equivalence remain unresolved, then anomalies may be misdiagnosed.

It may seem trivial to state the assumption that there exists innate variability in any population. However, it is worth stating this assumption because detection of bogus data is frequently dependent on deviations from the distributions or parameters that characterise the variability of the population.

5.2 Analysis of detection of bogus data

Some consistent themes are evident in the detection of fabricated or falsified data. Unless the perpetrator is unusually naïve or clumsy, data that has been falsified or fabricated will appear at face value to display the same characteristics as legitimate, reliable data. However, genuine datasets have a variety of characteristics and properties representing the underlying data, not all of which necessarily pertain explicitly to the particular research study. Falsified and fabricated data generally does not manifest all the underlying characteristics and properties identically; arguably if it could, then the data can be regarded as reliable and the malpractice becomes moot.
Data fabrication and falsification may therefore be detected by analysing ancillary data, including metadata, rather than the variables that pertain directly to the research. The analysis of the response time intervals and the character counts of open ended responses are examples from preceding case studies. Similarly, data fabrication and falsification may be detected by carrying out extraneous analyses that are unrelated to the central topic of the research. Examples from preceding case studies are the fitting of distributions to the response data and analysing the factor structure of the responses.

Analyses for the purpose of detecting bogus data follow the scientific method, and are conceptually similar to and comparable with statistical hypothesis testing. In effect, the null hypothesis is that the research data are genuine, legitimate and valid, and the alternative hypothesis is that the data has been fabricated or falsified. The data are not rejected as bogus unless anomalies manifest during the analyses which may be the result of malpractice. Of course, there remains a finite probability (referred to in inferential statistics as the significance level) that anomalous data is valid and not indicative of any misconduct.

5.3 Conflicts of interest

A generally accepted definition of a conflict of interest in research is a situation “in which financial or other personal considerations may compromise, or have the appearance of compromising a researcher's professional judgment in conducting or reporting research” (e.g. University of California, 2016). An application of this definition is that a conflict of interest may arise when the reliability and validity of the research may not be the highest priority for a stakeholder or participant in the research. Therefore data fabrication and falsification would typically be directly associated with some degree of conflict of interest.

None of the stakeholders in research are necessarily insusceptible to conflicts of interest. For example, the “publish or perish” imperative for academic researchers (Herndon, 2016) is a prime example in which the priority of obtaining novel and meaningful (i.e. publishable) outcomes may supersede research integrity. Professional researchers may have a commercial imperative to fulfil client expectations that may transcend sound research ethics, while the perverse motivation of those involved with data collection to fabricate response data has been addressed earlier.

The need to address the improper or undue exercise of power in government was recognised long ago in ancient Greece by the philosopher Aristotle. However, the explication of separation of powers is attributed to Montesquieu in his 1748 work The Spirit of Laws (Casper, 1989) as he described what we now call the legislature, the executive and the judiciary, and is referred to as the trias politica. Simplistically, the principle of trias politica is that there is a balance of power between the three branches of government, preventing any undue exercise of power, which is regarded as a fundamental principle of good governance. In essence, trias politica structurally militates against conflicts of interest.

6 A research protocol for militating against data fabrication and falsification

The impact of fabricated or falsified research data can potentially be mitigated by detecting the bogus data, excluding it from the dataset and, where practicable, replacing it with reliable data. A more robust approach would be to adopt a research protocol that militates against fabrication and falsification.

Two principles underpin the research protocol that would militate against data fabrication and falsification. The first is that the ethical obligations of researchers should include disclosure of diagnostic analyses carried out with the sole purpose of detecting or demonstrating the nonexistence of fabricated or falsified data. This recommendation is based on the premise that researchers cannot ethically abdicate or outsource responsible for data quality. Indeed, such disclosure would be explicit evidence in support of the validity and reliability of their research.

The second foundation of the proposed protocol is the principle of trias politica; that is, the separation of the power and responsibility for research design plus substantive analysis, data collection, and data verification. Using the three branches of government as analogies, it is suggested that there are parallels between the role of research design plus substantive analysis and the role of the legislature in government, between data collection and the executive, and between data verification and the judiciary. The legislative branch of government is responsible for determining policy and writing the laws that will give effect to the policy. The analogous role of research design plus substantive analysis is to operationalise the research objectives by
designing an appropriate research instrument and carrying out the substantive analysis of the data so as to resolve the research problem. The executive branch of government is involved with implementing the laws that have been written by the legislature. The parallel in research is that those involved with data collection are giving effect to the research design of those who compiled the research instrument. Finally, the judicial branch of government neither makes nor enforces the law, but rather ensures the appropriate interpretation and application of the law and may have some influence on the legislative process. In a similar sense, the data verification role is concerned primarily with the validity and reliability of the data that has been collected, although there may be some contribution to the design of the research instrument.

The proposed *trias politica* research protocol requires that the research design plus substantive analysis, the data collection and data verification are treated as independent (i.e. separate and discrete) research activities. The practical implication of this is that the three activities may be carried out by different parties, or at the very least, be addressed as separate activities when conducting and reporting on research.

### 7 Practicability of the trias politica research protocol

Adoption of the *trias politica* research protocol would have an important and substantial impact on the way business research is carried out.

In the case of large, funded, contract research, it would be appropriate for the client to appoint separate and independent contractors to carry out the research design plus substantive analysis, the data collection and the data verification. The research design should facilitate data verification by avoiding nonprobability sampling and interview quotas, including survey items with predictable response distributions (e.g. Benford’s distribution), and incorporating ancillary variables and metadata (e.g. date, time, place, length of interview, interviewer, medium, and language) into the research dataset. Research reports should include disclosure of the results of analyses of ancillary variables and metadata designed to detect or demonstrate the absence of bogus data.

In research and consulting organisations, it would be appropriate to ensure that ethical “screens” or “walls” are employed between the departments or individuals that carry out the distinct functions of research design plus substantive analysis, data collection and data verification.

Academic research is often characterised by limited resources rendering strict separation of powers and responsibilities impracticable. A compromise solution would be to adopt a consortium approach, in which a cohort of researchers are each randomly and anonymously assigned the data collection and data verification functions of their research colleagues. Although unethical collaboration could not necessarily be ruled out, some degree of separation of responsibilities would be achieved.

Finally, ethical boundaries would be paradoxical in the case of individual academic research. However, it is suggested that the individual researcher would have the same obligation to design and disclose those measures that ensured the research data was authentic.

Resnik and Elmore (2016) note that peer reviewers seldom detect instances of research misconduct, including data fabrication and falsification. In order to hold researchers accountable it is recommended that all research users (examiners and moderators of academic research, reviewers of manuscripts and journal editors, clients of consultants and marketing researchers, professional bodies through implementation of codes of good practice, academic institutions, research students and their supervisors) raise awareness of vulnerability to data fabrication and falsification, and accept responsibility for enforcing more rigorous research protocols.

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Towards a Systematic Approach to Reviewing Literature for Interpreting Public and Business Management Research Results

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Abstract: Overall, examiner’s reports show that a rich research report is one that discusses or rather interprets its empirical findings effectively. This implies that a research should go beyond presenting new data and information but rather this data and information should be interpreted. However, the ‘discussion of research results or findings’ component is a function of the ‘literature review’ component as well as ‘the presentation of research results or findings’ component. Technically, the main outcome or objective of the ‘literature review’ component is a conceptual framework—that is, a well thought-out outline of how a research should proceed after understanding the research problem, identifying the knowledge gap, and developing a framework for interpreting the research findings. Unfortunately, the interrogation of the literature review component is the most unstructured process in a research undertaking and, therefore, leaves students to wonder in the wilderness. Those that finally get it, do so after a long time. To allow for efficient research throughput, university should explore the cognitive trajectory of this undertaking. In simple terms, this means providing some initial structure to interrogating the literature review component in general and, specifically, the development of the theoretical and interpretative framework for discussing research results. Therefore, the main objective of this research is engaging the cognitivism and constructivism theories of instruction summarised in Driscoll (2000) and Gredler (2001) to provide for cognitive processes in the construction of knowledge. We emphasise initial because this will provide a structured approach to kick-start the process of identifying and discussing theoretical and other interpretive frameworks after which the process should then be content-driven after the student is enlightened or catches on.

Keywords: Literature review, conceptual framework, academic field of study, interpretive frameworks, theoretical frameworks, interpreting research findings

1 Introduction

Theoretical frameworks or indeed other frameworks such as models and constructs are important components of public and business management research. They help us explain and interpret research results. However, this is probably one of the most implicit undertaking—even in specialised academic research, such as economics—because it is often assumed that research students should have picked up these frameworks during course work. Articulating this part of literature review is even more difficult for multidisciplinary public and business management research students. Usually such students have no prior coursework in the specialised academic field of study where their proposed research is located and in some cases they have limited prior training in research.

Therefore, in this article, we discuss with empirical examples how to understand a specialised field whose interpretive frameworks are important to one’s research. After that, we point out how to identify and locate important interpretive frameworks and propose key elements of these frameworks that public and business management research students should focus on when reviewing such constructs, models, and theories. In mainline academia, this knowledge is transmitted to students by their supervisors who are also subject specialists in the academic field of study encompassing or driving student research. However, this is not the case with postgraduate public and business management students who might be qualified in another field and yet their research interest is in another field of study. For example, an engineer undertaking a research for a master in business administration (MBA) may need constructs, models, and theories in economics.

We also deal with the collision course—reviewing original material versus latest material. Most academic postgraduate research emphasises the need to review original literature where these interpretive frameworks were first pioneered and yet most of such literature is dated. On the other hand, focusing on the most recent articles implies reviewing contemporary literature that is not original.

When applying the proposed approach, we learnt that most public and business management literature that discusses important interpretive frameworks hardly reveal the pioneers of these frameworks. It also barely discusses the context or what was happening when these interpretive frameworks were coined. This is a disadvantage because without such a context, it is difficult to appreciate an interpretive framework and, therefore, difficult to evaluate its relevance to one’s research.

We conclude that postgraduate public and business management students are a different breed that need a different type of knowledge transmission, preferably, based on what they do best—that is, ‘learn and do’. We note that such students do well in their course work because it is structured but get stuck when doing their research simply because of the unstructured nature of research tuition. We hope that this explicit instruction on an important part of their literature review will help them to discuss their respective theoretical or interpretive frameworks effectively.

2 Situating the literature review within a research report

As Figure 1 shows, a research report has six main components—that is, the introduction, the literature review, the research procedure and methods, presentation of the research findings, discussion of the research findings, as well as the summary, conclusion, and recommendations. Deduced from systems thinking (Gharajedaghi 2006), here we use the word components rather than chapters deliberately. The word component implies independent functional parts that should all be present for a unit, in our case a research report, to be functional. A chapter might have two components, for example, both ‘presentation of the research findings’ and ‘discussion of the research findings’ can be in one chapter. Occasionally, we can split a component into two or more chapters, for example, having a conceptual framework independent of the literature review. However, what is common is having a chapter per component. The bottom row of Figure 1 depicts a doctoral research report or a master of philosophy or what we call a 100 per cent masters research report, where it is not unusual to find three components—that is, research methods, presentations of research findings, and discussion of research findings—in a single chapter collectively called the ‘middle chapters’. Such chapters have multiple applications. They can serve as an extension of chapters that need a detailed discussion of a particular section. Some researchers have opted to present different themes of findings in different chapters. In this case, each middle chapter will discuss the ‘research procedure and methods’ as well as ‘presentation of the research results’ and ‘discussion of the research findings’.

Figure 1: The main components of a research report

The six components of a research report are highly interlinked and, therefore, making it difficult to figure out where one should begin. Remenyi and others (1998), who have proposed an eight-stage research process (listed below) for public and business management students, propose that a research process should begin with a literature review and frankly, we agree.

1. Reviewing the literature
2. Formalising a research question
3. Establishing the methodology
4. Collecting evidence
5. Analysing evidence
6. Developing conclusions
7. Understanding the limitations of the research
8. Producing management guidelines or recommendations
Therefore, the focus of this paper is the literature review component—that is, a component that researchers broadly use to identify and discuss concepts and terms presented and applied in other chapters of the research report (Remenyi, Williams, Money et al. 1998). Figure 2 shows how the literature review component links in with other components of a research report. Of importance is the special relationship between the introductory component and the literature review. This shows that research conceptualisation in the introductory component informs what we do in the literature review but a comprehensive and critical literature review refines and builds upon the research conceptualisation and the rest of the introductory component. The other arrows suggest that the literature review component feeds into the other components of the research report. This proves that this component is not only the largest (approximately 25 per cent of the research report) but the most important because it feeds into approximately 75 per cent of the research report content.

**Figure 2:** Showing how the literature review links in with other components of a research report

As suggested by Badenhorst (2007), we review literature to (i.) understand the context or setting and, thereafter, to conceptualise the research problem, opportunity, or question, (ii.) justify the research, (iii.) identify the research and knowledge gap through reviewing past and current research studies, (iv.) identify, understand, and develop frameworks, theories, models, and perspectives that we can use to interpret our empirical research findings, and (v.) finally develop the conceptual framework. During this process, researchers should also understand the overall discipline and the specific area within the discipline where their respective research is actually located. This includes established and accepted facts as well as contradictions and paradoxes in the overall and sub discipline encompassing or driving the research (Remenyi, Williams, Money et al. 1998). In sum, after crudely conceptualising a research in the introduction component (title, research problem statement, research purpose statement, and research questions or research hypotheses or research propositions), the literature review should be the next undertaking.

## 3 Subcomponents of a literature review

Technically, the main outcome of a literature review is a conceptual framework—defined implicitly by Kumar (2014) as an advanced outline of how a research should proceed after we have interrogated key literature on the research of interest. This outline or outcome should result from a detailed understanding of (and justifying) the research problem in context, exposing the knowledge gap, and then developing a framework for interpreting empirical research findings. Inferring from this, we have proposed that including the main outcome or objective, a literature review should have the following seven key subcomponents or areas of focus:

1. **Research setting or context analysis** ... to understand the research setting or context.
2. **Research problem analysis** ... to understand and justify the research problem we intend to pursue.
3. **Reviewing past and current attempts of similar research** ... to establish the knowledge gap.
4. **Establishing and then discussing the academic field of study** (and its important components) encompassing or driving the research ... to give the research an academic home.
5. **Establishing and then discussing the key research variables and/or attributes** ... to understand what data and information we will be pursuing to answer the research questions or test the research hypotheses or prove the research propositions.
6. **Developing an interpretive or theoretical framework** ... to apply when interpreting the empirical research findings.
7. **Deriving the conceptual framework** ... to outline how the research will proceed based on the summary discussions of subcomponents 1 to 6.
These subcomponents are not radically different from those proposed by Rocco and Plakhotnik (2009). According to these authors, the first three subcomponents make up the function of a literature review while the next three comprise the theoretical framework. Summarising these six subcomponents is what informs or forms the conceptual framework (seventh subcomponent).

Figure 3 illustrates the proposed subcomponents of an outcomes-based literature review divided into four groups, namely; understanding the research problem, establishing the knowledge gap, constructing the theoretical framework, and conceptualising the research process. The inverted cone\(^1\) is suggesting that we should start more broadly and probably less detailed but end up more focused and detailed. By implication, our conceptual framework should be focused and as detailed as possible spelling out how we intend to advance with the research based on literature-supported decisions. The focus of this paper is the third grouping—that is, constructing the theoretical or interpretive framework. This part has three (of the seven) subcomponents—that is, establishing the academic field of study and its components, establishing the key research attributes or variables, and eventually developing a theoretical or interpretive framework. Before then, let us first discuss how we arrived at the structured approaches of interrogating literature on the academic field of study and its components as well as the accompanying theoretical or interpretive frameworks.

![Figure 3: Showing the proposed subcomponents of an outcome-based literature review divided into four parts; understanding the research problem, establishing the knowledge gap, constructing the theoretical framework, and conceptualising the research process](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.0 Understanding the research problem</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Research setting or context analysis</td>
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<tr>
<td>1.2 Research problem analysis</td>
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| 2.0 Establishing the knowledge gap |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>3.0 Constructing the theoretical or explanatory framework</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Establishing the academic field of study and its components</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.2 Establishing the key research or evaluation attributes and variables</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.3 Developing an explanatory or theoretical framework</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>4.0 Conceptualising the research</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- a summary of the research problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>- a description of the research knowledge gap</td>
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<tr>
<td>- a detailed theoretical framework</td>
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4. **The approach—Gharajedaghi’s systems methodology and Fisher’s devising seminars**

The main question is, ‘how can we decode an academic field of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks?’ There is no obvious answer but we can do so if we point out and relate or link fundamental and contextual aspects of the respective academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. To do this, we apply systems methodology described in Gharajedaghi (2006: 107)\(^2\) so that we see “... through the chaos and understand the complexities” of academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. We then derived the initial guiding questions which we then subjected to Fisher’s (1983) ‘devising seminars’ for further reflection or iteration.

As Figure 4 illustrates, Gharajedaghi’s (2006) systems thinking methodology is anchored at the centre of four foundations—that is, holistic thinking, operational thinking, self-organisation, and interactive design. First, holistic thinking provided us with a general approach to any academic field of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks using a set of verifiable assumptions (structure, structure, structure, structure

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1 I should mention that I cannibalised this inverted cone shape idea from my colleague, Dr. Horacio Zandamela.

2 We are aware that they are more recent versions of this book but we deliberately used the second edition as it explains what we wanted to achieve much better.
function, and process) and how these maybe interconnected. Using a modified version of ‘devising seminars’ we then subjected the initial framework to about 300 WITS School of Governance post-graduate students (divided in groups of about six) to interrogate, verify, and modify the initial assumptions over a period of three years until we reached satisfactory questions that we share later in this paper. During these discussions and revisions, we collapsed the concepts of structure and function into one concept and simply called it a component but we retained the concept of process. In this paper, a ‘component’ describes independent parts of the whole. For example, the study of microeconomics and macroeconomics (components) makes up the field of economics (the whole). A ‘process’ describes activities or operations that help us to realise objectives of the whole and or any of its components. Put differently, processes are vehicles that allow us to get the products of the whole or the independent parts of the whole (components). For example, what we have to do (such as research) to make economic or microeconomic or macroeconomic analysis.

Second, applying operational thinking allowed us to appreciate the complexity of academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks as they should be embedded and actioned through research. In the first place, these fields of study and their components, thereof, do not exhibit open and linear behaviour, at least in academic literature. This why we cannot predict them easily, therefore, complicating our ability to understand the academic field of study before applying its accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. Understanding the multi-loop nonlinear feedback relationship between the academic field of study and its accompanying interpretive frameworks is the key to unlock the complexity, the interdependency, and the counterintuitive behaviour of an academic field of study. However, contemporary discussions of theoretical and interpretive frameworks evolve around unidirectional causality making it difficult to visualise how to apply these frameworks in research that exhibits closed loop systems with multi-interdependent relations. Third, from self-organisation, we learnt that no matter how radical we wish to be there are certain aspects in academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks that seem to be universally accepted, for example, description and purpose of an academic field of study as well as theoretical and interpretive frameworks. There is no doubt that ‘established facts’ as well as ‘key issues and debates’ is the blueprint of tuition on academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. Therefore, our work should be acceptable since it gravitating towards a predefined order.

Lastly, while all the four foundations of systems methodology were of particular use, there is no doubt that ‘interactive design’ stood out because it delivered the product, in our case the key guiding questions for

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1 According to Hulet (2013) in Susskind and Rumore (2015: 224), “originated by Roger Fisher and others, a devising seminar’ is an off-the-record, professionally facilitated, face-to-face problem-solving session ... over an extended period”. “The purpose of a devising seminar is to invent mutually advantageous proposals in response to an existing or potential conflict” (Susskind and Rumore 2015: 226). In our case, it was a structured approach to interrogating literature on academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. Therefore, we encouraged students to unofficially share what they do to understand academic fields of study and theoretical and interpretive frameworks so that we integrate their approach in this structured approach. We then asked subsequent cohorts to comment on the visual perception recreated using comments from the preceding cohorts until we arrived at a mutually acceptable model. Susskind and Rumore (2015) have a more structured case in which a devising seminar was recently used.

2 Who by their own right are seasoned practitioners working the South African business and civil service organisations with a notable number from other African countries.
interrogating an academic field of study and the interpretive frameworks. Obviously, in systems methodology, “the ultimate aim of interactive design is to replace the existing ... [approach to understanding an academic field of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks] responsible for regenerating a pattern of ... [compliance] with ... [a structured or cognitive approach after all] the best way to learn and understand a system is to redesign it” (Gharajedaghi, 2006: 125). This foundation provided us with two important processes—that is, defining the problem or formulating the mess and designing or idealising or realising the solution. Therefore, in the following sections of this paper, we identify the mess before proposing the solution. In line with systems methodology and Fisher’s (1983) ‘devising seminars’, we divided the students into three independent cohorts with the first dealing with the context (research), the second dealing with the problem of an unstructured approach to literature review, and the third dealing with the solution. This was “ ... to ensure that the problem is defined within the proper context without undue influence of the solutions at hand” (Gharajedaghi, 2006: 127). Defining the problem and idealising the solution comprise three stages; namely, searching, mapping and communicating.

The searching stage has three processes—that is, systems analysis, obstruction analysis, and systems dynamics. Systems analysis meant stocktaking the current unstructured approaches to interrogating literature on academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks. As is the case, we found several approaches. For example, some supervisors emphasise the understanding and application of theoretical and interpretive frameworks but downplay the understanding of the encompassing academic field of study. Obstruction analysis meant that we figure out why this is the case. Our review points to a lack of research supervision tuition as well as a lack of forums to discuss this shortcoming. There is also a case of emphasising constructivism at the expense of cognitivism when undertaking research. Lastly, we applied systems dynamics to examine and link academic fields of study to their theoretical and interpretive frameworks. It is at this point that we observed that though independent, these two sub-components are highly interlinked with a potential for multi-loop feedback as we attempt to understand and apply them in the research process. As a result, we propose that understanding theoretical and interpretive frameworks should be in context of their respective academic fields of study.

During the mapping stage, which is closely linked to realising a solution to the problem, we have proposed six questions for understanding an academic field of study as well as five questions for the theoretical and interpretive frameworks. Respectively, these are;

What is [insert field of study]?
What is the purpose of [insert field of study]?
What are the components (structure and function) of [insert field of study]?
What are the processes in [insert field of study]?
What are the established facts in [insert field of study]?
What are the key issues and debates in [insert field of study]?

What events led to the development of [insert name of framework]?
How was [insert name of framework] developed and what was its intended purpose?
What does [insert name of framework] describe or explain or relate?
What are the advantages and usefulness of [insert name of framework]?
What are the disadvantages and limitations of [insert name of framework]?

At this stage, we performed three iterations. The first iteration was meant to assure us that we can decode an academic field of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks using these questions. In the second iteration, we applied these questions to decoding academic fields of study as well as the accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks in the social sciences. We refined the initial approach with a further review of textbooks—including [field of study] for dummies—which discuss these fields of study. In the third iteration, we integrated the components and processes in our understanding of each field of study as well as elements (attributes and variables) linking academic fields of study to their accompanying theoretical and interpretive frameworks to the satisfaction of most participating students. After this process, we conclude that it is possible to decode a field of study, without being a subject specialist, for purposes of interpreting empirical research results. However, it is impossible to divorce theoretical and
interpreting frameworks from their academic fields of study. Finally, we communicate this story not because we have found a definite solution but to spark a conversation on this important subject.

5 Constructing the theoretical or interpretive framework

5.1 Describing an academic field of study and a theoretical or interpretive framework

To begin with, one needs to demonstrate an understanding of the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest (Remenyi, Williams, Money et al. 1998). For example, if we are studying ‘savings’ or ‘consumption’, then we need to have some fundamental understanding of economics. Further, this understanding should include locating the branch or component within this field of study where the research of interest is sitting. A research on ‘savings’ can be a microeconomic issue if we are looking at household behaviour or a macroeconomic issue if we are looking at regulatory or fiscal policy. Similarly, anyone studying fertility or migration or mortality should begin with discussing demography and its components. This applies to marketing, operations management, as well as other public and business management fields of study.

Discussing the broad field of study should include what it aspires to achieve and the issues the field faces in its quest to achieve its objectives. After mentioning ALL the components, one should then zero down to the component of interest. Similarly, one should discuss what this component aims to achieve and the issues faced in its quest. Thereafter, one has to understand the key attributes (qualitative) or variables (quantitative) within the component of interest as well as within the broad academic field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest. Some texts capture attributes and variables as determinants and others such as monitoring and evaluation as indicators. For example, demographers have a ‘determinants framework for fertility’ proposed by Davis and Blake (1956). Similarly, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2014) have proposed determinants of human exclusion that one can use to measure four of the five components of development—that is, cultural, political, economic, and social development with the missing component being environmental development. Consequently, as we advance from discussing the broad field of study to the component encompassing ones research, we begin to learn about the overall discipline and the specific area of interest within the discipline. This helps us appreciate the established and accepted facts as well as become aware of contradictions and paradoxes in that discipline (Remenyi, Williams, Money et al. 1998).

Finally, one should identify and review the reigning interpretive or theoretical frameworks in the field of study in general and specifically in the component of interest. We should note that decoding the academic field of study and locating the component where the research is located as well as the key attributes or variables is the academic gateway to understanding established interpretive frameworks within an academic field of interest. With this understanding, one can then conceptualise an informed approach to the research and plan out an analysis plan for interpreting the empirical findings. What then is an interpretive framework? Levy and Ellis (2006: 198) define a framework as “... a generalised type of theory that indicates relationships between constructs or latent variables”. Therefore, here we are using a more general term, ‘interpretive framework’ to point out that whatever the format, the purpose of such a framework is to allow for interpreting the research results. The interpretive framework should include theories, models, and even constructs ranging from those that are descriptive and explanatory to those that are predictive and interpretive. Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between constructs, theories, and models or frameworks.

Most definitions and descriptions of academic disciplines as well as interpretive frameworks are found in introductory course work. This is why some universities insist that students who register for a particular research qualification should have done sufficient course work in a particular field of study. However, one can review textbooks that describe academic fields of study and interpretive frameworks to get a grip on important concepts, facts, and issues. One can also review empirical studies (journals) that have contextualised their respective researches in such academic fields of study and those that have applied the interpretive frameworks of interest to interpret their empirical results. It is the ‘how’ of this undertaking that we focus on in the rest of this article.
5.2 Identifying the mess—what is the problem?

Theoretical frameworks or indeed other frameworks such as models and constructs that help us explain and interpret research results are important to any research. However, this is probably one of the most implicit undertakings in research—even in specialised academic research, such as economics—because it is often assumed that research students should have picked up established interpretive frameworks during their undergraduate or postgraduate introductory course work. This sub-component is even more difficult for multidisciplinary postgraduate public and business management research students. Usually such students have limited prior training in social research and no prior course work in the specialised academic field of study where their proposed research is located. For example, an engineer undertaking a master in business administration research requires economic constructs or models or theories to interpret their empirical research findings.

Therefore, in this article, we discuss how to interrogate a specialised field of study whose interpretive frameworks are important to one’s research. We also describe how to locate and discuss important interpretive frameworks and point out key components of these frameworks that public and business management research students should focus on when reviewing such constructs, models, and theories. In doing so, we also deal with the collision course—that is, reviewing original material versus latest material. Most academic postgraduate research emphasises the need to review original literature where these interpretive frameworks were pioneered and yet most such literature is dated. On the other hand, focusing on the most recent literature implies reviewing contemporary literature and yet such thinking is not original.

5.3 Mapping the mess—how do we structure the solution?

5.3.1 Describing the research process

As Figure 6 illustrates, postgraduate public and business management research comprises two complimenting phases, that is, the research process and the research product that we eventually submit for examination. The research process should provide us with an initial structure of the report and point to the content that we should be pursuing. Obviously, as we interrogate content, we develop arguments and refine the structure of the report. Ultimately, a good research report or write-up is one with a good structure as well as solid and supported arguments. In this paper, we provide for the (i.) research process, (ii.) the initial structure, and (iii.) point to the content that one should interrogate to construct a theoretical or interpretive framework for interpreting postgraduate public and business management research results. We should point out that the structure we propose here should fundamentally change as one interrogates the content that discusses the academic field of study and the theoretical or interpretive frameworks of interest.
5.3.2 Establishing and discussing an academic field of study, its key components, and key attributes or variables of interest

To construct a theoretical or interpretive framework for our respective researches, we need to first establish the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research, its key components, as well as the key attributes or variables of interest. For example, if the research is on ‘savings’, one should determine and fit ‘savings’ and other important variables within the study of economics. Literature on basic economics points to two components, that is, microeconomics and macroeconomics. If this study is from a microeconomics angle, the other key variables would be ‘income’, ‘consumption’, and ‘interest rates’ over and above variables or attributes that describe the demographic and background characteristics of the respondents. Unfortunately, we have seen and evaluated research reports that have discussed and applied theories and models as well as constructs to interpret research findings without discussing the parent academic field of study to these theoretical or interpretive frameworks. The problem of omitting such a discussion from one’s research report is that one cannot fully appreciate the frameworks they are applying in their research. For example, how does one fully appreciate and apply microeconomic theory or the demographic transition theory without demonstrating their understanding of basic economics or demography, respectively? Obviously, if one does not fully appreciate a framework they are using to interpret their research results, then its application is likely to be compromised as well—and therefore, the ‘discussion of the findings’ component will be compromised as well.

Though some are straightforward, determining the academic field of study encompassing or driving a research requires knowledge of the research setting; an understanding of the research problem; and, especially an appreciation of similar past and current research articles. Therefore, the ‘introduction to the research’ component as well as discussions under Sections 1 and 2 of the literature review (Figure 4) play an important role in determining the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest.

Once we have determined the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research, we need to demonstrate our understanding of this field using a process that requires us to undertake four tasks:

1. Determining the themes that require one to understand (not master) a field of study.
2. Sourcing, selecting, and summarising literature on that field of study.
3. ... then selecting and synthesising (content analysis) this literature.
4. Repeating Steps 1 through 3 for each relevant component(s) and subcomponent(s) of this field of study until one gets to attributes or variables.

First, to understand a field of study, we apply the following questions to guide the discussion:

What is [insert field of study]?
What is the purpose of [insert field of study]?
What are the components (structure and function) of [insert field of study]?

5 Before arriving at these six questions we share here, we subjected our initial four questions, derived using systems methodology described in Gharajedaghi (2006), to about 180 post graduate public and business management students using a modified version of Fisher’s (1983) ‘devising seminars’. During these seminars, participants jointly interrogated, verified, and modified important questions or themes that one requires to understand a field of study until we got to the ones we share in this paper.
What are the processes in [insert field of study]?  
What are the established facts in [insert field of study]?  
What are the key issues and debates in [insert field of study]?

As we have explained earlier, ‘components’ describe the independent parts of the whole. A ‘process’ describes activities or operations that help us to realise objectives of the whole and or any of its components.

Second, using the themes as guidance, we then source, select, and summarise literature on the academic field of study of interest into Table 1 (Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet Template).

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<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Public policy studies involve the relatively detailed statements of government objectives in a sector and a general statement of the methods to be used in achieving those objectives” Pg 30. “There are national goals and strategies which are expressed in national processes, implemented by policy instruments and institutions and then ultimately affects society” Pg 32.</td>
<td>“Public policy studies aim to highlight how public policies are supposed to bring about change in a current state of affairs. This change can be political, economic, social or institutional” Pg 34.</td>
<td>“Despite recurrent debates on merits and disadvantages of projects as instruments of development intervention, no effective alternatives have emerged and projects are likely to remain a basic means for translating policies into action programmes” Pg 37.</td>
<td>“The policy concept should or can be universal touchstone of justice: While the policy approach to legal problems has considerable merit when used by able legal scholars to expose the reasons for legal rules and doctrines, it would lead to someone hasty and bad judgements if all judges in all cases were to discard all legal rules and decide on the ground of a choice between competing policies.” (Page 4).</td>
<td>“The key factors to be shaped by policy studies can be economic, political, cultural or demographic” Pg 34.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“Public policy is a principle of judicial legislation or interpretation founded on the current needs of the community, it may be regarded as the highest common factor of public sentiment and intelligence as ascertained by judges assisted by the bar.” (Page 1).</td>
<td>“Public Policy is used to encompass both conscious decisions and the course that policies take as a result of interrelations among decisions, including certain political processes” Pg 84. “To embrace both what is intended and what occurs as a result of the intention, any use which excluded unintended results” Pg 85.</td>
<td>“Policy action pursued under the authority of governments is necessarily at the heart of the political scientist’s concern. Disciplinary boundaries for a study of public policy are necessarily quite fluid” Pg 85.</td>
<td>“The contemporary loss of the stable state has now created the need for the government to become an improved learning mechanism, and in particular to do so by moving from the center-periphery model to an interactive network model with many sub-centres and only centralized themes” Pg 107.</td>
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Table 1: Showing a partially populated Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with summaries of information on public policy according to the six themes

Here we recommend that one should source both textbooks and journal articles. When decoding a field of study, textbooks provide theoretical descriptions and discussions of a field of study while journal material provides operational definitions as well as applications of a field of study. Similarly, one should source both
dated and latest literature. Dated material provides fundamentals of the field while latest material provides contemporary thinking on the academic field of study. Each Cell should have less than 100 words or five sentences so that only important points are extracted and should be exactly as the source article. The page number should be inserted. Note that it is possible to insert rows if any of the six questions has more than one theme or main point. For example, the description of public policy might have several descriptions and, therefore, each description should have its own row to capture the unique description from various authors.

Third, we then apply a thematic summative content analysis when synthesising and writing up on the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research. It is thematic because we interrogate and write-up on each themes. It is summative because we provide for the six themes before engaging the literature and leave an option to derive more themes during interrogation of literature. Lastly, it is content analysis because during interrogation, we should focus on explicit and implied subjective interpretation of material in each theme. Hsieh and Shannon (2006) have provided a detailed description of summative content analysis amongst other types of qualitative content analysis. As one synthesises this text thematically, we should look out for similarities and differences in arguments provided by the various authors. Bryman (2012) has argued that in qualitative information analysis, the greatest payoff is when information across articles is typically similar. However, articles that provide extreme or deviant or counterfactual information on the academic field of study provide added insight. Lastly,disconfirming articles provide exceptional information on the field of study that allows us to be critical on the supposed facts. In sum, similarities might provide us with established facts in the field of study while differences—which could be contextual or time bound—provide us with debates and issues. In sum, if well executed, this approach can potentially provide a near comprehensive and critical understanding (not mastering) of an academic field of study. Besides, since we are synthesising literature from multiple sources to understand each theme, the similarity index (plagiarism) is very low and our discussion does not sound like we are reproducing an introductory textbook. Below is a typical resulting statement from synthesising the summaries in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describing public policy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes referred to as policy sciences, policy analysis, and policy studies (Ham and Hill, 1993), John (1960), Shatten (1965), Heclo (1972), Snyman (1986), Dunn (1994), Hanekom (1995), Cloete and Wissink (2000), as well as Pal (2001) describe public policy as an applied social science that uses multiple methods of inquiry to prescribe and communicate a course or pattern of action or inaction, including legislating and its interpretation thereof, by public authorities meant to achieve an intended objective or relevant knowledge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We should stress that this approach provides for one to link and trace research attributes or variables through subcomponents and components to the main field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest. Such a link provides for nesting attributes or variables whose data and information we will need to collect, process, analyse, and interpret. This rationalised approach puts us in a superior position to understand the field of study encompassing or driving the research and how it links in with relevant components as well as subcomponents and consequently with attributes and variables of interest, therefore, providing for an informed interpretation of empirical results.

![Demography Diagram]

**Figure 7:** Showing demography and its components with a special focus on the migration components and variables of illegal immigration.

5.3.3 Establishing and discussing an interpretive framework—theories, models, and constructs

After establishing and discussing the academic field of study encompassing or driving the research as well as its key components and key attributes or variables; we should then proceed to construct a framework for interpreting empirical research results. Obviously we need to review almost all theoretical or interpretive frameworks in the field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest. We emphasise ‘almost’ because sometimes it is impossible to know all of them. One would hope to identify these frameworks when reviewing similar past and current research studies and during the interrogation of the academic field of study its key components and key attributes or variables. Therefore, discussions under Sections 2 as well as 3.1 and 3.2 of the literature review (Figure 3) play an important role in identifying theoretical or interpretive frameworks in the field of study encompassing or driving the research of interest.

Once we have identified the theoretical or interpretive frameworks, we need to interrogate them using a process that requires us to undertake four tasks:

1. Determining the themes that will enable one to understand (not master) interpretive frameworks.
2. Sourcing, selecting, and summarising literature on the interpretive frameworks of interest.
3. Then selecting and synthesising (content analysis) this literature.
4. Determining and detailing the most applicable interpretive framework(s).

First, to understand an interpretive framework, we use the following initial themes (structure) to guide the discussion:

What events led to the development of [insert name of framework]?
How was [insert name of framework] developed and what was its intended purpose?
What does [insert name of framework] describe or explain or relate?
What are the advantages and usefulness of [insert name of framework]?
What are the disadvantages and limitations of [insert name of framework]?

Second, using the themes as guidance, we then source, select, and summarise literature on each interpretive framework under review into Table 2 (Microsoft Excel Spreadsheet Template). Here we recommend that one should source a minimum of 7 articles (textbooks and journals) per framework and should include the pioneering or original article of the framework under review as well as reflections of both supporters of this
framework and antagonists spread across time since the framework was first published. As an example, Table 2 also provides us with a rough spread of articles we should consider if we are interrogating a framework coined in 1950. Most academic postgraduate research emphasises the need to review original literature where these interpretive frameworks are pioneered—in this case this framework was first published in 1950 and, therefore, dated but original works. Another seemingly opposing emphasis is reading latest work and, therefore, one should read reflections on the 1950 framework published in the last 5 years (between 2010 and 2016) preferably one article of a supporter and another one of an antagonist. These two articles are latest but certainly not original. But effectively we have reviewed both the original article as well as the latest articles on this framework. Our understanding of the framework can be strengthened if we review four more articles, that is, the reflection of a supporter and an antagonist at the time the framework was published (between 1950 and 1955) and another set half way between when it was published and when we are reviewing the framework, in this case between 1980 and 1985. These need not be the exact dates but close to these time intervals and of course any other key reflection should be included. Practically, we learnt that the pioneering article provides explicit information on the first four themes while those of supporters provides explicit information is on the third and fourth themes and lastly antagonist provides explicit information on the third and fifth themes. Eventually, these seven articles are likely to provide one with comprehensive and critical information on a framework of interest. Similarly, it is possible to insert rows if any of the five questions has more than one theme or main point.

Third, we then apply a thematic summative content analysis when synthesising and writing up on each interpretive framework. As one synthesises this text thematically, we should pay attention to the thinking of the pioneer at the time they wrote and published the framework and how this thinking has changed over time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pioneer</th>
<th>Supporters</th>
<th>Antagonists</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of the article:</td>
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<tr>
<td>What events led to the development of [insert name of framework]?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How was [insert name of framework] developed and what was its intended purpose?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What does [insert name of framework] describe or explain or relate?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the advantages and usefulness of [insert name of framework]?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the disadvantages and limitations of [insert name of framework]?</td>
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</table>

Table 2: Showing the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet that one can use to populate summaries of information sourced on an interpretive or theoretical framework according to the five themes for a framework pioneered in 1950, supporters, and antagonists

Fourth, during the review process, we should be determining the most applicable theoretical or interpretive frameworks. How? It should be those that incorporate the attributes or variables of interest and, therefore, linked to the research questions or hypotheses or propositions. Ultimately, it is the empirical results comprising this information or these data that we should interpret. Here we recommend that once we have
determined the most applicable interpretive or theoretical framework(s), we should detail them further as they play an important role in our fifth component of a research report—that is, discussion of the findings.

6 Summary, conclusions, and recommendations

The proposed process in this paper helps one to fulfil what Remenyi and others (1998) have pointed out—that is, using the literature review platform to provide a general understanding of the overall discipline as well as the specific area within the discipline that encompasses or drives the research of interest. Further, one should use this component to discuss established and accepted facts, contradictions, and paradoxes within the overall and specific discipline of interest (established facts, issues and debates). During this review, we should also establish and understand theories and models within the discipline of interest that will be useful to interpret our empirical research findings.

In mainline academics, this is transmitted to students by their research supervisors because they are also subject specialists. However, this is not the case with postgraduate public and business management students. Therefore, we had to propose an explicit cognitive process because postgraduate public and business management students are a different kind of breed that require knowledge transmission based on what they do best—that is, ‘learn and do’. We thought this would be useful because we noticed that such students do well in their course work because course work is structured but struggle with their research simply because research tuition is mostly unstructured. Like most text, Remenyi and others (1998) have pointed out the importance of understanding an academic field of study encompassing the research as well as the accompanying frameworks but without providing for a structured approach to this undertaking.

Further, during this research we learnt that most public and business management literature sources that discuss important interpretive frameworks hardly reveal the pioneers of these frameworks. The literature also barely discusses the context of what was happening at the time when these interpretive frameworks were coined. This is a disadvantage because without a context, it is difficult to appreciate an interpretive framework and certainly difficult to evaluate its relevance to one’s research.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the research students—both WITS Business School (WBS) and WITS School of Governance (WSG)—that took part in the devising seminars where we discussed the theoretical themes for decoding an academic field of study and theoretical or interpretive frameworks. More so, those that heroically applied this untested approach in their respective researches. I would also like to thank the WITS School of Governance (WSG) members of staff who attended the conversation where this approach was first presented for their helpful comments as well as the encouraging remarks from Professors Mike Muller (waters) and Gavin Cawthra and Dr. Manamela Matshabaphala. Lastly, I would like to thank the reviewers for helping us fine-tune and reconcile our argument and perfect this write-up.

References

Using World Café to Enhance Relationship-building for the Purpose of Developing Trust in Emotional Intelligence Training Environments

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Abstract: Every conversation or action between people involves an element of trust, particularly in workplace training environments. Personal development relies on the quality of trust relationships between trainer and learners, and between learners who experience feelings of vulnerability when dealing with issues that impact self-esteem and individual identity. Responsibility is placed on the trainer to create an environment characterised by trust so that learners feel safe, and unrestricted to embrace personal change, address challenging situations, and reflect on behaviours. Developing such an environment requires attentiveness to effective qualitative methodology. The research aim was to explore the need for relationship-building methodology such as World Café for encouraging the development of trusting relationships. The World Café exercise followed an earlier study of 21 Emotional Intelligence (EI) trainers in New Zealand which sought to identify what variables contribute to the design of successful EI training. World Café was utilised as a relationship-building methodology for further exploring the nature of trust and for evaluating the method. This paper begins with a summary of literature on the nature of trust and then presents themes based on participants’ perspectives. Trust was firstly viewed through the lens of ‘inputs’. While offering a useful perspective, viewing trust as an output offered a practical way for training across different learning environments, organisational contexts, and differences between learners. These findings informed a new practice-based definition of trust. We also present our findings that support the need for relationship-building methods, such as World Café, for building trust during the process of EI training.

Keywords: World Café, relationship-building methodology, trust, emotional intelligence, training and development.

1 Introduction

Relationships in the learning environment are shaped by trust, a key element that impacts learning. Trust affects the relationship between trainers and learners (Gill, Ramsey, & Leberman, 2015). The level of trust can influence the degree to which learning objectives are achieved, so responsibility falls to the trainer to create an environment characterised by trust, so that learners feel safe; free to embrace personal change or address a challenging situation or behaviour. The dilemma highlights the need for exploring relationship-building methodology, since trust always happens within relationships - between people. This article proposes the use of World Café (Brown, Isaacs, & Margulies, 1997; Fouché & Light, 2011) as an approach for building relationships that support personal development while engaging in research.

The World Café exercise followed an earlier study of 21 Emotional Intelligence (EI) trainers in New Zealand which sought to identify what variables contribute to the design of successful EI training. Trust emerged as a key element of a safe learning environment, although areas of ambiguity were raised what and how trust is defined. On this basis we sought to answer the research question: “How can EI training practitioners design their training in ways that encourage trust?” We begin with a summary of literature on the nature of trust and the findings that informed the new practice-based definition of trust. Further, our findings supported the need for relationship-building methods, such as World Café, for building trust during the process of EI training and while conducting research.

EI trainers and consultants who took part in the earlier study also indicated that, because of the nature of their work they often felt isolated from professional colleagues. As a result, and in order to build a community of practice amongst EI trainers, a national EI symposium was held in 2012. During symposium the World Café was implemented and feedback sought via survey to explore what worked and why.

Reference this paper: Gill L et al “Using World Café to enhance Relationship-building for the Purpose of Developing Trust in Emotional Intelligence Training Environments” The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods Volume 14 Issue 2 2016, (pp98-110) available online at www.ejbrm.com
2  The Nature of Trust

The nature of trust involves an expectation of interactional reciprocity which entails an expectancy that the words or ‘promise’ of an individual or group can be consistently relied on without guarantees (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995; Rotter, 1967). Gabarro and Athos (1978) define trust as confidence in another’s integrity, motives and objectives, including behavioural consistency, openness and discretion. According to Doney and Cannon (1997) trust is established on two components: the credibility of the one being trusted that their word can be relied on; and secondly, benevolence, which describes the degree to which genuine care for the welfare of the other is acted on to fulfil the trust intention.

Trust is characterised by “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trust-or, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party” (Mayer et al, 1995, p. 709). Trust is built through demonstrations of loyalty and an expectation of reciprocity, as each person accumulates positive trust experiences (Ferris et al, 2009). Trust is given with the expectation that the trustor will protect the vulnerability of the trustee in relation to the object of that trust (Doney & Cannon, 1997; Vangen & Huxham, 2003). Thus, trust is expressed as confidence in one’s own self-evaluation that the other will act with integrity to fulfil the expectation that has been conferred. An individual’s choice to trust is moderated by the perceived benefits to the trust-ee in extending trust (Kramer, 1999). Several factors make people reluctant to be vulnerable to the influence of others, including past trauma and fear (Daft, 2002). Trust is usually freely given until a betrayal occurs. Over time, people learn to moderate trust by weighing up the risk involved, their willingness to put themselves at risk, and the benefits of extending trust (Kramer, 1999).

When defining trust in organisational life, Bachmann (2011) asserts the need for a demarcation between the traditional perspective of trust as interaction-based, and institution-based trust stating the factors within the organisation directly influence trust development, therefore justifying delineation. He defines the former as involving micro-level factors which describes ongoing connections between individuals in roles of ‘trustor’ and ‘trustee’ while emphasising the need to pay attention to organisation culture and context. This means that business contexts are more or less conducive to building trusting relationships” (Bachmann, 2011, p. 207). Dietz (2011) challenges Bachmann’s assumptions suggesting that both bases exist in tandem, arguing that trust is an evaluation of trustworthiness of the trustee by the trustor in any setting. He considers the role of cultural norms and practices that trustees use as cues for making trust-based judgments. Culture, the embedded and implicit rules operating within a group of actors (Gill & Pio, 2007) can be applied individually and organisationally.

We suggest learners do not necessarily make this distinction and enter the training situation with a compendium of positive and negative trust experiences drawn from a multitude of personal, professional and organisational assumptions, each involving varying levels of contextualised relational trust. At times trust is formalised institutionally (i.e., in NZ employment agreements which contain the term “trust and confidence” defining the employment agreement relationally). Trust is part of the psychological contract between the employee and an organisational (institutional) representative, and so constitutes relationship-based trust. The difference is a situational one; contingent on whether the trust-relationship occurs privately or within an institutional context; the point is that it always occurs between people. As in every potentially trust-generating engagement, trustees’ ‘lived’ experience of trustors within any setting (including institutional) informs their predisposition to trust, or trust again in the same or different situation. In the workplace some people might hold values such as honesty and transparency as important, which are at odds with others who engage in politicking, behind-closed-doors conversations, in- and out-groups, hidden agendas, bullying, sabotage, resistance, and open confrontation, which destroy trust, even though as Fox and Stallworth (2009) remarked, we often still go on ‘playing the game’.

Bachmann’s (2011) article describes how complexity of trust issues increase in changing times. Institutional relationships have to deal with increasing complexity and so “organisational executives face a bewildering and chaotic environment in which they have to act as stewards of their organisation” (Gill & Ramsey, 2012, p. 120). Adding to the complexity of organisations is the escalation of unethical behaviour which undermines trust resulting in increased cynicism and resistance to change (Stephenson, 2004). This dilemma has implications for EI trainers, who not only need to support learners to develop resilience, while finding strategies to build/re-
build trust for learners who show a reluctance to put themselves in a place of vulnerability where they risk being let down.

Enduring relationships are behavioural demonstrations of trust (Hoffman, 2002). Therefore, where relationships are strong, there are likely to be high levels of openness, self-disclosure and trust (Gardner et al, 2005). Harari (2002) found a positive link between interpersonal trust and analogous concepts such as openness, integrity, benevolence, and competency. The level of trust in the relationship is established through the many interactions that happen between the people in the relationship, and are prioritised by their relative importance when measured against the trustor’s values system. McKnight and Chervaney (2001, p. 31) identified “goodwill, honesty, morality, expertise and caring” (p.31) as the starting point.

A pre-condition of trust is that the trustee perceives him or her as trust ‘worthy’. Multiple encounters collectively establish the trustworthiness of the trust-ee (Maxwell, 1993). The building blocks of a trusting relationship grow with each successful experience (Redling, 2004). Conversely, poor relationships are characterised by dis-trust. Because people are human and therefore imperfect, there will always be instances where the trustor’s expectations remain unfulfilled. Reasons for this failure might be human error, lack of ethical integrity, and lack of competence (Lewicki & Brinsfield, 2009; Williams, 2008).

At a deeply personal level, training in EI development carries a challenge to learners in reflecting on themselves and their situation which are often disturbing and chaotic and that can act as emotional triggers. Developmental change, unlike traditional knowledge-acquisition, is rationally and emotionally perturbing, and necessitates a level of vulnerability and an equally disturbing need to trust others in the learning environment (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). Further, because of the time pressures associated with training programs, trainers have to build trust relatively quickly, which can be a significant challenge. Learners trust the trainer and other learners to show respect, to value and validate disclosure and, more importantly, hold their conversations in confidence (Curzon-Hobson, 2002). Thus, it raises the question as to how to design EI training in a way that facilitates building trusting relationships.

In summary, trust is high in complexity and abstraction, making it problematic to operationalise for people wanting to design EI training (Gill & Ramsey, 2012). Much depends on quality relationships such as those needed to produce successful EI training outcomes. The time pressures associated with training programs mean trainers have to build trust relatively quickly. Thus the EI trainer must design EI training so that trust is developed in the trainer-learner relationship and learner-to-learner relationships. But knowing that trust is needed is distinct from knowing how to develop it in EI training design.

3 Methodology

As part of the wider research program, an EI Symposium was arranged that provided the opportunity for EI trainers who had participated in the research and others interested in the role of EI in education to meet and exchange ideas. The context of the symposium provided an opportunity for further research into the experiences of EI trainers and consultants, a group who are not widely considered in research literature. Any research carried out would need to involve a methodology that would fit within and contribute to the relationship-building intent of the symposium. Block (2008) pointed to the World Café as a relationship-building method that needs to be more widely implemented in order to establish healthy communities. For this reason the researchers decided to adapt the World Café process as a means of gathering rich data, while at the same time enabling participants to establish professional connections and model a technique that they could incorporate into their EI training practice. The World Café was designed to meet the research objectives in further exploring how to establish an operational definition of trust that can be used in the design of training, while doing so in a way that positively contributed to building trust relationships.

Next, we describe the participants taking part in the research, summarise the trust findings, and outline the background of the World Café and its application in this study. Of the 45 delegates attending the EI Symposium, ten had taken part in the original research that had prompted this effort. An invitation was also made through the Otago Polytechnic staff Intranet, with 30 staff attending. Invitations to the wider business community resulted in another five registrations.
3.1 World Café for relationship-building

World Café is a technique developed by Juanita Brown, who observed that people readily engaged in dialogue when they are in a café setting. (Brown, Isaacs, & Margulies, 1997). By creating a café-like environment people would naturally engage with one another, share and connect ideas, and generate new thinking. World Café methodology values the power of relationships formed and maintained through conversations that build trust and “create living knowledge and new possibilities for action in large groups” (Brown, 2002, p. 2), and for “assessing collective intelligence and creating actionable knowledge” (Tan & Brown, 2005, p. 84). Brown refers to the power of conversation for identifying what is important to us, what we care about and how that emerges and shapes people naturally in conversation. The key assumption of World Café methodology is that people already have the answers within them and which they will share if the Café can pose questions that are thought-provoking and stimulate dialogue (Anderson, 2011). The trainer’s role in a World Café environment is “to ensure there is an appropriate mix of the ‘familiar’ and the ‘exciting’, and that groups engage in...work that is punctuated by the injection of challenging concepts that illuminate the work they are doing” (Ramsey, 2006, p. 32). In this instance, ‘exciting’ means intriguing but, still psychologically-safe.

A key component of World Café is the opportunity to start the conversation with one group and later move to another group, thus becoming part of new conversations with new people; letting ideas and insights to intersect and overlap. This movement allows conversations to arrive at collective knowledges and the tempting potential for mutual understandings. World Café offers an environment in which people participate in “invisible learning networks more intentionally” (Brown, 2002, p. 3). World Café conversations are guided by six operating principles that applied in tandem, have the “capacity to foster collaborative dialogue, strengthen community, spark creative insight, and create new possibilities for constructive action” (Brown, 2002, p. 4). The six principles are: Create a hospitable space; Explore questions that matter; Encourage everyone’s contribution; Connect diverse people and ideas; Listen together for insights, patterns and deeper questions and; Make collective knowledge visible.

People who might contribute little to organisational discussions tend to naturally engage in conversations when they are in café-like surroundings (Brown et al, 1997). Dialogue is generated when the person hosting the conversation creates an hospitable space for the group to address a question that matters to them. People have more opportunity to talk (if one person is talking in each of 10 small groups then 10 people are talking at once, compared with a large group where only one person is talking). People talk better in small groups where they can moderate their exposure to factors such as trust/distrust, shyness, embarrassment or shame. People are more engaged around a topic if the environment is relaxed.

The EI Symposium World Café, which ran for 2 ¾ hours, was set in a large room with several clusters of 4-5 armchairs arranged around central coffee tables. Drinks and treats were placed on each table to help establish a café ‘feel’. These actions addressed the importance of hospitality and informality as part of the ‘personal touch’ essential for World Café success (Brown, 2002). Large sheets of paper covered the tables, providing opportunity for delegates to record their thoughts and provided a focus for taking thinking deeper. The World Café host welcomed people to their groups then explained café etiquette. The first intervention began with the Café host presenting people with the research question: “How can EI training practitioners design their training in ways that encourage trust?” Brown (2002) states that powerful questions are “simple and clear, thought-provoking, energy-generating, focus the inquiry, challenge assumptions, open new possibilities and evoke more questions” (p.8). Café groups began discussing the question with the Café host observing the dynamics of the conversations, who responded to cues such as the level of energy on display, the time individuals spent talking, and the attentiveness of those in each group.

A second deliberate intervention was turn-taking; everyone had an opportunity to speak uninterrupted to the group for two-minutes. This resulted in individual perspectives being heard without interruption and meant that everyone else had an opportunity to listen. After the turn-taking intervention which lasted about 20 minutes, normal conversation resumed.

Upon the completion of this initial ‘round’ a third variation occurred. The groups were re-organised: one person stayed at the table while the others distributed themselves around other tables. The Table host (the person who had stayed) shared a summary of the key thoughts from the previous group, then invited those newly arrived to share what they had discussed at their tables. In this way, the thinking of people throughout
the room was hopefully cross-pollinated with ideas from other conversations. The conversations continued, taking their own direction at each table. New thoughts that emerged were captured on the large sheet of paper. This variation was repeated later in the session, so most people had opportunity to be in conversation with 12 to 15 other participants, hopefully exposing everyone to the thinking of many others.

The fourth variation involved groups being invited to write an “engaging and provocative question which would take the group in a new direction”, given as a ‘gift’ to delegates at another table, who had the option of working on it or continuing with the conversation they were having. The intention was to stimulate new thinking or offer the option of introducing a new perspective into each group’s interactions. The World Café offered delegates opportunity to engage in conversation with people from a variety of backgrounds, some of whom were experienced in EI training and others with little experience. At the end of the group discussions the Café host facilitated a discussion of all of the groups’ perspectives so as to convey key insights of each table’s discussion.

At the end of the World Café process, participants were asked to write a page of reflections on the question that had been originally posed to the group. Writing their reflections provided an opportunity for participants to crystallise insights that had become apparent during the World Café. The reflections also served as rich data that could be used by the researchers for the further exploration of EI trainers’ perspectives on practice. The use of this data will be considered in the following section.

3.2 Methods of Data Evaluation

Two forms of data collection were employed for exploring trust and the World Café’s utility for build trusting relationships: an online survey; and the reflection sheet mentioned above, on which delegates could write their personal thoughts and feedback. This latter activity was an individual one aimed at generating qualitative data through reflection. Reflection is a formative process, a “discourse the mind carries on with itself that is essential to retaining experiences” (Evans & Abbott, 1998, p. 7). Reflection is “the process of internally examining and exploring an issue of concern, triggered by an experience, which creates and clarifies meaning in terms of self and which results in a changed conceptual perspective (Boyd & Fayles, 1983, p. 100). Delegates were given an A4 reflection sheet and asked to reflect on and respond to the question: “If trust is a key to transformation, what does this require of us when we design training?” Delegates were invited to hand in their A4 reflection sheet to the researchers. Responses were coded to NVivo 9 tree nodes and further analysed for emerging themes.

Secondly, delegates were invited to participate in a descriptive survey. Survey is an effective way to obtain self-reported information (Edwards, Thomas, Rosenfeld, & Booth-Kewley, 1997) offering a systematic standardised process for collecting information, particularly useful after participants have returned to their various geographic locales (Rossi, Wright, & Anderson, 1983). The survey consisted of four ‘forced’ short-answer questions and two ‘unforced’ demographic questions. Demographic questions asked participants to state their name and/or organisation, which, if provided, constituted consent. The following four questions were put to participants:

1. One of the goals of the Symposium was to connect people. How well did this happen for you?
2. A second goal was to stimulate new thinking about your practice in the area of EI training. How well did this happen for you?
3. As you reflect, what was the most important thing you took away?
4. Is there anything else you wish to add?

4 Findings

Of the 45 delegates attending the Symposium, 32 (71% r.r.) delegates handed in their A4 reflection sheet. Overall, 23 of the 32 delegates who handed in their reflection sheet also signed it with their name (71.9% r.r.), including nine of the 10 original research participants present at the Symposium (90% r.r.). One of the original research participants also sent two follow-up emails containing further reflections on the question. These findings indicate firstly delegates’ readiness to participate in communicating their perspectives, and secondly a strong indication that delegates trusted the researchers, observed in their willingness to be identified, which

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1 To meet ethical obligations, delegates were invited to fill out the A4 reflection sheet, which stated, “I understand by handing in my comments I am giving permission for them to be anonymously used in Lesley Gill’s PhD and/or subsequent publications”.

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might be able to be linked to the relationship-building nature of the World Café. The original research participants showed an even higher return rate of named comments, which points to their use of the World Café for articulating trust through their readiness to comment and willingness to be known to the researchers.

Twenty responses to the online descriptive survey were received. Cleaning the data resulted in one response being removed\(^2\) resulting in a 42.2% r.r. Of these 19 responses, nine (47.4% r.r.) signed their name including four of the original research participants. This finding points to delegates placing greater value on giving feedback in a face-to-face World Café forum which offered opportunity to building trusting relationships, as compared with an on-line survey which is concerned more with ‘information’ dispersion, not relationship-building.

4.1 Summary of trust findings

Confusion about trust and how to build it was reiterated in the findings, highlighting the struggle to define whether trust is a quality embedded in the trainer (trustworthiness) and so is present by default, or whether it is an external element that the trainer explicitly establishes in the training program.

Posing the question: “Is trust something we bring or is it something that is created?”

Developing trust takes time and can be easily damaged. Trust is complicated!

The intangibility of trust contributed to the confusion. Delegates discussed the high subjectivity of trust, which was based on variable degrees of willingness on the part of the learner to be vulnerable and to trust the trainer, even despite an aversion to trust. A complicating factor that emerged was that some people refused to be vulnerable despite working with a highly trustworthy trainer.

I am thinking that there is little influence I have over how much another person trusts me. There are things that I might do or say, i.e. self-disclosure or making assurance about confidence, but at the end of the day, trust is a choice, and influenced by a number of different things, e.g. the experience of the person.

Some participants questioned if trust was needed for transformation to occur.

Is trust necessary? Some argued that trust was misunderstood and that transformation could happen without it.

Transformation can happen despite a lack of trust, but I think it helps all the same.

There may be other factors that account for a learner’s trust in the process rather than a perception that they are assigning trust to the trainer. The desperateness of the learner was cited as contributing to learners’ willingness to participate in the process because of their self-identified need for the development, and so transformational outcomes occurred for them without relying on trusting relationships. This highlighted another complexity of trust which is that learners have choice to trust or not. Trainers cannot control who trusts, as there are some who were quick to trust and others who were reluctant or refused.

In disclosing the ‘self’ we lay bare the perceived inadequacies of that present state. This relies on a sense of trust in the process that involves supportive facilitation and confidentiality, so that we feel OK about this self-disclosure.

Creating an environment in which learners are ready to talk makes a subtle but important shift from trainer responsibility to learner accountability. Six of the nine original research participants commented on the need for trainers to be ‘present’, flexible and responsive to learners; which trainers implied a context in which to generate readiness to talk. EI trainers commented that to be ‘present’ referred to learners being fully engaged in the learning process, and at least temporarily detached from current anxieties.

A trainer builds trust to the extent that they actively and non-judgmentally try to find out the client’s interests, and take those interests into account in the training session [meaning] the session is client-focused rather than trainer-focused.

Responding flexibly entailed being perceptive and sensitive to the times when learners were closer to greater disclosure.

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\(^2\) One person gave a numerical number response to all of the questions; no ‘scale’ was given by the researcher or the participant, so the response could not be interpreted.
I pushed once and noted that this shifted them in their seat, so I tried to provide a way out (save face) by offering the guise “that there is so much information it must be tough to shrink it to one point”. I knew not to push this person again. I think that the greatest learning is that people like to be stretched only if it is a truly safe and trusting place.

To develop an environment that supported the development of trust, trainers need to be aware that the training must move learners towards the areas of most interest and importance to them. So a structural design feature of EI training must be that it is learner-focused and learner-paced.

The design needs sufficient flexibility to meet the emergent needs of the group. The pacing of the learning is a design variable.

This finding reinforces the significance of social constructivist theory because it highlights the emphasis on learners discerning their need. Social constructivism encourages trainers to allow the learner to arrive at their own self-paced self-awareness, and acknowledges the importance of “social intersections of people, interactions that involves sharing, comparing and debating among learners and mentors” (Applefield, Huber, & Moallem, 2000, p. 12) to the act of learning. Learner development relies on readiness to talk to others in an EI learning environment, since discussions inevitably delve into deeper reasoning and emotions that lead to new observations of self, and recognition of thinking and behavioural patterns.

A further theme expressed by eight of the nine research participants, was the need for trainers to demonstrate the openness they desired in their learners. Several EI trainers articulated how they chose to operate from an assumption of unconditional acceptance, belief in the learner’s trustworthiness, from a place of humility. They commented on the importance of alignment between their values and actions.

I operate from a basis that people are trustworthy because that is how I am in the world.

My own degree of openness towards the participants will deeply influence the degree of change that is possible.

EI trainers recalled the power of their personal stories in relating their human frailty and vulnerability, thereby modelling behaviours that learners needed to engage in, so as to be able to talk at increasingly deeper levels of honesty and disclosure.

I am prepared to expose my weak side – to tell the bad stories on myself and the good stories on others.

4.2 Inputs to trust

It was evident that while many participants reflected on inputs to trust relationships—that is, what the parties bring to the relationship that contributes to trust—EI trainers from the original research tended to use an output-based approach when defining ‘trust’. That is, they tended to discuss what a trusting relationship produced, and the comments of these trainers had much in common. In this section we will examine the ‘inputs’ that were discussed, and in the next section focus attention on ‘outputs’.

The emphasis of many participants was placed on the perceived willingness of the learner to ‘give trust’ versus trust being ‘assumed’ or taken (expected).

As soon as I am expected to ‘change’ or ‘be changed’, trust begins to erode. I trust because I can have a view, an opinion, and you will be ‘kind’ enough to respect my difference. Though, expect to change me, and I will begin to question ‘trust’. It is not that people don’t like change; they just don’t like ‘being changed’.

The expertise of the trainer was also factored in when understanding elements of trust. Participants commented that ‘experts’ from outside their organisation were often more trusted than those inside the organisation. Some said that trust in the trainer’s expertise derived from their position or ‘uniform’ (i.e. ambulance officer), their qualifications, or their word-of-mouth reputation which engendered credibility.

Individuals will assess the others’ degree of expertise, if important. [They] may not like the person but around competence (specialist), will trust.

Other factors of trust were linked to demonstrating qualities such as showing respect, sincerity, empathy, integrity and kindness; concepts implicit to meaningful relationships.
One of the key theories around trust is sincerity and the other is promise-keeping. Building trust and empathy is one of our competencies.

All of these inputs are encapsulated in the concept of meaningful relationships captured in the following comments and phrases:

What’s the kind of relationship-building you want to foster...for building time and space for people to develop trusting relationships?

In summary, several inputs were mentioned such as learner’s willingness to trust, trustworthiness, trainer expertise, and qualities such respect, sincerity, empathy, integrity and kindness. However, delegates recognised that they were not always effective in achieving the desired level of trust, so our attention turned to an output of trust.

4.3 Output of Trust

When the responses of the original research participants were viewed as a group, a pattern emerged. While not explicitly defining trust as an output, their reflections on the question quickly turned to a discussion of what trust produces in a learning relationship. The most observable output of trust emphasised openness, transparency and readiness to talk to others.

In the design of EI training, recognising that talking and making connections is a key part of building trust.

Reflections of these EI trainers suggested the purpose of trust was to ensure learners were ready to talk, thereby making it a tangible output. Employing the term ‘readiness to talk’ cuts through the bluff of learners saying that they trust but not demonstrating that trust through engagement and conversation. Therefore espoused trust needs to be fulfilled in giving actual trust if useful learning outcomes are to be achieved and evidenced through ‘readiness to talk’.

In order to share effectively trust is vital. We normally associate trust with being able to tell people a secret or to be able to talk in confidence, but really trust is about having the safety to be open and to have the self-confidence to share irrespective of the outcome of that sharing.

Opportunities to deepen trust – more conversations.

By treating trust as synonymous with readiness to talk, EI trainers have a basis on which to connect trust to the transformation process.

Trust enables us to put out stuff that we mightn’t ordinarily put out – to make ourselves vulnerable. As we put it out and others listen to us (actively) so we make sense of our own lives.

The flip-side of ‘readiness to talk’ is the trainers’ willingness to listen. Listening demonstrated to learners that what they were saying was valued and respected. Listening was a trainer skill that was identified as vital for developing a reciprocal trusting relationship.

As [learners] express themselves and perhaps say things they may not have told anyone else (make personal disclosures), and if the trainer listens non-judgmentally, then the learner can start to make sense of things in their own life in new ways. Without this listening process in a trusting environment, self-talk means that people tend to go round and round in established grooves.

Learners’ willingness to be open was found to be contingent on the perceived health of the organisation and team dynamics, which also relies on trust.

It depends on the health of the organisation and the team. Sometimes you’ll have a team where there is a high degree of trust where people can speak openly.

This finding suggests that Bachmann’s (2011) viewpoint regarding institutional trust is relevant though not exclusive. Willingness to speak openly involved learners accepting it necessitated them being vulnerable with others and a reliance on others’ ability to be empathetic:

The transformation in participants comes about through participants allowing themselves to be vulnerable.

In summary, the complexity of trust was evident in exploring the nature of trust. Points raised included the role of the trainer in developing an environment conducive to developing trust, demonstrated in the trainer’s
willingness to be open and vulnerable with learners; something learners perceived through the personal stories trainers told. The learner’s perspective in taking responsibility for learning was also noted and conveyed in their willingness to trust the trainer for the transformation goals they sought (at least in delivering the process). A number of inputs were raised: learner’s willingness to trust, trustworthiness, trainer expertise, and qualities such respect, sincerity, empathy, integrity and kindness, and are in line with McKnight and Chervoney’s (2001) research on trust definitions. Delegates also recognised that they were not always effective in achieving the desired level of trust, so attention turned to an output of trust — learners’ demonstration of trust through their readiness to talk. What they are prepared to disclose indicates the extent to which they were willing to trust even when they experienced feelings of vulnerability. Equally, the disinclination to trust was also evidenced by behaviours such as withdrawal from engagement and absence of personal disclosure or refusal to talk.

4.4 Developing an outputs-based trust definition

Previously, definitions of trust have been based on inputs of trust, mostly with regard to qualities of the trustee (McKnight & Chervoney, 2001). The findings of this study provide the basis for a new definition of trust based on outputs of a trust relationship (Gill & Ramsey, 2012). On this basis the following definition for trust was proposed:

Trust is the expectation that others can be relied upon, demonstrated through one’s readiness to talk about issues with which one experiences feelings of vulnerability.

This definition can be applied sensitively across different learning environments, and so is adaptable to organisational contextualisation. Interestingly, the definition alerts EI trainers to the differences between learners: some undertake training programs ready and willing to talk, and so already have trust in the change process; others low in trust are less willing to talk about areas where development is needed.

In summary, there is a complex relationship between trust and the connections people make through conversation. We have argued that high levels of trust generate readiness to engage in conversations around personal issues that involve vulnerability. It could also be the case that people are more likely to feel trust towards those with whom they have connected through conversation, thus reinforcing the connection between trust and relationship-building. In addition, using ‘readiness to talk’ as basis for building trust gives trainers a way of initiating trust-building through conversation that increases commitment to engagement incrementally. By providing a focus on engagement through relationship-building greater understanding about the nature of trust as an ‘output’ emerges, suggesting the need for an effective relationship-building methodology.

4.5 Exploring World Café as a Relationship-building Methodology

The comments gathered from the World Café session were analysed to explore its value for building trust relationships. Themes that emerged were: World Café was useful for mixing people up, which in turn created opportunity to connect, that in turn provided a platform for building trusting relationships that lead to ever-deepening conversations that in turn, trusting relationships.

Several delegates commented on the success of World Café for mixing people up. While this point may seem obvious, its plays an important part in initiating relationship-building with strangers:

Mixing people up in the cage of conversation is good (if at times uncomfortable). [We] hear more voices and different perspectives and how other people approach the issues.

Without the explicit process of moving people from table to table which mixed them up, delegates would have likely traditionally stayed in one seat, which would have limited their ability to make connections with others. Several commented on the usefulness of World Café method for connectivity:

I enjoyed meeting and connecting with new people.

The joy of just talking and making connections.

Being able to talk to others; the [World] Cafe style worked very well

The World Café also seemed to offer a way for that ‘connecting’ to evolve into deeper conversations that involved transparency and vulnerability:
The quality/level of our conversations changed markedly (was more focused and went deeper) when on the first round of the World Café, we took it in turns to speak.

I do think an atmosphere where people can express their ideas without being ridiculed is important – so perhaps EI training should take place in cafés!

This finding potentially identifies real value for implementing World Café as a relationship-building methodology, however to verify this, further research is needed; research that conceivably offers a way of developing measurement of depth of perceptions in conversations. The outcome of being ‘mixed up’ which foreshadowed delegates ‘connecting’ appears to be part of the process towards building trusting relationships, which World Café method facilitates:

- Being able to talk to others; the [World] Cafe style worked very well.
- Therefore the extent to which we act “as if people matter”, building relationships and forging connections contributes to a whole greater than the sum of the parts...An affirming and extending [World Café] workshop.
- Developing relationships, enjoyment, connectivity, genuine openness, [and] authenticity.

The transparency of these shared conversations collectively, made knowledge about trust visible so that everyone could ‘see’ others perspectives and comment on them openly, and which demonstrated trust relationships. In these quotes participants make a direct link between World Café and relationship-building. The progressive nature of activities within World Café method which results in mixing people up, offered opportunity for them to connect, thereby facilitating “readiness to talk”, so that meaningful conversations occurred, which in turn, assists relationship-building built on trust. This progressive deepening of relationships in the learning environment can be viewed as a reinforcing feedback loop as shown in Figure 1.

![Figure 1: Causal Loop Diagram using World Café method for building trust relationships](image)

The implications of these findings are that the World Café method offers trainers a process for creating a safe learning environment in a way that demonstrates trust, conspicuous by people’s readiness to talk. World Café method appears to be a rich seedbed for building trusting relationships, as learners are “led” by the EI trainer into talking about issues that progressively require deepening trust relationships with others.

Bergold and Thomas (2012) praise Participatory Qualitative Research methods for their democracy, safe environment and community participation, with an advantage that all can participate though at differing degrees. World Café methodology makes this research and practical contribution through inclusiveness, voice, and community. Participatory qualitative research offers participants the opportunity for the “reconstruction of their knowledge and ability in a process of understanding and empowerment” (Bergold & Thomas, 2012, para 17). World Café methodology extends the borders of traditional qualitative research, for example edging into descriptive surveys and reflective practice, and offers a way of measuring descriptive collective dialogue (Takahashi, Nemoto, Hayashi, & Horita, 2014) and for using qualitative thematic content analysis during data analysis (van Graan, Williams, & Koen, 2016).
4.6 Recommendations for Future Methodological Research

As indicated above, there are further research needs to pursue. This paper leaned heavily on interpretations of post-activity survey comments. It would be of value to have an expert panel rate the sincerity of positive affective response reflected in the comments of these delegates. By repeating the same sequence, timing and procedures used to collect the data we presented above, it will be possible to assemble a data set of approximately one hundred sentences (i.e., like those above, these will have been written by EI delegates in the same World Café activity). This would yield affordances for replicating the Q-methodology employed in Gill, McConnell, and Atkins (2011) and Atkins, Gill, and McConnell (2014). Q-sorts facilitate the use of commonly-available dimension-reduction algorithms (e.g., SPSS factor analysis) in studies of human subjectivity. Factor analysis is most commonly used to identify sub-tests or sub-scales or groupings of questionnaire items (e.g., Likert scale survey questions) measuring targeted constructs, attributes, or attitudes. It essentially allows researchers to empirically group “like-evoking” questions. Q-methodology, in contrast, uses factor analysis algorithms to group “like-minded” raters or participants. While this requires reasonably large numbers of statements, phrases, images, or other relevant related stimuli, the number of raters employed can be reasonably small. As described by Davis and Michelle (2011) this approach is:

...consistent with the post-structuralist view that meaning is inherently social and contextual, and that audience members must inevitably draw on discourses of the wider social world in constructing and articulating an account from their own unique location...It is this insistence on subjectivity as self-referential within a field of discourse produced by other selves that makes Stephensonian Q-methodology attractive to post-positivist, critical realist and post-structuralist scholars alike” (p.566).

Future research could explore a hundred-plus sentences twice Q-sorted by a panel of communication experts. For example, in one Q-sort pass, these communication experts could rate the likelihood (e.g., say 0% to 90%) that each sentence was “Written by an EI delegate who sincerely appreciated the World Café method.” Later, these experts would rate the likelihood that each sentence was “Written by an EI attendee who had NOT sincerely appreciated the World Café method.” The order of these Q-sort passes would be counter-balanced for sequential effects (e.g., fatigue, etc.). The clustering of rater-endeavours would include negatively-correlated dimensions, thus oblique rotations (e.g., SPSS direct oblimin) would be used. Consistent with PANAS research outcomes (Kercher, 1992), these “positive-affective” and “negative-affective” appraisal-outcome dimensions should still be notably independent. Subsequently, as described in Stergiou and Airey (2011), Q-methods could be used alongside traditional R-methods to develop an EI-training feedback questionnaire for assessing EI delegate appraisals of conversational depth and candidness. World Café methodology likely increases the latter. But this could then be quantitatively assessed by turning the most strongly rated comments, re: the potential interplay between “candidness” and “depth” and “sincere appreciation” dimensions, into Likert items (...following on from Stergiou and Airey, 2011). These, in turn, could be used for large-sample research, preferably attempted across the whole of the EI “World Café-attending” community (globally).

It was evident to researchers taking part in the World Café exercise that stronger relationships with research participants had been built as a result of the process, and were considered a part of the emerging community. As a result, we believe that members of the community have an increased awareness of the value of research and, as a result of their positive experiences, will have an increased willingness to take part in future research, whether it is based around the World Café or more standard research methods.

5 Conclusion

In this article we have explored the value of the World Café methodology for building a safe environment that encourages relationship-building for purposes of building trust to underpin transformation change. The World Café formed a basis to engage participants in exploring the question: How can EI training practitioners design their training in ways that encourage trust? Using a World Café approach that fosters facilitated conversations, provides a forum that supports and facilitates learners’ readiness to talk about issues where they experience feelings of vulnerability about, and for which, they are ready to talk for the purpose of transformational change; this new definition of trust addresses these issues.

The relationship-building function of the World Café provides a process for encouraging these conversations and engaging in meaningful dialogue that advances understanding, and in turn, creates a potential platform
for developing an EI community of practice with enduring trusting qualities. The World Café methodology offers a practical process that supports meaningful conversations on an issue (in this instance, trust) while acting as a practical basis for building purposeful trusting relationships.

References


Action Research: Intertwining three exploratory processes to meet the competing demands of rigour and relevance

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Abstract: For decades, scholars have questioned whether it is possible to conduct research that is both relevant to practitioners and empirically sound. This is the very challenge faced by researchers at Dutch universities of applied sciences. In this paper we build on the findings of an action research project into the research practices of a Research Centre at a Dutch university of applied sciences. We found that action research (AR) works best when conceptualised as three intertwined processes: (1) a joint inquiry with practitioners aimed at improving their actions and reflections on their own practice; (2) a collaborative review with (representative) practitioners and management researchers aimed at conceptualising the issue and process of the joint inquiry; and (3) making a contribution to academic theory through a published paper building on theory related to the specific content and process of the inquiry. This paper will argue that this triple process structure can encompass the Lego AR project—one of the few published in a leading academic journal—as well as new conceptualisations of practice research (Goldkuhl, 2011, 2012) and meta-action research (Fletcher et al., 2010). As such it can be of value for all researchers looking to balance the competing demands of rigour and relevance.

Keywords: practice-based research; practice research; action research; meta-action research; Triple Process Structure, process levels

1 Relevance and rigour: competing demands

The tension between rigour and relevance is intrinsic to practice-based research and the subject of continuing debate. The literature on the rigour-relevance debate describes these criteria as either complementary, competing yet reconcilable, or incompatible.

Andriessen (2014) defines rigour and relevance as two dimensions of practice-based research and provides an impartial overview of the choices researchers have in terms of orientation, quality criteria and methodology. He is less impartial about the concept of ‘applied research’ that assumes a linear model of knowledge generation by conducting basic research followed by applied research. Andriessen rejects this idea of applied research, using Schön’s metaphor (1983) of the “swampy lowlands” of practice where everything is insecure, complex, unstable and full of value conflicts, implying that if research is to be relevant to practice, it should engage with that “messy” reality from the outset.

As a discipline, organisational development, change and learning is concerned with the messy reality of organisations. Most action researchers in this field assert that rigor and relevance are complementary (e.g. Cummings & Worley, 2009; Lüscher & Lewis, 2008; Argyris, Putnam & McLain Smith, 1985). Yet the complementarity thesis covers up some real contradictions between rigour and relevance. One is the demand that the choice of intervention be based on empirical findings indicating that intended outcomes can actually be produced, while knowledge of intervention effects is, even after 40 years, still at a “rudimentary stage of development” (Cummings & Worley, 2009: 152). Four decades of OD work has proven practically relevant without that knowledge, so it seems warranted to ask how crucial it really is to making effective interventions. In practice, interventions may not need to be so rigorous to be effective. Even Lüscher and Lewis (2008), whose AR reports are among the few published in an eminent academic journal, simply say their contract did not include studying the effects on performance. Another contradiction is that rigorously researched interventions are not applied very often. For example, Argyris set rigorous standards and used rigorous methods for designing action science and for making practitioners’ theories-in-use explicit in order to test and modify these, but the interventions of action science are rarely applied. One revealing example of the contradiction between rigour and relevance is the debate between Beer and Argyris about the Strategic
Fitness Process intervention method. Beer and Eisenstat (2000) claim that this method solves strategy implementation problems, because it enables managers to have an honest, cross-hierarchical dialogue about possible obstacles blocking effective strategy implementation. Argyris (2010: 169) questions Beer’s use of the word ‘problems’. Is Beer referring to the barriers that surface during interventions or to the obstacles that prevent participants from identifying and avoiding the barriers and from being candid about these before? If the intervention addressed the barriers, it solved first-order problems, but if it did not address the original obstacles, it failed to solve the second-order problems of covering up and making the barriers undiscussable, making “the changes ... not likely to persevere.” Beer’s response (2011) was that the skills of action science are too complicated to learn during an intervention.

By glossing over the real contradictions between rigour and relevance, OD action researchers have not generated much in the way of knowledge that contributes to management theory. Only a few AR reports have ever been published in academic journals, publications whose main requirement is rigour. This low publication rate has led some researchers to question action researchers’ assumption that rigour and relevance are reconcilable (Kieser, Nicolai & Seidl, 2015: 165; Kieser & Leiner, 2009: 526).

According to Bullinger, Kieser and Schiller-Merken (2015), most academic scholars also regard the demands for rigour and relevance as reconcilable. Yet their analysis of papers discussing the rigour-relevance dichotomy in leading management journals shows that most scholars follow the logic of rigorous research while merely paying lip service to the practical needs of management. Kieser and Leiner (2009) argue that it is impossible to authentically consider the relevance criterion in evaluations of scientific output. Truly assessing the relevance of this output would require involving practitioners who are better equipped than researchers to judge relevance, but unqualified to judge rigour. Kieser and Leiner conclude that the rigour-relevance divide is unbridgeable. Practitioners and scholars are part of two different systems that are unable to communicate because of the specialised language each has developed. They assert that a useful exchange between the two systems would only be possible if bilingual and bicompetent researchers acted as facilitators who could transfer schemas from the context of practical improvements to the context of theory production and vice versa. Their task is to recognise and convey the implications of scientific analysis for practical problems, and to describe practical situations such that “researchers can identify one or more relevant science concepts and can provide interpretations that practitioners might find inspiring” (Kieser & Leiner, 2009: 528). This task description assumes practitioners can learn from researchers, not vice versa.

The debate as outlined above warrants the conclusion that rigour and relevance are competing demands. It is our aim to develop an action research model that respects these competing demands while enabling a useful exchange between both systems. We will show that, if we accept Andriessen’s claim that practice-based research needs to enter the swampy lowlands, we need a more dynamic and reciprocal exchange than the ‘go-between model’ that Kieser & Leiner advocate.

2 Action research: single, dual or triple process?

This paper explains and refines our triple process action research model (Schuiling and Kiewiet, 2016) and will introduce two practical tools for designing and reviewing AR projects using this model. We will first explain its provenance, detailing what it retains and rejects from earlier action research models.

The very first concept of action research postulated the idea of a triangle: action, research and training were considered “a triangle that should be kept together for the sake of any of its corners” (Lewin, 1946: 149). Schuiling and Vermaak (2016) described how Lewin’s focus shifts from his ostensible goal of evaluating the effectiveness of various organisational change techniques to “the tremendous pedagogical effect” of the research activity on the training process by creating “a mood of relaxed objectivity” in a field “loaded with emotionality and attitude rigidity”. Lewin’s triangle expresses the idea that injecting research into practitioners’ training transforms the training process and, potentially, the ‘action’ itself—the practitioners’ professional practice—and that this interaction in turn transforms the practice of research, as researchers make new discoveries by working with practitioners in a learning context. Schuiling and Vermaak concluded that the action-research dichotomy had from the outset actually been identified as a trichotomy.

In later theories, however, the triangle was abandoned in favour of phased models. Action research was conceptualised as a single process with three, four or five stages that needed to be completed in order to solve
problems and achieve change. Lewin (1946) was modelled as a three-stage process of diagnosis, intervention and evaluation. In OD, French (1969, quoted by French & Bell, 1999) used this scheme to design a consultancy process with a continuous iteration of executives perceiving problems and consulting a behavioural scientist, the consultant gathering data and making a diagnosis, giving feedback to the client, initiating joint action planning, action taking, gathering more data, et cetera. Susman and Evered (1978) even developed a five-phase scheme, consisting of diagnosis, action planning, action taking, evaluation and specification of learning. And there are many more single-process models, for example Checkland (1991) and Heron and Reason (2001).

To emphasize the dual goals of improving practice and developing theory, dual-process models were devised. Argyris, Putnam and McLain Smith (1985) introduced the concept of action science to address two problems: (1) action research had gradually been separated from theory building and testing, and (2) the methodology of rigorous research had become so disconnected from the reality it was designed to understand that it was no longer useful. In 2001, McKay and Marshall introduced an action research model that consisted of two interlinked cycles with different aims. The first cycle aims to bring about improvements in the real world while the other aims to generate new knowledge and insights in response to a research question. In 2002, Zuber-Skerritt and Perry divided action research into two separate projects—a core action research project and a thesis action research project—in an effort to help postgraduates in the social and human sciences understand the difference between collaborative, participatory action research aimed at practical improvement and independent action research aimed at writing a thesis and contributing to theoretical knowledge. In 2014, Coghlan and Brannick conceptualised action research as two parallel action research cycles. One consists of four steps (constructing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action), with a preliminary step for defining the context and purpose of the AR project. The other is a reflective cycle or “an action research cycle about the action research cycle” (Coghlan and Brannick, 2014: 13): it continuously questions how the four main steps are executed and whether they are consistent. It is a meta-learning cycle that reflects on the content, process and premises of the actions taken in the other cycle. In a way, Coghlan and Brannick take the ‘specifying learning’ stage from Susman and Evered’s five-stage model and give it pride of place as a cycle in its own right to emphasize the fact that meta-learning and reflection is continuous and runs parallel to the four main steps.

Cronholm and Goldkuhl (2004) were the first to postulate a triple process model, which they labelled “three different practices”. They define a practice as a meaningful, holistic entity encompassing human actions, humans and their shared practical understanding, a common language and material objects used in the practice. They conceptualise action research as three interlinked practices: regular business practice, theoretical research practice, and the intersecting practice of business change / empirical research. This concept is based on the idea that action research involves collaboration between researchers and practitioners of a local practice. This interaction between the two practices results in a third intersecting practice. However, Cronholm and Goldkuhl failed to load this third practice conceptually, making it no more than a cut-and-paste operation. They take research into theoretical and empirical work on the one hand, and a business practice and a business change practice on the other. They then paste the two together, neatly presenting collaboration between researchers and practitioners, but nothing more. Their triple practice concept lacks the dialectic that comes from combining empirical work with a business change practice. It was precisely this dialectic that Lewin identified in 1946 and that OD developed into a feedback loop, where feedback impacts the change process and the change process in turn impacts the type of data generated and theories built (Schuiling, 2001). So we need to incorporate this dialectic into the concept of action research. We need to think of this transformative process not only as a process that produces change—the core notion of action research—but also as a process that only happens when research and practice are linked in such a way that it transforms both constituent parts. This is the challenge set by action science: how to connect rigorous research with reality by connecting actions taken to change reality with theory building and testing.

With this legacy in mind, we came up with our own triple process structure (Schuiling and Kiewiet, 2016). This structure owes much to Coghlan and Brannick’s two cycles, but we included a third cycle in it because we felt their second process did not achieve the goal of developing actionable knowledge. Our model also builds on Cronholm and Goldkuhl’s three practices, but adds the dynamic dialectic missing from their structure. Our triple-process model, or Triple Process Structure (TPS), distinguishes between the process of joint inquiry in practice, the collaborative review of this inquiry, and scientific research. The outputs of these processes are defined as improved thinking and acting, an improved method of joint inquiry in practice, and a theoretical contribution respectively. Each process requires different sets of actors to collaborate. It is the action
researchers’ job to weave all three processes together, as it is their intertwinement that enables each process to produce its output.

Since then, we have concluded that our concepts of a ‘theoretical contribution’ and ‘meta-action research’ are rather abstract and vague and leave room for improvement. This paper aims to refine and improve our triple process structure in three ways. Basing ourselves on Goldkuhl (2012), we will first deal with the requirement that action research produce not only local but also general practice contributions to be theoretically valid. Next, we will look at the notions of Fletcher et al (2010) on meta-action research to clarify our own concept of meta-action research. Lastly, we will introduce two tools for designing and reviewing action research projects using the TPS model. We maintain our thesis that three processes are necessary to achieve the threefold goal of action research: making action more effective, refining the process of inquiry and contributing theoretical knowledge on action.

3 Higher professional education: the practical context of our conceptualisation

Since 2001, institutes of higher professional education in the Netherlands have been remodelled into universities of applied sciences (UASs) with a view to expanding knowledge production and circulation and preparing students for a working practice in which they subject existing routines to a critical analysis, absorb relevant knowledge from elsewhere and improve their professional practice (Leijnse, 2005). To this end, Dutch UASs conduct practice-based research. Andriessen (2014) defines practice-based research as research based on an issue stemming from professional practice and aimed at generating knowledge directly beneficial to this professional practice. Practice-based research is conducted in network projects in collaboration with businesses. Its funding depends on a clearly defined research question arrived at in collaboration with practitioners. In other words, practical relevance is a key criterion for carrying out practice-based research at Dutch UASs.

At the same time, practice-based researchers are also expected to conduct their research in an empirically sound manner. The required rigour and relevance is fostered by the official code of standards for evaluating practice-based research in the Netherlands established by the Netherlands Association of Universities of Applied Sciences (Vereniging Hogescholen, 2015). The Research Centre for Strategic Entrepreneurship (RCSE) has specified these standards for its own research. The RCSE is based at the Windesheim UAS in Zwolle, the Netherlands and has a staff of 7 professors and 55 researchers.

Most RCSE researchers are trained academics. Therefore, their own research methods are not practice-based and they are struggling to give their research the necessary practical relevance. This is a problem because relevance is gaining importance as a criterion in the evaluation of their research. Hence, innovation in research practice and the development of methodologies combining rigour with relevance are key elements in the drive to remodel Dutch institutes of higher professional education into UASs. To this end, a group of RCSE researchers set up a research programme to assess whether adding action research (AR) to researchers’ methodological arsenal would help them to generate knowledge that is directly relevant to practice while maintaining the necessary rigour.

We labelled this programme ‘meta-action research’ as it applied action research to the practice of research. This meta-AR met four requirements we consider key to ensuring both rigour and relevance in AR.

1. The research is a joint inquiry in practice: researchers and practitioners collaborate in cycles of action and reflection.

2. This joint inquiry in practice is driven by the client’s problem or felt difficulty (Dewey, as referred to by Mulder & Bos, 2014; McKernan, 1991) instead of the researcher’s agenda. Although action researchers can guide the focus of inquiry into areas that may come closer to their own research interests, professional responsibility dictates that they provide help in the areas specified by the client (Schein, 1987: 33). The idea is that relevant data can be collected in situations created by someone who wants help in changing an existing situation. This is a reversal of the traditional academic practice in which the researcher defines the research setting, the subject matter and the research question and connects with practical realities only to collect data.

3. Action researchers must combine incompatible roles: as interventionists they help those who engage them and as researchers they develop knowledge that is interesting beyond the context in which it was developed.
4. Learning must be reciprocal: an essential aspect of AR is that the researcher develops solutions in collaboration with the practitioners, and not on their behalf. This requires both to remain open to an evolving reality.

Reasoning that conducting research is a practice too, we designed an AR project that would both conceptualise and improve the practice of conducting research. Six senior researchers at the Centre held bilateral meetings with the first author in a joint inquiry into how AR could help them address their felt difficulty of combining rigour and relevance in their research projects. These senior researchers acted as a core group in four workshops that were open to a larger audience of researchers from the RCSE and other research centres within the university. The workshops were aimed at clarifying three issues: (1) what defines AR; (2) how to address the contrast between practical questions and research questions; and (3), how to intertwine intervention and theory building.

Each workshop started with a core group member discussing how the workshop’s topic manifested itself in their own research and posing a question to address in that session. Those present then discussed the question using AR literature. Each workshop ended with answers to the question posed at the start. After three workshops, four researchers integrated AR characteristics into their research plans. These plans were discussed in the fourth workshop with the assistance of two outside experts.

The first author kept a journal of the sparring sessions, designed and moderated the workshops, and drew up a report on each workshop based on audio transcripts. The second author collected data to review the bilateral consultations, the workshop process, the changes made in the research projects and the impact of these changes on rigour and relevance. After each workshop session, we reflected on the session, and discussed how we could build an augmented model of applying AR in practice-based research projects. Our reflection on the second workshop prompted the idea that practice-based research needs a Triple Process Structure and that AR could help create this structure.

4 Triple Process Structure

Figure 1 shows practice-based research as an intertwining of three processes. Process 1 is a joint inquiry by practitioners and an action researcher.

![Three Processes](image)

**Figure 1:** The Triple Process Structure of practice-based research
The action researcher helps the practitioners analyse their felt difficulty by reflecting on the issues they struggle with, by exploring new ways of thinking about these issues, and by enacting new ideas, which results in action-based understanding. Process 2 is a collaborative review of the content and process of Process 1 by the action researcher with all practitioners involved in Process 1 or with a smaller group representing them. Preferably, the group is joined at some point by a management researcher who can add some recent theory to help refresh the theories-in-use in the joint inquiry. Process 2 is intended to generate a method of joint inquiry that the practitioners can use long after the action researcher has left the company. So while Process 1 is about building competence in dealing with the issues people face in their current practice, Process 2 is about building competence in dealing with future issues. Organisations seeking a sustainable capacity to learn and change (Worley & Lawler, 2010) are likely to invest in Process 2. Process 3, researching theory, is aimed at making a theoretical contribution to a specific discipline, based on literature, new data or a new analysis of existing data. The work is carried out by the action researcher in collaboration with scholars specialised in research methodology and/or in theory on the specific issues dealt with in the joint inquiry. Practitioners will seldom want to participate in this process as they lack the scientific background to assess claims regarding the value of the theoretical contribution.

In this Triple Process Structure, the action researcher is the only person to participate in all three processes. Of course, action researchers are not omnicompetent. They have mastered the skills of each process well enough to contribute to its output, but others will often be more competent. This requires them to possess good process consultancy skills, not the least of which is the ability to assess their own ignorance (Schein, 1999: 11). Their special expertise is their ability to link or intertwine the three processes. Initially, action researchers support practitioners in their joint inquiry to improve the practitioners’ actions and reflections on a particular issue. To intertwine this inquiry with the institutional context, action researchers then institute a review group consisting of joint inquiry participants who are willing to invest time in conceptualising how the joint inquiry process works, how it can be improved, and the results it generates. Action researchers provide the review group with data from Process 1 and theories from Process 3. This results in an institutional contribution: a conceptualised understanding of both the issues at stake and the process of dealing with them. To intertwine the review and research processes, action researchers read relevant literature, connect with relevant researchers, possibly introduce them to the organisation(s), involve them in the collaborative review, and conduct joint research. This results in a contribution to theory. This approach ensures that both practitioners and researchers actively deal with the competing demands of rigour and relevance. Intertwining is one of the most effective strategies to bridge the separate worlds of theory and practice and to engender productive interaction (Schuilling & Vermaak, 2016).

Much has been written about the role of the action researcher in controlling the research process (Elden & Chisholm, 1993). Here too, the Triple Process Structure can make a valuable contribution. It can help to clarify the control issues at play in each process. In Process 1, it is wise to establish joint control by allowing researcher and practitioner to alternately take the lead, while always ensuring that the practitioners’ question remains the guiding principle behind the inquiry. In Process 3, the action researcher should team up with authoritative researchers willing to amend their theories and jointly analyse the data, review the literature and formulate new constructs and propositions. In Process 2, however, control must remain with the action researcher, because this is where Processes 1 and 3 are intertwined and action researchers are the only people qualified to intertwine them. Neither practitioners nor researchers have the required expertise, and few would even attempt it. Only action researchers have the skills, courage and ideals to build, drive and deliver in Process 2.

5 Action research at the Lego Company revisited

The Lego Company AR project is a good example of grounding theory in practice (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008). In their research, Lüscher and Lewis distinguished two processes: sparring and reviewing. Through sparring, action researcher Lüscher helped the Lego managers to make sense of the paradox of managing self-managing teams. In the reviewing process, the researchers and practitioners jointly reflected on the sparring process by interpreting the data collected in that process. They also formulated ideas about the sparring process based on theoretical frameworks found in scholarly literature. According to Lüscher & Lewis’s AMJ article, reviewing yielded two theoretical contributions: a model of paradoxical inquiry and a modified theory of paradoxes.
In their account of the Lego case, Lüscher and Lewis (2008) identify the reviewing process as their own research method. They claim that rigour complements relevance (2008: 223). However, this raises two sets of questions. The first pertains to relevance: if a management team is involved in both sparring and reviewing, what is the interaction between these two processes? Does this enhance the managers’ learning or limit it? If it limits their learning, some practitioners apparently need to sacrifice their learning for the sake of conceptualisation. If it enhances their learning, why restrict the reviewing only to one management team and not involve all of them? The second problem pertains to rigour: if the action researcher and the practitioners take part in both sparring and reviewing, how do these two processes affect theory production? Practitioners’ conceptualisation horizon is the company and their role in it. Does this broaden or narrow the researcher’s theoretical scope during the reviewing process? If the process is mutually beneficial, this might build a case for including practitioners in the review process of academic journals. If it is not, why bother having a review group?

Lüscher and Lewis’s review process encompasses both a practitioners’ review and scholarly research, without distinguishing between the two. This nearly obscures Lüscher’s unique innovation of introducing a practice-theory mediating review process into AR practice. We have neither heard of this, nor read about it, anywhere else. These are new and exciting elements: creating a review group, providing it with data and constructs so researcher and managers can together reconceptualise their joint inquiry as a process of paradoxical inquiry, and bringing in a renowned theorist—Lewis—to join the discussion. However, what Lüscher and Lewis failed to acknowledge is the different intent the practitioners and researchers brought to the review. The practitioners did not just want to be sparred with, they also wanted to learn how to spar. It is a desire we personally witnessed in our ‘ meta-action research’ project with the RSCE researchers. The practitioners’ drive to understand and conceptualise the joint inquiry process is not inspired by a desire to contribute to academic theory, but to acquire a working method that can benefit their staff and their organisation. For them, the conceptualisation process is anchored in practical interests. So, in the Lego case, the managers wanted to learn how they themselves could act as sparring partners for each other and their employees (Lüscher, 2002/2012).

Our Triple Process Structure does make a distinction between the review and theory production processes. We see modelling and theoretical contributions as two different outputs. Applying this structure to Lüscher and Lewis’s AR project and reinterpreting their setup in our triple structure will demonstrate more clearly why their case is an exemplar for the practice of action research.

Figure 2 represents a Triple Process Structure interpretation of Lüscher’s AR project at Lego. In our analysis of how Lüscher intertwines the three processes, she plays distinct roles in these processes: (1) as a sparring partner who helps the managers make sense of the paradox of managing self-managing teams; (2) as a reviewer who provides data and theory to one of the management teams (at Lego called the ‘focus group’) that collaborates with her to conceptualise the issues and the sparring process; (3) as a PhD student who is supervised by a full professor and collaborates with this professor to produce the AMJ paper.
This representation renders the research process even more “visible and reliable . . . through a disciplined account of managers’ and researchers’ roles in constructing shared understandings” (Lüscher & Lewis, 2008: 238). We feel that by differentiating between the review process (shared conceptualisation) and the researching theory process, we have highlighted that AR can make a theoretical contribution and that this theorising is limited to management scholars and action researchers who base themselves on the data and the concepts jointly produced by action researchers and practitioners.

6 Three types of contribution

Conceptualising the output of the three processes of the TPS model is made easier by first looking at Goldkuhl’s (2011) distinction between the three types of output of practice research. His definition of output follows from his anatomy of practice research as consisting of two sub-practices and three target practices. The two sub-practices are situational inquiry and theorisation, while the three target practices are the local operational practice, the general practice and the research community. This anatomy facilitates the categorisation of three types of output. The first is the Local Practice Contribution (LPC), for example, a diagnosis in a situational inquiry. The second is the General Practice Contribution (GPC), for example, an improved method for making a diagnosis in a situational inquiry. A GPC provides abstract and useful knowledge for practitioners other than those involved in the local work practice. The third output is called “abstract knowledge as suggested contributions to the scientific body of knowledge”. This output is presented to the research community, where fellow researchers are recipients, but also key providers of existing theories and key interactors through dialogue and review (Goldkuhl, 2011).

We find LPC and GPC to be valuable concepts. The GPC results from alternating theorisation with joint inquiry. Based on insights, needs and data from the joint inquiry, new abstract knowledge may be developed and then fed back to the inquiry process as emergent theories and methods (Goldkuhl, 2011: 20). The theorisation practice transforms situational knowledge to abstract knowledge: concepts, theories, models and methods. This knowledge should be formulated as constructive and useful for practice. A GPC’s users are practitioners, educators and students. These groups supply feedback to the researcher as a knowledge constructor, but, more importantly, they continue to test the GPC in new local inquiries where the abstracted knowledge is applied for the sake of situational knowledge creation and improvement of local operational practices, as Goldkuhl (2011) rightly stresses.

We have two critical comments here. Firstly, with his anatomy of practice research, Goldkuhl (2011) actually reverts from his three-practices model (Cronholm & Goldkuhl, 2004) back to a two-practices model of practice research: theorisation and local inquiry. This dual process lacks the learning process of developing competences for the future, for dealing with other issues than the present one: the very competences whose development has always been a key purpose of action research in OD. Secondly, Goldkuhl’s distinction between the output for general practice and the output for the research community is unclear. He defines ‘abstract and useful knowledge’ as the contribution to general practice and ‘abstract knowledge’ as a suggested contribution to the research community. This gives us cause to wonder whether this is the same output presented to two different communities, or two different types of output. And if they are different, how do they differ? Or, is the distinction merely an acknowledgement of the research community doing work of a higher order than building general practice contributions?

We believe the TPS model addresses both these weaknesses. Our model includes the learning process, in the shape of the collaborative review process that mediates between the processes of joint inquiry and researching theory. In terms of the contribution to general practice, we take a more radical stand than Goldkuhl by positioning the GPC as the output of the researching theory process (see Figure 4). In the TPS model, the process of ‘researching theory’ must produce actionable knowledge for professional practice.

If we reposition Goldkuhl’s three types of contribution in the TPS model, we get the following results: The LPC is the output of the joint inquiry in a local work practice. We follow Goldkuhl’s (2012) proposal to use Susman and Evered’s (1978) model to define four LPCs: a diagnosis intervention, a design intervention, an implementation intervention, and an evaluation intervention. The GPC, however, is repositioned as the output of the researching theory process. We agree with Goldkuhl (2012) that producing LPCs is the foundation for producing GPCs. We also agree that action research is required to produce GPCs (Goldkuhl, 2013). Action research has produced GPCs to many a general practice, such as organisation development, organisational
learning, process consultancy, education, health, and information systems. Producing GPCs is in turn the basis for producing improved theories-of-action models. Two general theories-of-action models have been developed in the field of action science (Argyris, Putnam & McLain Smith, 1985). Action science uses the normal definition of a theory as a set of interconnected propositions that have the same referent: the subject of the theory. It also ascribes to theory the normal functions of explanation, prediction and control. However, it extends theory to everyday life and work. A theory of action is a theory of deliberate human behaviour. It involves causal reasoning. In a theory of action, propositions take the following form: ‘In situation s, do action a’ (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Action theories themselves are also regarded as a cause, as the action not only applies and tests the theory but also shapes the behavioural world the theory is about (Argyris & Schön, 1974: 17). The field of action science made significant progress from 1974 to 1996, but has lacked substantial development ever since. Theorising GPCs can be a great stimulus for a resumption of the seminal work of action science, because in action science, action and practice are defined in relation to each other. A practice is a ‘sequence of actions undertaken by a person to serve others, who are considered clients’ and ‘[a] theory of practice consists of a set of interrelated theories of action that specify for the situations of the practice the action that will, under the relevant assumptions, yield intended consequences’ (Argyris & Schön, 1974: 6).

Figure 4: Requisite output and actors for each process in the TPS

The output of the process of collaborative reviewing can be called future practice contribution (FPC). These contributions are developed in and for the local work practice, to prepare it for dealing with future issues. It consists of models, methods and skills. The models help to explore issues similar to X. The methods help to diagnose issues like X, design solutions for them, implement these solutions and evaluate their effectiveness. The skills help local practitioners to use the models and methods.

7 The concept of meta-action research

In Schuiling and Kiewiet (2016), we use the term ‘meta-action research’ to refer to action research into the practice of research. We found that this idea appealed to the researchers participating in the project. However, ‘meta-action research’ was also used by Fletcher et al. (2010) to refer to the reflection process following a leadership development seminar in Africa. This publication defined meta-action research as

‘action research on or about action research. It is based on reflection, self-reflection, conceptualisation and theorisation of the activities, processes, methods and results of the action research program(s) or project(s), denoting systemic change, transformation, awareness and understanding of one’s own learning, and arriving at higher-order concepts, principles, theories or models of action research.’ (p. 491)
Rereading the paper, we concluded that several concepts had been used rather loosely:

- A three-day seminar on action research is conflated with action research, even though the participants did not take part in any joint inquiry before or after the seminar. This appears to have been training in action research rather than action research itself.
- What the TPS model calls a ‘collaborative review on the joint inquiry’ amounted to no more than the usual participant satisfaction survey taken at the end of the seminar. There was no collaborative review with the participants about the joint inquiry conducted during the seminar.
- The theory building was described and modelled as three cycles of reflection by the trainers over a 14-week period. This reflection process was labelled ‘meta-action research.’ However, this process consisted of neither action nor research, as the trainers in no way acted upon the practitioners who participated in the seminar or upon researchers specialised in the participants’ fields of activity (e.g. poverty reduction, women’s empowerment, etc.).

Fletcher et al. describe their shock at being criticised by a participant for using a data collection process that “exemplified Western colonisation of Africa”. This makes for fascinating reading, as does the description of the 14-week effort Fletcher et al. made to honestly reflect on what they might have done wrong in the seminar and to work through their defence mechanisms in answering this question. Such reflection makes their article a must-read. But we cannot help but feel that their comprehensive definition of meta-action research is used to gloss over a fundamental problem: the lack of any actual action research. This problem is not theirs alone. We recognise it is increasingly difficult to create communities of inquiry into social practices that have so little impact on the real world problems they are supposed to solve. This highlights the importance of the collaborative review process in the TPS model. And it leads us to caution against using the concept of meta too easily. Therefore, we withdraw our concept of meta-action research as action research into the practice of other social practice?

We propose instead to reserve the concept of ‘metaprocess’ for the intertwinement of the three processes. This intertwinement is the core of action research and dovetails with the definition of a metaprocess as a process that transforms other processes (Ross, 2014). Without intertwinement, research is just research and will produce rigorous knowledge, but not knowledge relevant for practice. In the absence of any intertwinement, joint inquiry into local practice is just an inquiry to solve a local problem, not the basis for broader knowledge production. It goes without saying that the collaborative review process would not even exist without intertwinement.

8 Using TPS to design and review research

The TPS model can be used to design research projects. Figure 5 shows its four design parameters: (1) minimal specification of the output (or contribution) expected to be produced in each process; (2) set of actors capable of producing the desired output; (3) sequence of interactions that will enable these actors to produce the output; (4) intertwinement of interesting data, questions and constructs between the processes to coax actors out of their routines and comfort zone and ask them to contribute to an unfamiliar process.

![Figure 5: The four design parameters of the TPS model: output, actors, interactions and intertwinement](image-url)
The four questions in the model—Who? What interactions? Degree of intertwine? What output?—will continue to evolve during the project and help participants to move back and forth between practice improvement and theory building. It might be helpful to make a basic design decision in advance and settle on one of the four archetypes of action research depicted in Figures 6, 7, 8 and 9.

Figure 6: Archetype 1: fully intertwined, practice-based

Figure 7: Archetype 2: fully intertwined, research-based

Figure 8: Archetype 3: partially intertwined, practice-based (inquiry and review, no GPC ambitions)
Discussion

The Triple Process Structure (TPS) addresses an important concern in the rigour-relevance debate. As research and practice are two distinct systems with different standards for their output as well as different interests, competences and mind-sets, collaboration between the two can be detrimental to both (Kieser & Leiner, 2009: 518). This leads to the first TPS principle:

In Process 3, the research agenda takes precedence; in Process 1, the practical agenda takes precedence.

This implies that rigour is the evaluation criterion for Process 3 while relevance is the evaluation criterion for Process 1. Following from this, we arrive at the second TPS principle:

There is no such thing as applied management research.

The concept of applied research falsely assumes that knowledge is developed by conducting basic research followed by practical application of the theories thus developed. Fifty years of fruitless discussions about bridging the rigour-relevance gap may be the most compelling argument against the concept of applied research. So neither Process 3, nor Process 2, nor Process 1 is a form of applied research. There is research and there are applications, but there is no applied research. The third TPS principle, therefore, is:

Practical relevance is derived from a joint inquiry by practitioners and researchers and translates the knowledge of both practitioners and researchers into improved practice.

The fourth TPS principle is:

The middle process of collaborative review is reciprocal, which enhances the quality of both the inquiry process and the research process.

This leads to the fifth principle, which can also be called the ‘inverse Heisenberg principle’. Just as researchers affect their objects of study, the objects of study affect the researchers:

In Processes 1 and 2, researchers are affected by those whom they study.

By reframing “being affected” as a process of learning, researchers can begin to see themselves as reflective practitioners who dare to venture into the “swampy lowlands” of practice. This expansion of the researcher’s identity is a precondition for collaboration in Process 2.
10 Conclusion

The rigour-relevance debate in management studies has not been settled. Recently a strong case was built for the claim that the gap is unbridgeable and that rigour and relevance represent two competing institutional logics. However, that has not stopped the quest for a fruitful exchange between practitioners and researchers. The Dutch endeavour to develop universities of applied sciences that conduct practice-based research and simultaneously work on building a theory and methodology for practice-based research, is one example of the continuation of this quest. As a contribution to this debate, this paper presents the Triple Process Structure for action research. We believe we found more than we were looking for: the Triple Process Structure is not limited to AR, but defines the basic structure of all research that seeks to strike a balance between the competing demands of rigour and relevance.

References


Gertjan Schuiling and Derk Jan Kiewiet


Mixed Methods Research: Insights from Requirements Engineering

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Abstract: Requirements engineering (RE) combines technical and human aspects in software development. It covers the process of eliciting, analysing, specifying, validating and managing the requirements of software systems. RE needs to understand the people and the context within which specific actions and decisions take place. Hence, RE research opts for qualitative research. Quantitative approach is equally important in RE research nevertheless, as some studies may need to measure certain variables and confirming existing theories. Therefore, the adoption of mixed methods is viewed as an appealing alternative to fulfill the diverse needs of RE studies. The method offers the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to understand and overcome complex RE issues. This paper highlights some insights of adopting mixed methods in RE research. The discussion is based on experience of having two qualitative and one quantitative studies and integrating two mixed methods research designs. The insights generate several tentative facts about employing mixed methods in RE research, which covering the aspects of writing and publishing, research intention and motivation as well as understanding of accompanying methods.

Keywords: Requirements engineering, mixed methods research, qualitative and quantitative methods

1 Introduction

Requirement engineering (RE) appears as one of the key processes in software engineering (SE) activity. It provides comprehensive description of solutions to solve occurring operational issues. The issues normally require a software system, which could be a new one or an improved version of the existing ones. RE activities involves the identification and specification of user and system requirements for such software systems. It produces a requirements specification, which represents the shared visions among stakeholders about the issues to be addressed.

Unlike other SE activities such as design or programming, RE focuses on both technical and human aspects. The technical aspect concerns with methods, techniques and tools used in RE activities namely elicitation, analysis and modelling, specification, validation and management. On the other hand, the human aspect deals with stakeholders who participate in RE activities to develop the specification. As such, RE studies are accountable to be tackled by using quantitative and qualitative methods. The combination of both methods is known as mixed methods.

The term “mixed methods” refers to the use of two or more methods in a research project yielding both qualitative and quantitative data (Greene, 2007; Teddlie, 2009; Creswell & Plano, 2011). It is a research approach from social and behavioural sciences that involves collecting and analysing both qualitative and quantitative data persuasively and rigorously. The method integrates data concurrently or sequentially or by embedding one within another. It gives priority to one or both data. It uses two approaches in a single study or in multiple phases of a study. The method also frames the approaches within theoretical lenses and combines them into specific research designs (Greene, 2007; Creswell & Plano, 2011; Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2008; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007).

There are several reasons for using mixed methods. Researchers may conduct mixed methods research to acquire multiple perspectives, as one data source is insufficient to view or clarify the problem. Researchers might need to enrich their understanding, as the results of the primary study are not quite complete to comprehend the issues. Exploratory findings require generalisation in order to contextualise the information thoroughly and some research objectives could only be achieved through multiple research phases (Creswell & Plano, 2011).

There are three main strengths of mixed methods (Venkatesh, Brown & Bala, 2013). First, the method has the capability to take into consideration both confirmatory and exploratory research questions within the same study. Second, it has robust inferences than a single method. Finally, qualitative research alone restricts the number of participants and the issues to be discussed (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Likewise, quantitative
research lacks deep insights of context and reactions from people. Quantitative data consists of numbers and classes whereas qualitative data consists of words and descriptions. Quantitative data is analysed by statistics whereas qualitative data is analysed using coding and categorisation. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data always offers better understanding of the studied concepts (Runeson & Höst, 2009).

There are six major mixed methods research designs, which are convergent parallel, explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential, embedded, transformative and multiphase (Creswell & Plano, 2011), as shown in Table 1. The first design comprises collecting both qualitative and quantitative data in parallel manner. The priority is given to both data. The second design begins with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by the qualitative data. Thus, the priority is given towards the quantitative data. The third design is the reverse of the second. The fourth design incorporates one data collection and analysis within the other. The priority is normally given to the embedding data. The fifth and sixth designs bring multiple design elements together over a period of time or phases. The priority can be given to either or both data types. Irrespective of any design, the interpretation is made at once through the merging of both findings at the end.

Table 1: Mixed methods research designs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Mixing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Convergent parallel</td>
<td>Concurrent QUAL and QUAN</td>
<td>Equal</td>
<td>Data are integrated during interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Explanatory sequential</td>
<td>Sequential (QUAN first then qual)</td>
<td>QUAN is given priority</td>
<td>Data are integrated during interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Exploratory sequential</td>
<td>Sequential (QUAL first then quan)</td>
<td>QUAL is given priority</td>
<td>Data are integrated during interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Embedded</td>
<td>Concurrent or Sequential</td>
<td>Unequal; one is embedded within the other; QUAL or QUAN</td>
<td>Data are integrated during interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Transformative</td>
<td>Concurrent, Sequential or Embedded</td>
<td>Priority can be given to either or both data types</td>
<td>Data are integrated during interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Multiphase</td>
<td>Study 1 mixed or QUAL or QUAN Study 2 mixed or QUAL or QUAN Study 3 mixed or QUAL or QUAN</td>
<td>Study 1 informs Study 2 and Study 2 informs Study 3</td>
<td>Data are integrated during interpretation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*QUAL and QUAN capitalization indicates an emphasis or priority on the qualitative or quantitative methods respectively.*

The selection of which design(s) to be used relies highly upon the purpose and interaction of the study, the method priority and the timing of data collection and analysis required (Creswell & Plano, 2011). It should also be driven by the research questions, objectives, and context (Creswell & Plano, 2011; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Researchers therefore have to accurately consider the suitability of using which mixed methods designs for their research.

This paper intends to share some insights of using mixed methods in RE research. The insights are based on the experience of conducting three distinct RE research projects. The paper also aims to show the feasibility of adopting mixed methods in RE research by using not only one design but also integrating two designs. The experience gathered from the projects are then conceptualised as facts that could guide the use of the method in RE research.

2 Background

Literature has shown that the selection of research methods in SE/RE research carries many challenges (Perry, Porter & Votta, 2000; Easterbrook et al, 2008). Selecting a research method in such research is problematic because the implications or consequences of using individual methods are not well documented. Many researchers select inappropriate methods because they do not fully understand the underlying assumptions for the methods that they select or they possess limited knowledge about the alternatives (Sjöberg, Dyba & Jörgensen, 2007; Easterbrook et al, 2008). Besides, the absence of hypothesis, missing research questions and
having no certain solutions that can be associated to a theory or practice are some of the challenges that face SE/RE research (Perry, Porter & Votta, 2000).

A number of efforts have been made to address this issue. A decision-making structure related to the impacts of research design decisions in SE/RE research has been introduced (Wohlin & Aurum, 2015). Similarly, one study highlights the arguments behind each method that could aid researchers to select proper research methods (Easterbrook et al., 2008). In regards of mixed methods, a study proposes a guideline to perform the method in SE/RE (Venkatesh, Brown & Bala, 2013) as well as addresses that SE/RE research can comprise together qualitative and quantitative methods for collecting and analysing data (Sjoberg, Dyba & Jorgensen, 2007).

The use of mixed methods in RE seems to be relevant due to the fact that some RE issues need to be undertaken from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives. The method benefits RE researchers by overcoming the limitations of qualitative or quantitative research alone in tackling RE issues. Due to that respect, some RE research have started adopting mixed methods. The existing RE research that employed mixed methods in achieving their research goals revolve around three main strategies, namely concurrent, evolutionary and hybrid. The following paragraphs elaborate the strategies. The studies that employed the respective strategies are listed in Table 2.

2.1 Strategy 1: Concurrent

The first approach involves merging the results of both qualitative and quantitative data, which initially are conducted independently. One study investigated the influence of user involvement towards better RE process and product (Das, 2007). It highlighted the effects of different user characteristics in RE process and the importance of documenting user requirements. A survey and interviews through internet chatting involving practitioners from multinational companies were conducted. The results from the interviews were intended to validate the survey results.

2.2 Strategy 2: Evolutionary

The second strategy concerns the execution of two studies in an evolutionary manner. The research may be started by firstly employing qualitative approach before continuing with quantitative work and vice-versa. Most studies conducted interviews first in order to get an inclusive understanding of the subject matter. For instance, one study investigated the frequently specified quality requirements together with the tools used to validate those requirements (Caracciolo, Lungu & Niersras, 2014). Interviews were executed to learn the practices and to validate the quality requirements from the experts. Next, an online survey was conducted. The survey triangulated the results of the former. The same approach was adopted by studies that intended to identify RE practices in public sector (Haron et al, 2011) and the types of information needed by stakeholders during RE (Maalej, Kurtanovic & Felfering, 2014). Based on the interviews, the identified needs were grouped according to the situations that they confronted. An online survey was then conducted to quantify the frequencies of those needs and assess how well current tool satisfies them.

In contrary, one study examined the most and the least practised requirements activities in industry by collecting data through a survey and then analysing them statistically to get the patterns (Tahir & Ahmad, 2010). Interviews were then carried out to gain better understanding on the discovered practice patterns. Similar approach was adopted by another study which aimed to explore the best RE practices in outsourcing projects (Ahmed & Marczak, 2014).

2.3 Strategy 3: Hybrid

The last strategy combines several studies and designs into one investigation. For example, one study aimed to enhance RE processes to better fit agile software development style (Inayat, Marczak & Salim, 2013). The study consisted of three major phases. In the first stage, a survey was executed to identify the most relevant socio-technical aspects of requirement-driven collaboration in agile team together with a systematic literature review to determine the characteristics of the identified aspects. The second stage involved onsite observation and interviews to widen the understanding of the aspects and their impacts on team performance. The third stage evaluated the findings via expert and focus group interviews.
### Table 2: RE research using mixed methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Techniques</th>
<th>Issues</th>
<th>Design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1: Concurrent</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey Qualitative: Interviews</td>
<td>Influence of user involvement towards RE process and product (Das, 2007)</td>
<td>Convergent Parallel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2: Evolutionary</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey Qualitative: Interviews</td>
<td>RE practices in industry (Tahir &amp; Ahmad, 2010)</td>
<td>Explanatory Sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey Qualitative: Interviews</td>
<td>RE practices to resolve outsourcing project issues (Ahmed &amp; Marczak, 2014)</td>
<td>Explanatory Sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey Qualitative: Interviews</td>
<td>Quality requirements and the tools to validate them (Caracciolo, Lungu &amp; Nierstrasz, 2014)</td>
<td>Exploratory Sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey Qualitative: Interviews</td>
<td>RE practices in Public Sector (Haron et al, 2011)</td>
<td>Exploratory Sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey Qualitative: Interviews</td>
<td>Stakeholders’ information needs during RE (Maalej, Kurtanovic &amp; Felfernig, 2014)</td>
<td>Exploratory Sequential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3: Hybrid</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey Qualitative: Systematic Literature Review; Observation; Interviews</td>
<td>RE processes to better fit agile software development style (Inayat, Marczak &amp; Salim, 2013)</td>
<td>Convergent Parallel Explanatory Sequential</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above-mentioned studies acknowledged the benefits of using mixed methods. The method particularly enabled them to achieve the intended RE research objectives, which cannot be fulfilled by qualitative or quantitative approach alone. On the other hand, the studies recognised the need of RE researchers to be well prepared with the method’s underpinning philosophy. Otherwise, the results obtained may not be valid enough or too bias towards one approach due to inappropriate research settings.

### 3 The Projects

The primary objective of this paper is to develop comprehension regarding the adoption of mixed methods in RE studies and to highlight some insights based on the authors’ own experiences in conducting three research projects using the method; Research Project I, Research Project II and Research Project III respectively. These projects comprised three studies, two qualitative (A and B) and one quantitative, and combined two designs. Thus, they adopted the hybrid strategy. The three projects were conducted by one dominant researcher and were completed within three to four years. Figure 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the designs, research questions (RQ), objectives (RO) and techniques used by those research projects. The description of each project is explained as follows.
Research Project I:
The aim of this project was to investigate the use of graphical formal methods in specifying requirements (Razali et al, 2007; Razali, Snook & Poppleton, 2007; Razali et al, 2008; Razali & Garratt, 2009; Razali & Garratt, 2010; Razali, 2014). The project employed the embedded and convergent parallel designs. The quantitative study was conducted to assess the hypothesis that graphical formal methods are more usable compared to formal methods alone in modelling requirements. The qualitative study on the other hand helped to support the theory by providing insights on what aspects, how and why the graphical formal methods are usable. The output of the project was the usability theory and design guidelines for graphical formal methods. The findings were validated through replications. Figure 1 illustrates the design of this project.

Figure 1: Mixed methods RE research project I (Embedded and Convergent Parallel Designs)

Research Project II:
The second research project intended to investigate a systematic way of selecting the right stakeholders and techniques for requirement elicitation (Razali & Anwar, 2011; Anwar & Razali, 2012; 2014; 2015). The project adopted exploratory sequential and convergent parallel designs. The qualitative study was conducted in order to explore the key contributing factors for selecting the right stakeholders for requirement elicitation. The gathered factors were then confirmed through the quantitative study. Later, the project was extended qualitatively to derive the criteria for selecting the suitable techniques. As a result, a systematic stakeholders and techniques selection framework for requirement elicitation was formulated. This research project was validated through case study. Figure 2 illustrates the design of this project.
Research Project III:
The third research project devised the way of assessing the impacts of requirements change through the adoption of risk assessment approach (Abdul Rahman, Razali & Singh, 2012; 2014). This research used exploratory sequential and explanatory designs. It began as an exploratory study to obtain risk factors for analysing the impacts of requirements change. The project then conducted the quantitative study to confirm the factors and generate the formula for calculating risks. Another qualitative study was conducted to formulate specific measures for each risk factor. The project validated its output through case study. Finally, a risk assessment framework for software requirements change implementation was produced. Figure 3 illustrates the design of this project.
Figure 3: Mixed methods RE research project III (Exploratory Sequential and Explanatory Sequential Designs)

The three projects demonstrate how several RE issues can be addressed by integrating two or more qualitative and quantitative approaches. In fact, it proves the feasibility of having more than one design in one investigation. The mixed methods allow the complex RE phenomena to be better understood by merging the results consisting of several data types. The understanding leads to the formulation of abstract or strategic solutions such as theories, guidelines and framework for executing RE activities.

By integrating several designs together also gives some flexibility to researchers in terms of setting up priority and emphasis. Rather than being restricted to the timing and weight imposed by a particular design, researchers are free to mix and match them to suit the research objectives. For example, equal emphasis can be given to both qualitative and quantitative data by integrating exploratory and explanatory sequential designs together. Similarly, several studies can be conducted sequentially and concurrently at the same time through exploratory sequential and convergent parallel designs. Table 3 summarises the arrangements involved in the three projects.

Table 3: The approaches used in the three RE research projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Strategy &amp; Design</th>
<th>Techniques</th>
<th>Timing</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Mixing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RE Project I</td>
<td>Hybrid: Embedded Convergent Parallel</td>
<td>Quantitative: Controlled Experiments Qualitative: Interviews</td>
<td>Concurrent</td>
<td>Quantitative emphasis</td>
<td>Data are integrated during interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE Project II</td>
<td>Hybrid: Exploratory Sequential Convergent Parallel</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey Qualitative: Interviews</td>
<td>Concurrent and Sequential</td>
<td>Qualitative emphasis</td>
<td>Data are integrated during interpretation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RE Project III</td>
<td>Hybrid: Exploratory Sequential Explanatory Sequential</td>
<td>Quantitative: Survey Qualitative: Interviews</td>
<td>Sequential</td>
<td>Equal emphasis</td>
<td>Data are integrated during interpretation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final Output: Risk Assessment Framework for Software Requirements Change Implementation
4 The Insights

Some insights of using mixed methods in RE research based on the experiences in conducting the above-mentioned projects are encapsulated as follows.

4.1 Writing and Publishing Strategy

Mixed methods research typically delivers several distinct findings in transformative fashion. The findings associate one with another. Writing in mixed methods research requires researchers to report the findings gradually or in stages. As the findings are evolutionary, the researchers often need to reiterate their previous published work for the new findings to be appreciated and meaningful. High-ranked RE/SE journals normally do not accept such nature on the basis of “novelty and unpublished work”. In addition, most journals impose strict publication philosophy and word limits. There are also conflicts among reviewers on the approaches. For instance, quantitative reviewers tend to request for larger samples and replications while qualitative reviewers insist for affluent and intricate elaboration. To accomplish both requests in one time seems to be too demanding. This causes the publication of complex interrelated findings in one avenue is almost impossible. Therefore, RE researchers should be able to strategise the writing and publishing effort accordingly. At least for journal writing purposes, the findings should be logically divided and separated so that they could stand independently with less reference to other parts of the work.

4.2 Research Intention and Motivation

The fusion of both qualitative and quantitative methods is indeed costly. The endeavour requires vast time in collecting and analysing the data, together with the struggle to merge and synchronise the findings from the two. Therefore, RE researchers need to decide if a particular RE issue really requires the adoption of both qualitative and quantitative approaches altogether. The decision is highly dependent on clearly stipulated research questions and objectives, which later determine the specific mixed method research design(s) to be adopted. Once decided, researchers should plan the time to gather and merge data from both methods. The data must be collected and analysed at the right time in order to guide the subsequent phase. For example, embedded research design requires both data to be collected and analysed together before they can be interpreted. Meanwhile, exploratory research design necessitates researchers to collect and analyse data for the qualitative study first in order to build the hypotheses for the quantitative study. By having more than one design at the same time, the planning becomes more challenging. RE researchers should strategically plan the effort that best suits the chosen design(s). Prior to that, it is imperative for RE researchers to articulate research questions carefully in order to decide the right and matched designs.

4.3 Understanding of Accompanying Methods

Integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches in one study is complicated. This is particularly true when several designs are combined. RE researchers may be acquainted with some qualitative techniques such as interviews and observation. They still need to cultivate an inclusive understanding of qualitative research nevertheless. RE researchers may need training in recording and interpreting social behavior systematically. They need to grasp the philosophy of qualitative research, particularly the data collection and analysis procedures imposed by specific qualitative approaches such as grounded theory. Likewise, they should also be well informed of the fundamental assumptions concerning quantitative methods. RE researchers are normally able to understand and appreciate quantitative approaches more, as they are technically trained professionals. Due to that respect, they tend to quantify data even it is for the qualitative part of the study. This action does not quite align with the principles of qualitative study. Therefore, before choosing mixed methods as the research approach, RE researchers are strongly recommended to firstly acquire the knowledge and experience of adopting quantitative and qualitative approach separately. It is essential for the researchers to appreciate and figure out strategies in conducting each study adequately before associating those two. Besides, they have to assure that the qualitative and quantitative studies that they conduct could be methodologically linked, although the findings from both studies may not support each other. Regardless how many approaches are adopted in mixed methods research, the final output should be viewed as one interrelated rather than disintegrated end result. Knowledge and advice should be obtained from the respective specialists in qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods fields, as required.

By analysing the experience gained from the three projects, several tentative facts of adopting mixed methods in RE research can be conceptualised as follows:
Fact 1: The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods requires logically divided and yet interrelated piece of work.

Fact 2: The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods requires clear and distinct research inquiries and goals.

Fact 3: The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods requires deep understanding of principles and roles of both methods as well as the rules of the integration.

These facts could be confirmed and refined further by future RE research that adopt mixed methods. Meanwhile, they can guide RE researchers who plan to employ mixed methods in their research.

Conclusion

The effort to implement mixed methods in RE research projects is a challenging task. This paper has discussed some insights pertaining to the subject matter based on three mixed methods research projects conducted and experienced by the authors. The insights provide some preliminary understanding of adopting mixed methods in RE research. The use of multiple views or paradigms in mixed methods offers different perspectives and addresses various aspects of RE problems. Through mixed methods, RE researchers acquire important skills of both qualitative and quantitative research approaches. The method trains RE researchers to gather, relate and merge different evidence into one integrated and comprehensive outcome. Meticulous application of the method improves the ability of RE researchers to overcome the demanding RE issues in the increasingly complicated software systems. Although mixed methods is quite appealing, the endeavour is justifiable only if RE researchers understand the fundamentals and procedures that come together with the method, have clear research intention and motivation as well as being able to segregate interrelated work reasonably.

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References


Making the Case for a Mixed Methods Design in a Bourdieusian Analysis of Family Firms

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Abstract: This paper justifies a mixed methods design in a Bourdieusian analysis of SME family manufacturing firms in the UK. Despite the extensive use of Bourdieu in sociological research, there have been few attempts to apply his powerful “thinking tools” of doxa, habitus and fields (Bourdieu, 1979) to business studies. The research methodology outlined in this study adopts a fresh approach to a Bourdieusian analysis of the distinctive nature of family firms, known as “familiness” (Zellweger, Eddleston, & Kellermanns, 2010). Bourdieu used diverse research methods, including in-depth interviews, photographs and large-scale questionnaires to develop his concepts of doxa, fields and habitus. Therefore the philosophical underpinning has suggested a particular methodological design. Adopting a QUAN + QUAL approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 110), this paper will describe the rationale for the choice of mixed methodology, the relationship of the design to the research aim and objectives, the challenges of each research stage and the case for a mixed methods research design. The quantitative stage identifies trends and correlations between innovation and family firms in the manufacturing sector using a government-commissioned dataset. The qualitative stage is an in-depth analysis of 27 interviews with family firms. The final stage will compare and contrast the analysis from both stages to arrive at a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of “familiness”. This paper will not outline the results from the study, which will be the subject of further papers. It is intended that the contribution of this study will assist family firm researchers to design effective research approaches when exploring the complex nature of family firms. Furthermore, the research design will demonstrate the case for selecting a mixed methods approach for these types of research questions.

Keywords: Mixed methods; Bourdieu; family firms; familiness; manufacturing; innovation

1 Introduction

This paper seeks to make the case for using a mixed methods approach to investigating the nature of “familiness”, through investigating how innovation takes place in SME family manufacturing firms. The importance of innovation in maintaining a family legacy, particularly in the highly competitive manufacturing industry, is paramount. Yet the concept of “familiness” is poorly understood in family firm literature (De Massis, Frattini, & Lichtenthaler, 2012). Hence innovation has been selected as the most relevant business activity for understanding how “familiness” is manifested across a sector and within individual firms. The quantitative study explores the relationship between innovation and familiness across a sector, and the qualitative study explores this relationship within individual firms. This research design uses a complex and unusual methodological approach to which does justice to both the idiosyncratic nature of the family firm and also to the complexity of Bourdieu’s sociological theories. This paper will initially outline the research aim with the supporting ontological and epistemological assumptions and then proceed to explain the research process flow and research design. This paper concludes with an evaluation of the validity and the challenges of this research design.

2 Research Aim, Research Questions and Research Objectives

The key aim of the research is to understand the nature of “familiness” through an exploration of innovation activities in family firms. “Familiness” is defined as a family’s unique qualities, which provide a means of gaining sustainable competitive advantage over non-family rivals (Habbershon & Williams, 1999; Tokarczyk, Hansen, Green, & Down, 2007; T. M. Zellweger et al., 2010). The research aim has been broken down into two questions: firstly, “what significant empirical differences exist between family and non-family firms in relation to business performance?” Secondly, “how does “familiness” affect innovation in individual family firms?” The research objectives which are derived from the research questions, are as follows: firstly, “establish the extent and attributes of familiness through analysis of secondary data, with reference to habitus, doxa and fields. Secondly, “explore the nature of familiness through analysis of primary, qualitative data, with reference to habitus, doxa and fields.” The paper will now turn to a discussion of the Bourdieusian concepts.
3 Bourdieusian Concepts

3.1 Habitus – the habits

“Habitus” is Bourdieu’s attempt to ground practices in terms of both historical and cultural ideologies and also in terms of an individual person’s ideology (Webb, Schirato, & Danaher, 2002, p. 15). Bourdieu acknowledged that the concepts of habitus derive originally from Aristotle’s “hexis”, which is translated as a “state” or “way of being” (Rodrigo, 2012). Bourdieu was also influenced by Husserl’s idea of “Habitus” or “Habitualität”, or how people develop habitual styles of thinking, which then become ossified into permanent convictions (Moran & Cohen, 2012).

There are three ways in which habitus can be understood. Firstly, we can understand habitus as a concept in an individual’s head, that drives his or her activities in a way that the individual cannot fully articulate. Furthermore, habitus may be not in the rational interests of the individual who performs it. This is where the concept of habitus meets Bourdieu’s theories of power: the dominant or elite “who move in their worlds as fish in water” (Bourdieu, 1987, p. 108) and who do not need to engage in rational thought as to how to achieve the goals that best suit their interests. Their habitus will naturally generate socially desirable actions which meet their interests. Those who are not dominant in a society either do not understand the habitus, or the habitus does not meet their individual interests.

Secondly, in a more refined definition of habitus produced in 1989, nine years after his initial formulation, habitus becomes an expression of cultural norms:

“The habitus, as the system of dispositions to a certain practice, is an objective basis for regular modes of behaviour, and thus for the regularity of modes of practice, and if practices can be predicted, the effect of the habitus is that agent who are equipped with it will behave in a certain way in certain circumstances.” (Bourdieu, 1986)

In this second definition we can understand habitus as “acquired dispositions” that can be observed through the individual’s interactions with each other and with their environment. Habitus can be replicated without explicit direction, so that a group of individuals will display the same set of behaviours. Therefore, habitus has predictive power: we can formulate hypotheses for future actions, based on previous actions. This makes the concept of habitus particularly useful for this research, which attempts to understand how familiness, a type of habitus unique to the family firm, can predict behaviour in relation to innovation.

Thirdly, habitus is an organising principle for actions: habitus will “underlie the unity of the life-style of a group or a class” (Bourdieu, 1990) and is therefore durable. Habitus allows a family business to learn through the lens of what is normal and acceptable behaviour, but also prevents learning, in that it privileges past behaviours. The habitus of a family will be shared by its members and the concept of habitus gives weight to historical events. History forms the cornerstone of habitus.

Bourdieu himself noted in his study of the Kabyle that their “habitus” discourages innovation, but also that “if innovation is always suspect – and it is not only insomuch as it flouts tradition – it is because the peasants are always inclined to see it as the desire to distinguish oneself, to stand apart, as a way of challenging others and crushing them.” (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 18). A pre-industrial, agrarian, rural society based on wide kinship is clearly different from SME manufacturers based on nuclear family structures in the UK. Here, innovation is actively encouraged to be part of the habitus of modern manufacturers (Foresight, 2013; House of Commons Library, 2015b). It can therefore be envisaged that SME manufacturers, whether family or non-family, have developed a “habitus” that rejects tradition, embraces competition and are keen to innovate.

3.2 Doxa – the rules

Habitus is created and reinforced by doxa. Bourdieu, in observing Algerian and his own French societies, developed the concept of doxa: the cultural competencies which are shorthand to interpreting the world around them. Bourdieu provided another formulation of doxa as the “sens pratique”, where it displayed in an individual’s “commitment to presuppositions – doxa – of the game” (Bourdieu, 1990d, p. 66). Doxa provide the ability to instantly understand the rule of the game, or the specific, unspoken assumptions of a particular
field. Doxa, therefore, refer to the normative rightness of accepted ideas, or what an individual considers probable, and can be contrasted with scientific demonstration.

Doxa are acquired by birth, or “through a slow process of co-option and initiation which is akin to a second birth” (Bourdieu, 1990d, p. 68). The implication for the field of family businesses is that the family members acquire their understanding of their doxa i.e. the values and behaviours of both the family, and their business from birth. Entrepreneurial family business members also need to acquire an understanding of the doxa by which their customers, suppliers and employees operate, in order to grow their businesses. The ability to learn new doxa relating to the fields of business, while being able to smoothly navigate the doxa of their own families, is a distinguishing feature of the family firm. Outsiders, who may be familiar with the doxa governing a particular industry, may be unfamiliar with the doxa governing the family who are involved in the business.

3.3 Fields – the spaces

For Bourdieu, the social world is a relational space, and a field is an autonomous area of activity that contains the doxa, or the rules of functioning; the doxa define the relations amongst the individuals within a particular field. The field is a structured space, of positions between individuals, where each individual is struggling for a better position.

“Fields [are] historically constituted areas of activity with their specific institutions and their own laws of functioning. The existence of a specialized and relatively autonomous field is correlative with the existence of specific stakes and interests via the inseparably economic and psychological investments that they create in the agents endowed with a certain habitus, the field and its stakes (themselves produced as such by relations of power and struggle in order to transform the power relations that are constitutive of the field) produce investments of time, money and work etc.” (Bourdieu, 1990c, p. 87).

In this description, each agent of the field is characterised by their level of power, their interests and their habitus. There are, therefore, the dominated and dominating agents in the field. The practices and strategies of the agents in the field can only be understood relationally: in terms of how an agent interacts with those around them.

Bourdieu was interested in the forces that generate struggles between agents, in fields where resources are scarce and competition is fierce to obtain them. If agents are struggling for resources within the field of the firm, then efforts are diverted to managing these struggles, which can be counter-productive for firm performance, as formulated in agency theory (Fama & Jensen, 1983). We can therefore designate the family and the firm as being two distinct, but overlapping fields, with the same players taking up different positions (father-owner; son-employee), but with similarities in terms of their power. Figure 1 below explains how habitus, doxa and fields correspond to the structure of the family firm.

![Figure 1: An Illustration of Habitus, Doxa and Fields in the Family Firm](image-url)
In the case of a firm owner, who is also a father, the father-owner is an agent, operating both in the “playing field” of family and the “killing field” of the business. He would have a distinct habitus for the field of family, one that may involve informal dress, an indulgent approach to his children, gestures, such as hugs, and emotional language, such as endearments. His habitus and his field would be operated by doxa, the rules which organise and give meaning to his behaviours. The rule of family operates on a long-term basis, which is the lifespan of each agent. The family rules prioritise the care and protection of the other agents, or family members. Despite this harmonious example, there may still be elements of a power struggle in the family as time wears on: an ageing parent, who becomes frail and dependent on their children; a re-marriage, which introduces a new agent in the form of a step-parent, with a different level of power to children. The family field is autonomous: family rules and behaviours operate independently of the business.

We can also hypothesize the field of business, where the owner dresses, speaks and behaves differently. The doxa, or rules of business, favour the shorter-timeframe of business, and encourage a competitive attitude towards other employees. A firm is the site for power struggles between its employees: for pay, training, status and other resources.

Familiness is the intersection between the fields of family and of the business. In other words, familiness is where doxa and habitus interact within the overlap between family and business. Bourdieusian field theory says little about the intersections between fields, even though individuals are active in more than one field in an industrialised society. This methodology required will be one that can examine the intersection between fields. It is this intersection that the research will define as, in Bourdieusian terms, as the source of familiness. This study will go onto also understand how habitus and doxa compete or complement each other in this intersection, and whether the resulting familiness is of benefit or hindrance to firm performance.

4 Research Approach

The research approach has been informed by Bourdieu’s methodology, which reconciled quantitative data with the insights gained from in-depth interviews, photographs and observation. Bourdieu, while using quantitative data, was sceptical of a purely positivist approach (Bourdieu, 1990). He was reluctant to interpret large-scale datasets without reference to the social and political power relations that structure attitudes and behaviours.

4.1 Philosophical, Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

While there is an increasing acceptance that the debate over the validity of mixed methods is not as prevalent as it once was (Alvesson & Kaj, 2009), recent research warns that a study that includes both data types without strong philosophical, ontological and epistemological justification is simply a “collection of methods” (Harrison, 2013). This research attempts to engage both the positivist and anti-positivist epistemological viewpoints by adopting a pragmatic philosophy. The pragmatic philosophy is able to do justice to both objective realities and subjective viewpoints and can be used as the basis for a mixed methods approach (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2003). Pragmatism is based on a common-sense, truth-seeking approach to problem-solving, which distrusts a priori arguments:

“Any idea upon which we can ride, so to speak; any idea that will carry us prosperously from any one part of our experience to any other part, linking things satisfactorily, working securely, saving labour; is true for just so much, true in so far forth, true instrumentally. This is the view that...truth in our ideas means their power to “work”. (James, 1907).

This philosophy is suited to the complex ontological world of family firms, and to the problem-solving approach of understanding the nature of “familiness”. The first problem is to understand the nature of “familiness”, including the extent to which it exists; the second problem is the extent to which “familiness” can be theoretically explained by Bourdieusian concepts of doxa, fields and habitus. Solving the first problem requires that external, objective realities are studied, using a quantitative epistemology. Solving the second problem requires an in-depth investigation of internal, subjective viewpoints, using a qualitative epistemology. Bourdieu shares with the pragmatic philosophers, the belief that there can be multiple logics, and a historical and contextual dimension to interpretation of data. The pragmatic philosophy therefore forms the backbone
to a mixed methods position, allowing for both the constraints of positivism and the laxity of anti-positivism to be successfully navigated.

### 4.2 Convergent Parallel Research Design

The research design selected for this study is a convergent parallel design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2003). The convergent parallel design has the following characteristics:

> “[It] uses concurrent timing to implement the quantitative and qualitative strands during the same phase of the research process, prioritises the methods equally and keeps the strands independent during analysis and then mixes the results during the overall interpretation.” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 70)

The convergent parallel design was described in earlier mixed methods handbooks as the concurrent triangulation design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2003) and has since been re-named, as presumably all mixed methods studies could be said to triangulate between data points. However, the convergent design is where the “convergence” occurs at the problem-level. In this study, qualitative and quantitative data will be triangulated in order to converge on the answer to the research aim and to provide a critical analysis of the nature of “familiness.”

This study uses the type of convergent parallel design, together with sequential timings and is outlined in Figure 2 below.

In this design, qualitative and quantitative data collection occurs during Time T and comparison of data at Time T=1 and interpretation of data at Time T+2 starts once the data collection process has been completed.

![Figure 2: Timing in the Convergent Parallel Design](image)

Based on Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011

The research design illustrated in Figure 3 starts with taking a worldview of pragmatism. As described earlier, pragmatism is problem-centred, pluralistic and real-world oriented (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Stage 1a has been completed, and Stage 1b is currently in the process of being completed.
4.3 Stage 1a: Quantitative Research Design

In Stage 1a, the quantitative data gathering is conducted simultaneously with the quantitative data gathering. The quantitative analysis is based on the dataset “SN 6856 Small Business Survey, 2010-2012”. This is a large-scale representative telephone survey of SME business owners in the UK, commissioned by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, the Scottish Government and Invest NI. This is the most recent and comprehensive survey of the SME manufacturing industry in the UK. As this study focuses on how doxa, fields and habitus can frame familiness, it was decided to use a dataset which included smaller firms, where familiness can more easily be observed. This is because larger firms are more likely to hire non-family managers and these formal management mechanisms dilute the family influence (Sonfield & Lussier, 2009; Zhang & Ma, 2008). Given the confidential nature of individual company records, SN 6856 is not available for
public access. Therefore, the researcher applied for and was granted “Secure Researcher Status” and was required to complete data confidentiality and data security training.

The weakness of this dataset is that it is surprisingly small for a survey that is used to form UK government policy and represents only 0.1% of the total population of businesses. SN6856 consists of 5723 records from an estimated total of 5.24 million businesses (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). However, the random sample approach, which selected 6000 records at random from the Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR) database, and further sample stratification, is considered to have produced the most representative sample SMEs across the UK (Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2014).

Descriptive analysis was performed using SPSS in order to compare the indicators of innovation from SME family firms in the manufacturing sector of the UK with that of non-family firms. The UK Data Service offers a choice of SPSS or Excel for data analysis. SPSS is more suitable for analysis of large datasets and more complex statistical analyses, such as the exploratory factor analysis and chi-squared techniques used in this study.

The results from this quantitative phase will compare innovation indicators, such as the introduction of new product and services, the investment in innovation, the intention to innovate in future and the adoption of industry best practice. This stage will analyse family firm behaviour in relation to turnover and growth, use of business support, export capability, experience of accessing finance. This analysis will confirm whether family firms are indeed different to non-family firms across a number of key variables relating to innovation and business performance. Given the large size of the dataset, both Exploratory Factor Analysis and parallel analysis techniques will be used to produce a statistically-derived conceptual grouping of the variables of interest. This conceptual grouping will be analysed for Bourdieuian themes. For example, whether their rules of engagement can be explained through doxa, their approach to training and staff development can be explained through habitus and their willingness to interact with the outside world can be explained through the concept of fields. The results of the descriptive statistics and factor analysis will result in the development of a number of hypotheses, which relate the key factors to each other. Finally, these hypotheses will be tested using a chi-squared technique.

4.4 Stage 1a: Qualitative Research Design - Cross-Case Study

In Stage 1a, the quantitative data gathering is conducted simultaneously with the quantitative data gathering. The qualitative research design selected is a cross-case study design and will collect a cross-sectional set of data. The advantage of cross-case analysis is that it enables the researcher to generate knowledge through individual interviews, by comparing and contrasting cases and thereby accumulating knowledge (Khan & VanWynsbergh, 2008). Case studies are considered particularly appropriate to organisation studies because they promote “understanding the dynamics present within single settings” (Eisenhardt, 1989, pg533) by using a variety of lenses, which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be explored and defined. This ability to study multiple systems is particularly relevant to family business research because family firms operate at the intersection of two systems: the business and the family (Tagiuri & Davis, 1992). This research therefore provides a novel and innovative research design to explore how the unique nature of that intersection can be understood.

The validity of the cross-case study method is based on the view that the case study method is inductive and concerned with building theory from a small number of cases that can be generalised (Gillham, 2000). The cross-case study design assumes that the case study is inherently generalizable, as there is a micro-macro link in social behaviour (Gerring, 2007) and that, by understanding a small, but key part, we can better understand the whole phenomenon. The cross-case research design in the study of family businesses enables theoretical replication (Chirico, 2008; Nordqvist, Melin, & Hall, 2008), which enhances the external validity of the findings. The cross-case study approach in this stage will be used to investigate the nature of familiness in-depth, within the setting of family manufacturing firms. This cross-case approach will rely on the triangulation of data points (Yin, 2013), in order to generate a family firm taxonomy which could apply across an industry (manufacturing) and organisation type (family firm). The known problem of the unit of analysis in family business – is it the family or the business? – is neatly avoided by the case study approach, which allows the researcher to view both the family and the business within the same study. Case studies are therefore considered a valid and appropriate methodology for the study of family firm issues: (Giovannoni, Maraghini, & Riccaboni, 2011; Michael-Tsabari, Labaki, & Zachary, 2014; Salvato, Chirico, & Sharma, 2010).
4.4.1 Cross-Case Study Selection Criteria

The initial selection of case studies was a random selection of 200 companies taken from the FAME database, which is provided by the firm Bureau van Dijk. Case study selection is considered problematic, as it depends on a very small selection of cases that are nevertheless expected to provide insight into a causal relationship across a larger population (Gerring, 2007). Purposive sampling was selected as means of avoiding sample bias by selecting firms based on variables of interest.

Using the purposive sampling technique, firms were selected which:

- Fitted the criteria of SMEs as per the definition used in the Small Business Survey
- Had activities in the manufacturing industrial codes used in the Small Business Survey
- Scored both “high” and “low” under the widely used F-PEC familiness scale (Astrachan, Klein, & Smyrnios, 2002).
- Scored both “high” and “low” under the same definition of innovation as used in the quantitative dataset

By selecting firms which scored “High” and “Low” across two dimensions, polar sampling was used in this study. Polar sampling across the two key dimensions allowed contrasting patterns in the data to be more readily observed. Polar sampling is recommended for researchers of family business (de Massis, Kotlar, 2014) as the theory created from extreme cases is more likely to be relevant across a variety of types of family firm.

4.4.2 Familiness Scale

These questions are based on Astrachan et al’s (Astrachan et al., 2002) F-PEC scale. The scale was slightly adapted for this study so that the questions could be answered from publically available material:

4.4.3 Power

- Are more than 50% of owners family members are owners? Yes = High No = Low
- Are more than 50% of the governance board also family members? Yes = High No = Low

4.4.4 Experience

- Has the family business been established two or more generations ago? Yes = High No = Low

4.4.5 Culture

- Does the website and marketing materials promote the family nature of the firm? Yes = High No = Low

4.4.6 Innovation Scale

These questions were developed based on the innovation questions used in the SBS 2012 survey, and also so that they could be answered from publicly available data.

- Does the website and marketing materials mention the introduction of new products in the last 2 years? Yes = High No = Low
- Does the website and marketing materials mention the introduction of new processes, including internationalisation, in the last 2 years? Yes = High No = Low
- Do the accounts include R&D expenditure on innovation in the last 2 years? Yes = High No = Low

The initial interview questions were tested on a pilot study of 10 family SME manufacturing firms. The questionnaire was redesigned following the pilot study, in order to establish the most effective questions and interview approach.

The researcher made an initial assessment of whether the firm was a manufacturing SME firm using FAME and publicly available data. This yielded a sample of 200 firms. The researcher then followed up with a phone call to the firm’s Head Office to confirm:

- Whether the firm was a family-owned firm
- Whether the family would agree to be interviewed

The selection of 22 firms was made on the basis of familiness and innovation below:
Table 1  Firm selection based on familiness and innovativeness as in the F-PEC scale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>High-Familiness</th>
<th>Low-Familiness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High-Innovativeness</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Innovativeness</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is likely that there will be heterogeneity within the case study across a number of variables, other than familiness and innovation, such as the size of business, the number of employees. While this heterogeneity may make it hard to generalise across the wider population of family businesses in the UK, the variety will make for rich analysis of the extent to the theoretical concepts of power, experience and culture are displayed in terms of familiness. A dialectical analysis during the thematic analysis will help to explore the richness of the data.

Questionnaire Design

There is there is some debate over whether interviews should be idiographic, concerned with exploring the distinctive features of a single case (Bryman, 2008; Luthans & Davis, 1982; Tsoukas, 1989), or nomothetic, investigating a larger population and concerned with generalisation. This study takes the latter view, i.e. that the interviews with a small number of cases are inherently generalizable, as there is a micro-macro link in social behaviour (Gerring, 2007). Interviews are a popular empirical approach within family business research. Family firm research suffers from the problem of the whether the family or the business is the unit of analysis. Case studies allow the researcher to view both the family and the business within the same interview. Multiple interviews across a number of family firms have been used to build up a more generalizable view of how familiness concepts operate across different types of firm in relation to innovation activity (Chirico, 2008; T. Zellweger & Sieger, 2012).

Even without the mixed method component, semi-structured interviews, combined with other data sources, are considered to have a relatively high validity within qualitative analysis (Gillham, 2000; Yin, 2013) due to their ability to triangulate data by using multiple sources, and a larger set of interviews, up to 27 in this case, enables us to further generalise our observations. The use of open-ended questions allows for more honesty in recollections than in structured, closed-ended questions (Flick, 2009). Yet, the use of pre-determined elements allows the comparison of key data points (Flin, O’Connor, & Crichton, 2008).

Ten pilot interviews were conducted prior to finalising the questionnaire. The pilot interviews asked explicit questions about “rules”, “fields” and “habits”, which caused confusion for interviewees. The final questionnaire was re-designed to explicitly ask questions about innovation, while questions about doxa, fields and habitus were avoided. The number of questions was also reduced, so that the interview lasted less than one hour. This allowed enough time to explore the main theoretical concepts while not being so long as to tire interviewees. Photographs were also taken, as in Bourdieusian analysis, in order to capture visual evidence of habitus and doxa, such as the dress code, size and layout of the family owner’s office, photographs of family on the wall. This enabled the researcher to see how Bourdieusian concepts affected innovation “in vivo” (Gerring, 2007) as well as subsequently during data analysis. The questionnaire was designed to allow the researcher to witness the intentionality, the reasoning and the underlying mental and emotional in the business decision-making process in relation to innovation. The interviews were fully transcribed. Themes will be pre-coded in Nvivo, based on Bourdieusian concepts of doxa, fields and habitus. Nvivo was selected over other CAQDAS tools, such as ATLAS.ti, MAXQda, and N6, due to the large user base and availability of online tutorials (Zamawe, 2015). In addition to the use of “nodes”, which are particularly suited to thematic analysis (Bringer, Johnston, & Brackenridge, 2004), Nvivo was evaluated to be the most appropriate for the systematic evaluation of qualitative data.

Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in family business research is problematic, as both the family and the business are simultaneously the unit of analysis (Holt, Rutherford, & Kuratko, 2009; Moores, 2009; T. M. Zellweger, Nason, & Nordqvist, 2011). For this research design, both the business and the individual family member are concurrently the unit of analysis. The family business member concurrently trades off their personal role within the family with their role within the firm. They are also balancing the needs of the family, such as to provide an income for future generations, with the needs of innovation, which require a more risk-taking
approach. Using a single unit of analysis will allow synergies, as well as counteracting forces, to be observed. Finally, the single unit of analysis allows the close study of theoretical constructs of fields, doxa and culture, which are relevant to both an organisation, as well as to an individual.

5 Making the Case for a Mixed Methods Design

This paper concludes with making the case for the mixed methods design chosen above. Mixed methods is a methodology that uses the qualitative and quantitative approaches into a... (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, pp. 17–18) and the six points of defence are presented below:

5.1 Response to the research aim

In this study, the research aim has been central to driving the choice of mixed methods. This follows advice from Creswell (2003) that a “research problems suitable for mixed methods are those in which one data source may be insufficient [or] results need to be explained”. In this study, the research aim is to explore the nature of familiness. One data source will be insufficient due to the complex and contested nature of familiness. The research aim can only be answered through multiple questions, such as “Does familiness exist?” and “If so, what are the key differences in family firm performance?” These questions must be answered through reference to a large-scale dataset. This calls for quantitative analysis. The research questions which ask “What accounts for the key differences in family firm performance?” and “Can Bourdieusian theories of doxa, fields and habitus help us understand these key differences?” must be answered through understanding the subjective attitudes of family firm members. These questions call for qualitative analysis to explain the quantitative findings. Therefore, neither purely quantitative nor qualitative analysis will do full justice to the research aim.

5.2 Consistency with Bourdieusian approach

A mixed methods approach was also selected for consistency with Bourdieu’s methodological techniques. Bourdieu’s concepts of doxa, fields and habitus were derived from analysing both quantitative data, such as large-scale surveys and government records, and also qualitative data, such as interviews, photographs and ethnographic observation. His research publishes photographs and interviews alongside the quantitative data, which, together with analysis from quantitative data, converge to produce conclusions of how power and conflict play out in social fields. This study uses the same research approach, where by a quantitative and qualitative analyses are performed separately, with a discussion that converges the findings. The quantitative study analyses broad trends across the UK, while the qualitative study will delve more deeply into distinctive nature of power relations within the family.

5.3 Suitability for the complexity of family firms

A mixed methods approach is generally argued to provide a more complete set of data for investigating complex social phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2003), and in the case of this research, SME family businesses are a particularly complex social phenomenon (Ram & Holliday, 1993). Given the inherent complexity involved in the secretive and diverse world of family business, mixed methods provides a wider variety of methodological tools to apply to a phenomenon which mixes both the family and the business.

5.4 Calls for greater methodological diversity

A mixed methods approach will answer recent calls for more methodological diversity in the area of family business studies (De Massis et al., 2012; Litz et al., 2012; Melin et al., 2014; Sharma, Chrisman, & Gersick, 2012) and in the area of management studies more widely (Harrison, 2013; Thorpe & Ellwood, 2011).

5.5 Consistency with philosophical approach of pragmatism

This study is informed by a pragmatist viewpoint, which prioritises problem-solving and practical outputs (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010) in order to solve the problem of why some family firms do not innovate, and to also develop practical policy support for family firms. Bourdieu is more helpfully thought of as a pragmatic thinker who defended the use of instruments of analysis in the social sciences. Bourdieu subsequently presented the body of his work as “thinking tools visible through the results they yield” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) or as “orienting tools for research” (Gorski, 2013).
5.6 Personal Experience of the Researcher

A researcher must possess an appropriate skill set if considering mixed methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this case, the researcher has a postgraduate-level academic background in business and the sciences. This has provided the requisite ability to conduct and analyse statistical analysis using software packages and to understand the logic of hypothesis design. The researcher also has graduate-level academic background in the arts. This has provided the researcher with the ability to analyse qualitative data and develop themes based on textual data. The researcher also has considerable professional experience in working with family firms in the private and philanthropic sectors, and was therefore able to develop the trust required when conducting interviews.

6 Conclusion

This paper has outlined an ambitious research aim and objectives for a Bourdieusian study of familiness, using a mixed methods approach, and specifically a convergent parallel design. This paper has outlined the “thinking tools” of the study, including doxa, fields and habitus. The use of pragmatism has been described as an overarching research philosophy. The convergent parallel design has then been described in more detail. Finally, the case for selecting mixed methods has been presented in six points of defence. The analysis of results, which is yet to be completed, will firstly demonstrate the extent of familiness in the world of SME UK manufacturing firms through the quantitative study and will secondly demonstrate the nature of familiness in individual firms, through the qualitative study.

Bourdieu argued that the conclusions of his research into culture and status could be valid in the US, or other societies. The mixed methodology described above is superior to either qualitative or quantitative approaches, in delivering “a reading that seeks to identify, behind the specific institution of a particular society, the structural invariant and, by the same token, the equivalent institution in another social universe” (Bourdieu, 2013, p. xiv).

Analysing a rich blend of large-scale trends and small-scale opinion, this mixed methods approach is designed to comprehensively identify common “structural invariants” in the fields of family and of business. This study therefore takes a mixed methods approach to argue that the structural invariants produced by this research will be more broadly applicable beyond the world of UK SME manufacturing family firms, to understanding the complex and contested nature of family firms more broadly.

References

Telling Tales: Storytelling as a Methodological Approach in Research

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Abstract: This paper describes the application of storytelling as a methodology in a consumer relationship context. A theoretical overview of Story as a unique narrative form is presented. The inquiry was conducted in the consumer banking sector using a blended narrative approach of storytelling and life history narratives. Research design was exploratory in nature and pursuant of an interpretivist perspective. The methodology applied Gabriel’s (2000) story classification taxonomy which categories stories based on epic, comic, tragic and romantic dimensions and follows the Beginning, Middle and End configuration (BME). Procedures used in this study are presented to serve as a guide for researchers interested in undertaking storytelling in the field of consumer and business research. We conclude that storytelling is a valuable methodology for exploring consumer relationships as it allows researchers to trace the evolution and development of the interaction by analysing the story typologies associated with each relationship phase. Finally, the paper reflects on the usefulness of this methodology in understanding and articulating consumer experiences.

Key Words: Story, Storytelling, Narrative, BME Framework, Narrative Interviewing, Relationships

1 Introduction

Understanding the internalised process of consumers can be difficult and traditional research methods may not be effective in accessing consumer cognitions as they relate to complex behaviours. Story as a methodology is one approach well suited to explore consumer issues that reside beneath the surface. Stories are a universal language and allow researchers to investigate elements of the human psyche, discover the meaning of human existence and appraise our own individual purpose within it (Brooker 2004). Using storytelling also allows the researcher to investigate the constructed meanings of consumers in the present but as they relate to the past (Bennett and Detzner 1997 p 121) offering unique insights into the behaviours and perceptions of consumers over time. Consequentially, storytelling was applied as a methodology to investigate the following research question; why do consumers choose to remain in long term relationship with which they are dissatisfied or no longer committed to? Applying a storied approach allowed the research to explore the contemplative space within which attitudinal dissolution of a relationship may occur and probe the motivations and rationalisations leading to the decision not to exit.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 details the literature on story as a narrative methodology. Section 3 explores an applied approach to analysing stories. Section 4 details an overview of the research case. Section 5 describes the methodological approach. Section 6 details the findings and analysis. Section 7 discusses our conclusions and finally, section 8 offers a commentary on the applicability of storytelling as a research method.

2 Story as Narrative

The phrase ‘Once Upon a Time’ opens the mind and the imagination to infinite possibilities. Stories have always permeated every fabric of human society (Moore 2012). Warner (2014) refers to this as the Ocean of Story which has encircled us since the beginning of time. They are a universal language loaded with symbolism and significance which allow us to unravel the mysteries of the world in which we live. At their most basic, they seek to discover the meaning of human existence and consider our own individual purpose within it (Brooker 2004 p 6-8). Practically, they provide a framework through which we can investigate experience (Webster and Mertova 2007) and gain access to the complexity of human affairs and human activity. As “people think narratively rather than argumentatively or paradigmatically”(Weick 1995,p.127), stories are sense making devices told in the present with a view to the future (Bennett and Detzner 1997). At an elemental level we have a need for stories, to organise and transmit our experiences to others and to help form meaningful connections (Dyson and Genishi 1994). Woodside (2010, p 532-533) argues that as information is indexed, stored and retrieved through stories, the process of telling a story is episodic, cathartic and pleasurable for the both the teller and the listener. Stories, how we tell them and how we transmit them, are therefore pivotal to understanding behaviour (Escalas & Stern 2003, Holt 2004).

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It is widely accepted that stories adhere to a number of universal plots, common across all genres and cultures (Tobais 1993). From a Jungian perspective the assumption is that we all share common deeper levels of unconsciousness into which archetypes are embedded and within which the meanings and blueprints of stories reside. From Aristotle’s Poetics to Frye’s Archetypes of Literature (1951), a number of master plots have been consistently identified enabling researchers to classify stories. These poetic modes are often derived from grand narrative typologies found in Fairy Tales, Greek or Celtic mythology (See Tatar 2004, Gabriel 2000, Kavanagh, O’Leary and Majella 2004). More recently, da Silva and Tehrani (2016) have revealed that many classical stories may be over 5,000 years old in origin. They argue that these master stories have been passed vertically through ancestry and horizontally across societies by way of commerce and conquest. The result has been a rich narrative cultural inheritance universally shared across civilisations. It is an incontrovertible truth that we have been conditioned through literature, oral transference and visual media to understand and value the worth of a story (Kent 2015).

‘Narrative’ has received much attention in consumer research and is now a well-established and well-theorised methodological approach. In contrast, ‘Storytelling’ as a methodology remains somewhat less explored. As storytelling is part of the narrative genre, overlap of concepts and approaches are not uncommon. Some authors like to draw a distinct divide between stories and narratives. In this instance the preference is for stories to be retained as separate units of analysis, distinct from other narrative forms in which they may reside (for example interview text). Others prefer to see the interdependence and interconnectivity of both (Gabriel 2000, Hinchman and Hinckman 1997). Consequently, confusion between what is a ‘narrative’ and a ‘story’ is inevitable as both are essentially one in the same. In some instances the analysis of a story is referred to as Structure Analysis, where a story is analysed in its own right but labelled Narrative as a Whole (see: Lieblich, Tival-Mashiac and Zilber 1998). Such categorisations do not afford stories special status, as suggested by Polkinghorne (1995), but rather include them as one of many narrative types.

The variety of narrative and hence story research can be partly attributed to its roots in the fields of literary criticism, rhetorical theory and poetics (Barry and Elmes 1997 p 3). In simple terms, a story is what someone tells and a narrative is a researcher’s account of what someone tells (Redwood 1999). Fundamentally narrative provides researchers with a framework through which they can explore and investigate the ways individuals experience the world around them. Webster and Mertova (2007) eloquently suggest that “narrative is not a reconstruction of life – it is a rendition of how life is perceived” (p. 3). Stories as narratives, told by individuals about their life experiences, utilise universal ‘plots’ assimilated from the world around them. Individuals then embed these plots into their own retelling of life events and happenings. It can be argued that because of this, stories are not creations of the individual alone but are constructed based on an understanding of the elements that guide a good narrative tale. They are therefore historically, contextually and temporally bound to the world around them (Maynes, Pierce and Laslett 2008). The art of storytelling itself includes the acts of embellishment (Gabriel 2000) and exaggeration, meaning that stories are not static forms, rather they are culturally and societally elastic, ever changing, ever adaptable (Tatar 2004).

Generally speaking, two broad categories of narrative exist within the literature. Firstly, narrative analysis results in the production of a story, for instance a researchers recount of a narrated event. The second, analysis of narratives produces ‘paradigmatic’ or typical categories which are based on narratives or stories (Bruner 1985). This method is concerned with structure and phenomenon. It retains complete stories as units of analysis to produces taxonomies and categories (Polkinghorne 1995) and is based on the assumption that narrative knowledge is organised in stories and therefore expressed through stories (Hatch and Wisniewski 1995). Collected storied narratives are subsequently analysed to expose embedded themes, plots, and characters. These are then compared to develop meaning (Clandinin and Connelly: 2000, Levy 1981, Van Laer, de ruyter, Visconti and Wetzels 2014).

Jerome Bruner (2002, p 4) put it well when he concluded that the primary difference between the narrative and the story is in understanding what ‘makes something a story rather than, say, an argument or a recipe’. The field is unquestionably complex and the reality is that narratives can be stories, they can culminate in a story, or can simply describe an event, happening or opinion (Plokinghorne 1995, Polkinghorne 1988, Hatch and Wisniewski 1995, Blumenfeld-Jones 1995). Indeed qualitative researchers often uses the term narrative to denote to any form of text (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) and may loosely define what they consider to be a narrative. This study is concerned with stories as unique narrative forms (Polkinghorne 1995), viewing them as...
more than mere anecdote (Skjørshammer 2002) but essential to the human condition and hence to understanding.

3 Using Story: Stages of Story Analysis

One of the principal concerns at the outset of the research was the appropriateness of storytelling as a method. This concern was compounded by two factors; 1. The uncertainty that the data collection technique would encourage and enable the production of sufficiently compelling stories and 2. Whether the nature of the research would yield tales of experiences rich enough for analysis. In addition, given that the research problem involved understanding what might lie beneath consciousness (as is the case with non-exiting behaviour in problematic relationships), it was unclear if consumers would even have a level of relationship involvement sufficient to produce fully emplotted stories. However, no such problems arose and stories rich in complexity emerged. On a cautionary note we suggest that this may not be the case for all consumer related research. We believe that story as a methodology is only relevant in particular consumer contexts, specifically those which demonstrate high levels of involvement, high levels of complexity and a possible shared social dimension.

There are many approaches to analysing stories. The approach documented here uses a combination of form and content. We have provided a synopsis below detailing the stages involved.

Stages of Story Analysis:
1. Identify the type of story based on story classifications, character types, plotlines, tropes and themes.
2. Evaluate the emotion produced by the story.
3. Explore the fantasies, desires and wishes embedded in the story.
4. Seek to understand the meaning and value of the story to the participant.

Stage 1 is concerned with form. It applies the beginning, middle and end (BME) methods and universally recognised plotlines to analyse and identify the story type. Gergen and Gergen’s (1988) plot analysis is another potential avenue in this regard. Stage 2 involves identifying the emotions embedded within the story itself. Emotions can often be openly expressed as part of the storytelling process and therefore naturally emerge. Participant descriptions of the emotions they felt when narrating an experience help establish empathy from the listener. They also reinforce a sense of narrative legitimacy by imbuing the story with depth and context, revealing varied emotional highs and lows (Stern 1995). Furthermore, tying emotions to the retelling of an event increases the persuasiveness of the story for the listener. Ultimately, identifying the associated emotions can help reinforce the conclusions of stage 1 by establishing if a story is say tragic based on the expressed emotional sentiments (i.e. anger, hate). Stage 3 involves exploring the implicit and explicit intentions of participants. Wishes and desires contained within the story reveal an individual’s future intentions, framed by their experiences of the past. Confirmation of this intent can be authenticated by examining the story for narrative plot holes to unveil gaps and omission in truth. Stage 4 is concerned with content evaluation. It is at this stage in the process that causality can be established, events and happenings are linked and temporal order established. Tracing the arc of the story and the rising and falling actions embedded in the plot assists this process and demonstrates narrative cohesiveness. Ultimately Stage 4 is the culmination of stages 1-3. Meaning is ascertained by mapping typologies, emotions and desires/intentions. At this juncture, a useful exercise is to consider the function of the story for the participant as this helps illuminate the meaning contained within.

The process outlined in this paper works more succinctly when complete narrative forms are used. Fragmented stories, such as terse stories (Boje 1991) and even proto stories (Gabriel 2000) do not provide the necessary completeness to follow each stage to conclusion. Consequently, the data collection phase is critically important as it will influence the quality of stories collected for analysis.

4 A Storied Understanding of Dissolution in Financial Relationships

It is accepted that relationships can exist in a dissatisfied state (Gummesson 2008) and can be engineered to engender a culture of forced retention (Donaldson and O’Toole 2007, Ògan 2008). Consumers can remain in relationships in a non-committed state for extended periods of time (Stewart 1998, Dawes and Swailes 1999) and ultimately may not want to engage in relationships (O’Malley and Tynan 2000). Pressey and Mathews (2003) identify a fading away or ‘fizzling out’ type of relationship due to a lack of interest or a diminished sense
of perceived importance. This less well defined type of relationship evidences an apathetic and indifferent consumer who may not view the relationship as a positive. It also suggests that dissolution can be an internalised process, occurring in the mind of the consumer and not necessarily evidenced through actions.

When evaluating dissolution models two issues are of note. Firstly, theory (interpersonal and marketing) tends to take a wide view of relationships and in doing so, they outline broad comparable stages and processes. Models rarely take into account the contradictions that might be present at a micro level within the relationship or the ‘alternative’ trajectories that might occur given the context of the relationship, i.e. is it a positive or negative relationship. Secondly, most models take a linear approach, similar to that of consumer relationship development theory. This limits potential understanding, presenting a predetermined process with a prescriptive set of responses to particular categories of problems.

The aim of this research was to explore these issues in an attempt to understand consumer’s cognitive rather than behavioural disengagement from service relationships (Bowden, Gabbott and Naumann 2015) and concurrently investigate how this impacts relationship dissolution. It was primarily concerned with investigating consumers who have not only mentally disengaged but chosen not to terminate such a relationship (Yanamandram and White 2012). In this regard, it was concerned with hidden dissolution that occurs in the mind but does not manifest itself through behavioural actions. The key purpose of applying a storytelling methodology was to use consumer stories to uncover instances of a hidden attitudinal dissolution and investigate the factors influencing such behaviour.

5 Methodology

Research was conducted in the field of retail banking as this industry has a proven track record of low satisfaction levels and high rates of retention (Aldlaigan and Buttle 2005, Amarch 2014). The study was interpretative and adopted a social constructionist perspective. The design was longitudinal involving 14 in-depth interviews. A further eight follow-up interviews were conducted six months after initial interviews and in four instances additional interviews were necessitated. Participants were selected based on bank account type (Personal Current Account (PCA)) and length of their banking relationship. This was deemed a necessary requirement to demonstrate the financial maturity and commitment of the participants. A description of the sample is provided in Table 1.1 below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Interview Duration</th>
<th>Additional Material</th>
<th>Follow-up’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Early 30’s</td>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1hr 10 min</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2 * 15 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Early 30’s</td>
<td>Computer Programmer</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1hr 05 min</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>2 * 15 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Late 40’s</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>40 min</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>2 * 15 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Early 40’s</td>
<td>Secretary</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1hr 15 min</td>
<td>Photos Narrative</td>
<td>1 * 10 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Early 50’s</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1hr 10 min</td>
<td>Photos Narrative</td>
<td>1 * 30 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Early 30’s</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1hr 20 min</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>1 * 5 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mid 20’s</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>3 * 10 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Mid 40’s</td>
<td>Buildings Officer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
<td>Long Post interview dialogue</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Late 20’s</td>
<td>Operative</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1hr 20 mins</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>1 * 20 min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Late 30’s</td>
<td>Admin Staff</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Late 30’s</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Late 30’s</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1hr</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Late 30’s</td>
<td>Postgrad Student</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1hr 20 min</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Early 30’s</td>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1 hr</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Stories were collected by way of semi-structured life history interviews during which individuals outlined their past experiences with Irish financial institutions. Kvale’s (1996) steps to narrative interviewing were applied.
Interviews were then transcribed and stories extracted for analysis. A story was considered to be any piece of text that was emplotted and evidenced a unique tale of specific events which revealed familiar themes, plots, and characters (Gergen and Gergen 1988, Murray 1988). These characteristics were then compared and contrasted across all stories to develop meaning (Clandinin and Connelly 2000, Levy 1981). This enabled the research to trace the evolution of a participant’s banking relationship by analysing stories which explained why individuals refrained from exit when dissatisfied.

Analysis was framed by adapting Gabriel’s (2000) story classification taxonomy which categories stories as tragic, epic, comic and romantic (see Gabriel 2000, 2003). Stories with secondary plot lines such as tragic-comic were also classified (see Gabriel 2000, 2003). The approach considered emergent themes, plots, characters, poetic tropes (or metaphors) and emotions and then framed these facets of the story in the context of the generic classifications as described by Gabriel’s taxonomy. This approach is distinctly Aristotelian in style and operates on the beginning, middle and end (BME) principle. This meant that any piece of text that demonstrated a clear beginning, middle and end was retained for analysis. Arguably, the analysis can be considered ‘form’ based (Lieblich et al 1998, p 88) however it is also concerned with content. To assist accurate classification of stories, the research also captured the elicited emotions of both the participant and the researcher. Emotions and sequencing of events contained within the story allowed stories to be categorised. Furthermore the fantasies, desires and wishes embedded within the story were also explored. This aided understanding and helped establish the meaning and value of the story to the participant.

To ensure narrative integrity, stories demonstrating more than two categorisation themes were not deemed suitable for analysis (Gabriel 2000).

6 Findings

This focus of this paper is purely methodological. The findings therefore present a demonstration of how stories can be analysed to assist understanding consumer behaviour. The data produced is output from a consumer banking study. The paper does not present the general findings of that study, but instead focuses on one aspect of the data analysis which took the form of storytelling. The following section will discuss some of the stories as they occurred in the research and demonstrate how they can be analysed from a methodological perspective.

In total, 37 stories and protostories were collected and six classifications identified. Table 1.2 presents a breakdown of each typology.

Table 1.2: Collected Stories by Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story Type</th>
<th>Collected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romantic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tragic/Romantic</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tragic</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tragic/Comic</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comic</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epic</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protostories</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each isolated type displayed standard characters; for example, the hero and the villain, the helper or the clumsy member of staff. Given the universality of story plotlines, they often follow a predictable path where themes or issues appear repeatedly. These can then be anticipated, as can the emotions associated with each archetype (for instance: anger, pity or regret). The dominant story type in evidence was tragic in origins. Due to space constraints, this paper will only discuss three of the identified six classifications as they occurred in the research; Tragic, Comic and Romantic (see table 1.3).

‘Terse Stories’ were also in evidence (Boje 1991 p 115), where participants would frequently abbreviate a story expecting the researcher to “fill in the blanks” based on the presumption that some tales are implicitly understood. This short cut mechanism was qualified with phrases such as “You know what I mean” and “You know the story”. The fragmented nature of Terse Stories precluded them from analysis but they provided insight into the shared understanding of banking experiences.
Table 1.3 Common Banking Story Typologies Evident in the Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology</th>
<th>Plot</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Character Types</th>
<th>Emotion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Adapted and Developed from Gabriel Yiannis (2000), Story Classifications, Storytelling in Organisations; Factions, Fictions, and Fantasies. Oxford University Press, NY.

6.1 Tragic Stories

Tragic banking stories refer to tales of struggle and misfortune. These tales represent hardship and tribulation where the participant is positioned as the victim while the bank is characterised as the malicious and wicked entity. They deal with battles and struggles between participants and their financial lender. They are tragic because the participant suffered and often lost the struggle with their bank. The result of this was that they felt victimised and having failed to get a successful outcome, eventually became submissive and repressed within the relationship. Defining traits of tragic banking stories are injustice and punishment (Gabriel 2004) as evidenced in the abbreviated story below:

When we changed house we changed our mortgage ... They advised us to go on a fixed rate for three years...They gave us a fixed rate for five years, & after three we could opt out. We were locked-in ......He said 'This is the way things are going to happen. Things are going to go belly up'. So, we were fine for a while & then the rates came down & then they came down, & they came down, & down, & down, & down ... ....Like we were paying twice what some [other people] were paying! That really sort of got to us, but we waited, and after three years we got out of that. Then they started sending us letters about our mortgage, saying that they were giving us attractive offers & all the rest. They were not really attractive at all! because they were actually dearer that everybody else ... I was really annoyed.... I just said ‘no, no, no, that’s just it, it’s not going to happen. Our 5 years are up in December of this year. So in December that’s it, we’re out!'

This story is classically tragic because the narrator suffers over an extended period of time. The plot is one in which the protagonist sees himself as the undeserving victim. In good faith, he had trusted the advice given to him by his long standing bank, only to be severely disadvantaged by the outcome. Misinformation and false promises create feelings of misfortune and betrayal. He and his wife had put their faith in the advice of a banking official and in the process feel that they have been misled and duped. The central positioning of the protagonist is that of a victim making this a tragic tale of ill-fortune. This story also hints at deception on the part of the bank. The narrator casts the bank as the villain and the banking staff as the agents of his
misfortune. This subtext of deception within the story underscores the sense of treachery felt by the participant. This is a tragic arc in the story and the point at which it reaches its ascendency before its decline. There is a sense here that he regards himself as having been preyed upon and trapped by inequitable restrictions. He must continue to pay a substantial amount more for his mortgage than his fellow consumers. We feel pity for his dilemma and take his story as a cautionary tale about taking advice from a bank.

It is important for the participant that the self-identity he has constructed here is appreciated (Gabriel 2000). So, as listeners we are encouraged to see him not as the pitiful victim of a tragic set of circumstances from which he could not escape, but rather as an injured party who is capable of fighting back. This is reinforced toward the end of the story when the narrator adamantly professes his intention to exit once the opportunity arises.

He subsequently declares:

‘I’m prepared to leave everything now….There’s no hold with me and our bank. There’s NOTHING that can keep me there...’

An additional unique feature of the tragic banking story is that even if the participant was partly to blame for their misfortune by way of their own actions or inactions (which they often acknowledged), they still elicit compassion from the listener. Because these are tales of villains and victims, battles between good and evil, strong emotions were commonplace and include feelings of sorrow, regret and anger. Darker elements are also present and often take the form of desires to enact revenge. Metaphors were frequently utilised to emphasise sentiment and included references to ‘loaded guns’, ‘a gun to my head’, being ‘held over a barrel’, ‘evil doers’ and ‘devils’. Feelings of shame manifested themselves on occasion where a participant felt they could have done more to gain satisfactory outcomes.

6.2 Comic Stories

It was back in the 90’s and it was difficult enough to get loans…. But I did have a contact in my local branch….He said ‘Oh no. I can’t, I can’t seem to get this loan for you!’…. I found it very difficult and at this stage I just went on the phone. ‘You ARE getting that loan for me (laugh). This is ridiculous’ (Laugh). And I didn’t laugh at the counter or at them or anything!... I was just raging cause I met all the criteria. It was like I was getting refused and eh, I said ‘You go back there now, and you ring me back WHEN YOU’VE GOT IT’. This is the bank manager (smile)! And he comes back to me in a half an hour ‘That’s all fine. It’s all sorted out’ (Laugh).....

The story excerpt above demonstrates how comic stories are more light hearted and self-deprecating in form and nature. They will also often involve elements of subtle trickery and deception. The central plotline places the protagonist in a dilemma and then describes their attempts to resolve such an issue. Other characters, such as the banking staff were depicted as clumsy, incompetent, weak or dim-witted. The idea of someone getting their comeuppance was also commonplace, for instance, a bank staff member being hoodwinked by claims of exaggerated finances. Battles are less about good and evil and more about big versus small, me versus them. Rather than resulting in real hurt like tragic stories, the outcome was usually annoyance or irritation. The intention is to elicit empathy from the listener through retelling events in an amusing manner. This is not to assume that comic stories are simply about entertaining the listener. At their core they are complicated and typically draw out varied emotions ranging from pity and scorn to bitterness and gratitude. In this instance, the comedy often masks deeper feelings and emotions such as rejection and disappointment.

6.3 Romantic Stories

Romantic tales refer to stories where the participant appreciates some action taken by the lender when dealing with their financial needs, for example being helpful with a loan application or going above and beyond basic service requirements. Such actions gave participants a sense of equality with the bank reinforcing their self-esteem which tended to imbue the relationship with trust. Romantic plots also developed with reference to friends and partners who assisted in financial endeavours and so they did not have to specifically relate to relationships with a bank. These tales represent a real sense of relationship development and so tended to be referenced historically, to when participants discussed the beginnings of their banking relationship. In the context of this research they centred around themes such as reciprocation and recognition (Gabriel p, 84). The
emotions most common to this kind of story were feelings of security and gratitude as is evident in the abbreviated story below.

My daughter was buying a car recently and she wanted to get a bank draft and she was busy herself. So I said “I’ll organize it”... I rang ...... and asked could she (the bank teller) organize the bank draft for me. She organized it and I just walked across the road and picked it up. She let me pick it up! .......I did have to get authorization to take the money out of her bank a/c. But she had it all organized for me......!”

This story is romantic as it involves a display of appreciation by the bank for the protagonist. It is almost symbolic of a gift-giving gesture that is somewhat unexpected given the nature of the request. It is clear that this incident is a source of gratification for the participant, reinforcing her self-concept as a valued customer. It demonstrates the simplicity and benefit that is possible in consumer relationships where both parties are amicable and co-operative.

Romantic stories were most commonly associated with the beginnings of participants banking relationship. Often this was conveyed nostalgically and exposed a sense of lament for what was retrospectively once a good relationship. Romantic stories relating to other stages of participant relationships typically dealt with tokens of reconciliation after a relationship transgression. These stories tended to be romantic hybrids with tragic dimensions. Pure romantic tales, which include themes of love and romance and often deal with overcoming adversity through love e.g. “love conquers all”, were not evident in this research.

7 Conclusions

The lived experience of a participant’s banking life-time evident in the collected stories, strongly supports the existence of relationships which have attitudinally dissolved to a point of complete emotional disconnection in favour of the status quo. The research labelled these types of relationships as disaffected. Stories demonstrate how these interactions are not temporarily bound and can exist for lengthy periods of time. As the methodology permitted the evolution of the relationship to be sketched over time, it was clear that initially they began with positive associations and affiliations. At this juncture the relationship is deemed to be full of hope and possibility for the future.

Stories then demonstrate that as time passes these positive feelings become replaced with more negative sentiments. This shift in attitude is attributable to repeated and unresolved episodes of dissatisfaction experienced by the participant, yet these individuals still remain in their relationships regardless. Analysis of the collected stories indicates that this occurs because participant relationships develop to a state where dissatisfaction becomes normalised and even expected. Loss Aversion theory plays a significant role here, where negative rather than positive outcomes dominate participants thinking with the result that individuals tend to frame the benefits of exiting as potential losses and so they choose to remain.

The research concludes that dissatisfaction may play a less important role in relationship dynamics than was previously thought. This is because the stories told by the informants suggest that dissatisfaction is transitory and has a non-cumulative effect. This was evident in the way the stories showed how these relationships quickly move from a negative state back to the status quo. Stories further suggest that rather than increasing the likelihood that the relationship will be terminated, the passing nature of dissatisfaction found in this study results in low levels of exit.

8 Discussion

While reservations are warranted in using storytelling as a methodology it is judged here to be very appropriate for investigating any consumer relationship that had lasted over a long period of time. Analysing individual stories and categorising them by typology allowed the research to trace high and low points across participant relationships. Such rich material cannot be accessed using a quantitative methodology nor can a historical tracing be easily facilitated by a standard interview technique.

Applying a storied approach also facilitated access to consumers rationalisations for choosing to remain in long term financial relationships they deem to be dissatisfactory. The collected stories drew together the
happenings, events and actions as they occurred to present a representation of consumers understanding of their banking relationships (Polkinghorne 1995). As knowledge is organised in stories, the research presents a reflection of the consumer banking world as it exists both socially and individually. We therefore conclude that story as a methodology is uniquely positioned to access consumer experiences with a richness that other methods might lack.

The main concern regarding the suitability of the storytelling method was whether or not consumer interviews would yield tales of experiences that would be sufficiently rich or even plentiful. In addition, given that the research problem involved understanding what might lie beneath consciousness (as is the case with non-exiting behaviour in problematic relationships), it was unclear if consumers would even have a level of relationship involvement sufficient to produce fully emplotted stories. Consequently, we recommend that storytelling is best suited to researching complex consumer behaviours where the intention is to probe the consciousness of participants and reveal issues pertinent to human experience and activity.

Although arguably the popularity of narrative inquiry arose in organisational literature, this study has shown the relevance of social narratives to the daily behaviour of ordinary consumers. It concludes that folklore generated amongst consumers regarding their banks has a significant effect on their consumption behaviour, creating relational expectations and conveying behavioural norms, which include non-exiting behaviour in problematic financial relationships. Perception and actions are influenced and even determined by such narratives. The research also evidences that these traded stories have resulted in the production of a meta banking narrative which dictates what a banking relationship is by defining what it is not (i.e. amicable, easy to terminate or fair).

The conclusion of this study is that stories play a significant role in the development of consumer banking relationships. In particular they allowed the research to delve into the mind of the consumer and identify why they chose to remain in relationships they were no longer happy with and what factors underpinned this decision. This was made possible by mapping stories over the life history of a participants banking relationship and identifying typologies as they evidenced changes and critical junctures in that relationship. Essentially, the stories recounted the ebb and flow of the relationship over time to reveal episodes of discontent and disharmony leading to a level of attitudinal dissolution in the absence of behavioural change.

Furthermore, it is the conclusion of this research that consumer stories provide four functions for narrators; sense making (Woodside, Sood and Miller 2008), validation of experience, experience transference and cathartic release (Woodside 2010). These functions are not necessarily mutually exclusive and in many instances all four can be fulfilled through the retelling of an experience.

As a method for future consumer research we regard it as being uniquely insightful in a variety of highly involved and complex consumer situations.

References


Innovative Methodologies in Qualitative Research: Social Media Window for Accessing Organisational Elites for interviews

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Abstract: Reflexivity is the nature of qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Morgan an Smircich, 1980); implying that through reflectivity exercises researchers are able to demonstrate their research's rigour and also create a treasure trove of ideas and strategies, share the pleasures and agonies of doing qualitative research. The ever-growing body of knowledge on the strategies for accessing research participants that researchers share, evidences the gains of reflexivity (see the newly injected literature Cunliffe and Alcadipani, 2016; Blix and Wettergren, 2015; Mikecz, 2012). Well, this article does the same; it reflects on the access methodology employed for a PhD research (Maramwidze, 2015) carried out to explore the challenges faced by Foreign Direct Investors (FDI) in the South African banking sector, which involved sampling elite respondents. Similar to other researchers’ views on accessing potential research participants, in this case organisational elites, the researcher faced challenges associated with gaining access; as well as the usually high cost of conducting face-to-face qualitative interviews.

Whilst qualitative research provides contextually rich data related to specified research objectives, it is agreeable that this depends on the seniority and level of experience of respondents in organisations of interest. Organisational elites are good examples of such experienced respondents, but they are difficult to access because they often use gatekeepers to screen down possible contacts and manage their workloads more effectively. This access problem is particularly exacerbated on the part of beginning researchers who have not built up a deep enough networks of organisational contacts, which typified this author.

The paper promotes the online social and professional media window access strategy for overcoming the challenges of access; which of course, helps minimise the financial and time cost factors. The key insight from the paper is that, success in accessing professional elites requires a methodical approach to identifying and building relationships (for types of researcher - respondent relationships, see Cunliffe and Alcadipani, 2016) with suitable online professional groups and staff in target organisations for the research, from early on in the research process. This establishes needed trust and elicits stronger cooperation from such elites in providing meaningful information to the researcher. The purpose of this article is therefore to present the author's subtle and innovative access strategy. As such, the paper does not attempt to provide details about data collection, analysis or findings of the case study reflected upon. The main contribution of the paper to knowledge is the immediacy in experience which the PhD study affords beginning researchers in learning how to establish such online relationships of trust with the elite participants, learn and implement innovative methodologies, to access and interview elites than would be the case without such strategies. The wider implications of the ideas for teaching research methods to beginning researchers are therefore explored later on in the paper.

Keywords: Reflexivity in qualitative research; organisational elites; innovative and diplomatic access strategies; social media (LinkedIn); research students; teaching research methods

1 Introduction

Successful completion and quality of a research, especially qualitative research, typically requires experienced organisational respondents suitable for answering the research questions meaningfully (Cunliffe and Alcadipani, 2016; Mikecz, 2012; King, 1994; Robson, 2002). Hornby et al (1993, p. 280 cited in Welch et al, 2002) states that elites are groups of individuals in societies who are considered to be superior because of their position of power, authority, talent and privileges, hence the influence that they may exert on others (Woods, 1998). These elites are often difficult to access because of the need to alleviate time pressures around their commitments. Given the need for rich qualitative data which organisational elites provide and interest in managing down the overall costs of doing qualitative research, it is important to explore practical tips for achieving these objectives to beginning researchers, such as research students. Articles on gaining access, building relationship and trust, and maintaining relationships for example, are bountiful. It is however, the need to continue adding to this body of knowledge, reflexive discussions of the strategies for gaining access, especially using case-study experiences, for updating purposes. The ever-evolving technological innovations mean ever-evolving methodologies which researchers can adopt. When such innovations are used successfully, it makes sense to update knowledge on such developments in order to help other researchers; hence the gains of reflexivity in qualitative research. In this paper, a particularly useful set of strategies takes...
advantage of social media and professional networks as a window for accessing organisational research participants. This approach and strategy is currently not as main-stream as traditional research methods in literature.

The purpose of this paper is to promote the social and professional media as access window for organisational elites. It uses a PhD research entitled: ‘The political challenges of foreign direct investments: insights from South African banking sector’ completed in 2015 at Sheffield Hallam University, UK, to demonstrate the successful use of online social and professional media (LinkedIn particularly) to recruit organisational elites for a qualitative research. The organisational elites involved are therefore experienced bank staff, investors in the banking sector, and policy makers whose perceptions of the said challenges were needed. Reflecting on this journey is important especially to beginning researchers because it opens new windows for accessing the difficult to access organisational elites. The author faced access challenges while doing the PhD research; finding it difficult to connect and obtain interview appointments because of various hurdles. Generally, her experiences are immediate to such beginners, whose problem of access is exacerbated by lack of established network with such elites compared to mature industry-based researchers. Also, there was a real need to manage down the overall cost of the PhD research which was self-funded, a position facing most research students. Because of the purpose of the paper, the author makes no attempt to bring in details of data, analysis or findings.

1.1 Overview of the article
The rest of the article is as follows. Section 2 is a brief literature review on access to organisational elites in qualitative research, which reiterates the gaps in knowledge. Section 3 presents pertinent aspects of the PhD case study contextualises the research experience shared with the readers, and elucidate wider research methods thinking which research students can benefit from. The thrust of the case study is how the researcher overcomes the challenges in gaining access to needed organisational elites in the study. A discussion section (4) summarises the contributions to knowledge of the paper whilst Section 5 presents a case for inclusion of this topic into teaching research methods to research students; suggesting the effective use innovative research approaches to gaining access to elite participants. Section 6 concludes the paper, offering suggestions for future insights.

2 Literature review on access to organisational elites in qualitative research
The main foci of this literature review are access to elites and the process of interviewing them. This strand of literature falls under the widely agreed assertion that gaining access to research participants is an arduous task. For instance, latest works Cunliffe and Alcadipani, 2016; Mikecz, 2012; Harvey, 2010 agrees with earlier assertions (Laurila, 1997; Welch et. al, 2002; Leblanc and Schwartz, 2007) that accessing respondents and indeed organisational elites for the purpose of interviewing them for qualitative data, is difficult. Some writers argue that the implication of this difficulty is that researchers may shy away from interviewing organisational elites because of the perceived barriers (Delaney, 2007). This denies the research access to rich experiences, which make the elites particularly important as sources of research data. As evidenced in the following section, a sizeable body of literature provide insights to researchers on strategies for accessing organisational elites. That said, the strategies rely mainly on the researcher having a network link to the elites which most early researchers such as research students may not have.

2.1 Who are organisational elites?
Several writers offer seemingly assenting descriptions for elites in general. For example, Mills (1999) cited in Blix and Wettergren (2015) brackets elites as those people who have power and authority, prestige and money, and are often in control and command of things. In organisation research, organisational elites are the people who occupy senior positions in organisations (Welch et. al 2002; Woods, 1998 cited in Harvey, 2010; Hornby et. al 1983 cited in Welch et al 2002; and Giddens 1972). In this context, the organisational elites dealt with can be characterised as political, economic and corporate elites, since they include senior bank staff, investors in the South African banking sector, and government policy makers. Most of them occupy senior positions, are powerful in terms of strategic decision making roles, and have great influence on the behaviours and actions of others in the organisations and/or society. The sample comprised of company owners, chief executive officers, managing directors, and senior persons in public and private organisations.
2.2 But why is it difficulty to access organisational elites?

Literature suggests that most elites tend to erect barriers around themselves (Hertz and Imber, 1993; Welch et al, 2002; Mikecz, 2012) which makes the sampling processes time-consuming and difficulty (Thomas, 1993). So, how do elites shut out the world? Suggestions in literature points at persons known as gatekeepers; whose responsibility is to screen and approve who sees who and when. So no matter the category of elites under research, gatekeepers are thought to be the hurdle between. Examples of gatekeepers include persons such as secretaries or personal assistants (Drew, 2014; Ostrander, 1995; Laurila, 1997; Welch, 2002; Leblanc and Schwartz, 2007; Mikecz, 2012). This is limiting for researchers because they often have to work on strict time boundaries with limited funding. Generally, literature suggests various strategies for identifying, contacting and gaining commitment to participate in research, which typically, is the sampling stage of a research. Sampling, according to Robson (2002) is critical for the research’s rigour and quality. Sampling involves the careful selection of research participants from a research population (Walliman, 2005) and according to Mason (1996) a sample should consist of people possessing appropriate knowledge for answering the research questions.

2.3 The process of gaining access

Clearly, the process of gaining access to elites depends entirely on the category of the elites being pursued. With regards to organisational elites, Brannick and Coghlan, 2007) suggests that primary access is when the researcher seeks for permission to get in to an organisation for the purpose of undertaking research and secondary access is the process of building relationships in order to gain access to people and information. To access research participants, Goldman and Swayze (2012) summarises the stages of gaining access in a brief but quite comprehensible manner, namely: a) identifying potential participants; b) contacting and c) gaining commitment stages. Through these stages, some recent articles suggest first-step strategies such as reviewing organisational databases and business listings in order to gain insights into organisations then decide who to include in samples, and use of business directories to identify potential elites (Dexter, 2006; Odendahl and Shaw, 2002; and Welch et al., 2002).

The second stage involves mainly contacting the organisation or individual elites in order to inform them of the research purpose. Thus, the research uses existing contacts in target organisations seeking their consent to participating in research. However, advice shared here focus on one’s own contacts in organisations which early researchers may not have, and also mature researchers who are not familiar with the industry of focus in a study. For instance, Welch et al (2002) suggests some interesting ideas that are quite helpful in formulating approaches to organisational elites. They suggest the use of an internal sponsor for example, a senior person in an organisation, who would use his/her power and authority to influence the participation of others. The question that remains unanswered is: what if the researcher has no internal sponsor or the research involves a number of organisations? Ostrander (1993) believes the approach is practicable if the sponsor one knows has influence and is also known by many others. However, this approach, which they call the cascading or top-down approach, has some drawbacks, if a (novice) researcher has not yet established any strong network of influential contacts in the field of research. As Macdonald and Hellgren (1998) posits, Welch et al (2002)’s suggestions may work well but may not reduce the cost challenge in qualitative research. Overall however, just like Mason (1996), Welch et al. (2002) assume that the snowballing technique can come in handy for building up research samples, but only when the researcher has gained initial access into the organisation.

The final stage of access to elites involves communicating with the chosen individuals. Researchers commonly share the advice that strong letters of introduction to state the research purpose is paramount (Delaney, 2007). However, at this stage, communication barriers erected to screen who speaks to elites can impede contact efforts. Elites often employ gatekeepers as noted earlier, who screen visitors and communication with elites in order to lighten their loads in organisations. Advice presented in literature entails communicating the value that the person will add to the research, thus making the person see the big picture and stressing the fact that their input is significant for the successful completion of the project (Delaney, 2007; Sabot, 1999; Dexter, 2006).

2.4 But how is the challenge of gatekeepers addressed in literature

Extant and current literature distinctively contribute unique strategies that researchers have successfully employed, and believe can help gain access to research participants. Most however, do not point at the social and professional media as windows for accessing organisational respondents, even elites. To mention but just a few, Harvey (2010 p9) exhibits quite a number methods for gaining access; Mikecz (2012) shares his
experiences on gaining access to the Eustonian community of elites. His positionality, which Petkov and Kaoullas (2015) describes as the researcher’s knowledge of aspects of culture, social, or physically knowing the organisational elites, was advantageous to gaining access. But the concept of positionality is also thought to be a hindering factor in accessing organisational elites (see Petkov and Kaoullas, 2015 for elaborated types of positionality). Mikecz explicitly shows that he made a break through because he had worked at an international university and had trained corporate executives, therefore had a portfolio of the potential people from which to build the research sample (social capital to put it in the words of Thuesen, 2011 cited in Mikecz, 2012 p 486). This suggests that inside knowledge of an organisation and an established fluid relationship with organisational elites prior to the research ensures perhaps, the successful elimination of gatekeepers. Formal "dating" of potential participants with a purpose to develop and nurture relationship for research seems to be an agreeable approach in literature. Cunliffe and Alcadipani (2016) conceptualises such an approach into three main perspectives of relationships for accessing difficulty to access respondents (see Cunliffe and Alcadipani, 2016: p 541 for the nature of access from the Instrumental, Transactional and Relational perspective). Petkov and Kaoullas (2015) adopt the use of an intermediary to gain access to a preferred respondent. According to these writers, an intermediary would be anyone with close contacts with a target respondent; from friends, relative, doctors or lawyers. They admit that this approach is "highly contextual" (p 7) which may suggest longer processes and delays, thereby incurring more costs. Similarly, Cunliffe and Alcadipani (2016) approaches entail both 1) relational and perhaps 2) opportunistic or random access. Relational in that, because of the outsider positionality, an intermediary (acquaintant) was used in order to gain access to a target respondent. Opportunistic or randomly because the researcher approached anyone believed to be of influence in the organisation. What is evident in most of the cases reviewed is that; strategies employed involve physical contacting of target respondents, depended on already established relationship or on the use of physical intermediaries. It could be thought that in this time and age, it could also be useful to peep and try to tactfully gain access through the social and professional media window, avoiding the hurdles of 1) positionality 2) gatekeepers.

2.5 Gaps in knowledge
As a major gap in knowledge in this area, once more, the question that remains unexplained is how researchers without internal contacts, for instance, can go around the gatekeepers’ challenge. This paper addresses this question by sharing the author’s recent experiences in accessing professional elites for her research in the hope that it will benefit research students significantly, a perspective that is not fully covered by other researchers who narrate their own experiences (Richards, 1996; Welch et. Al., 2002; Morris, 2009; Delaney, 2007; Cunliffe and Alcadipani, 2016; Petkov and Kaoullas, 2015; Blix and Wettergren, 2014; Mikecz, 2012; Easterby- Smith and Malina, 1999; and Nudzor, 2013).

3 Methodology
Since the purpose of this article is to present the author’s subtle and innovative access strategy, the author makes no attempt to provide details about data collection, analysis or findings of the case study reflected upon. The main contribution of the paper to knowledge is the immediacy in experience which the PhD study affords beginning researchers in learning how to establish such online relationships of trust with the elite participants, learn and implement innovative methodologies, to access and interview elites than would be the case without such strategies. Also recommended and elucidated are the wider implications of the ideas for teaching research methods to beginning researchers are therefore explored later on in the paper.

3.1 The PhD research: Empirical insights from South African banking sector
However, providing some insights into the stem research is fundamental to facilitate the conceptualisation of the methodology and access technique adopted. As noted earlier, this article stems from a PhD research carried out to explore the political challenges facing investors in the South African banking sector and the impact of FDI flows on the economy as related to their experience. It explored the experiences and perceptions of local and foreign investors, the government and the intermediaries about FDI flows into the economy. This lands the research into qualitative tradition using interview and required it to use semi-structured interview technique to obtain their in-depth views. Also, the nature of the research topic and objectives compelled the research to conduct in-depth, face-to-face interviews with organisational elites. To set the context of the research pictorially, the researcher presents below the research objectives, methodology, and contributions to knowledge of the research.
The table shows four important boxes under which most research topics are conceptualised, namely: Critical Literature (Domain Literature), which teases out researchable gaps in knowledge; Problem Studied and Why, which determines which gaps to explore further and frames them into guiding research questions; Methodology, which consists of a suitable approach for successfully exploring the questions; and expected Contributions to Knowledge, which portray the value-adding outcomes from the research. In this research, it is clear from the research questions that key evidence required from the research is the qualitative experiences of stakeholders in the research – bank staff, investors in banking, and government policy makers, for example. As noted earlier, senior staff amongst these stakeholders constitutes the organisational elites that are the subject of this paper.

3.2 The Pertinent aspects that elucidate key research methods and procedures
As highlighted earlier, Brannick and Coghlan, (2007) suggests that primary access is when the researcher seeks for permission to get in to an organisation for the purpose of undertaking research and secondary access is the process of building relationships in order to gain access to people and information. Taking on from this viewpoint, the researcher approached the access process from a relational perspective (Cunliffe and Alcadipani, 2016) endeavouing to build a fluid relationship with target elites, where access is sought by directly contacting the identified research elites. Details of the access process are reflected on below.
3.3 The reflexive journal

As the author is a research method tutor and enthusiast, it was reasonable to reflect on the challenges of gaining access to organisational elites, and to offer a systematic approach that eased the process of accessing and successfully interviewing target respondents.

As mentioned earlier, reflexivity is the nature of qualitative research in assessing quality (Mays and Pope, 2000) for example, and for satisfying many other conventions; developing a reflexive journal was part of the reflexive methodology the author adopted to contribute to the theories of accessing organisational elites. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) in a reflexive journal, a researcher notes down regular entries of the research process and procedures/techniques employed at different phases of the research process for credibility reasons and these entries can be used as rich sources of methodological approaches in literature. It is in these entries that the researcher recorded methodological decisions and the reasons for their choice for quality and rigor purposes. The same approach is now employed to import and contribute to the body of literature, innovative techniques used to access organisational elites that were difficult to access before the methodology was designed and employed.

4 Overcoming the challenges in gaining access to organisational elites

4.1 Avoiding the gatekeepers

Just like other researchers, the author asserts that the main challenge the research on exploring the challenges facing foreign bankers in South Africa was sampling the appropriate respondents; who happen to be organisational elites, typically surrounded by gatekeepers. The access process was characterised by several failed attempts; typically, no response or failure to speak to the targeted research participants due to barriers between. The following procedures were then tried and tested, resulting in a successful recruitment of relevant target elites in the various organisations that were sampled for the purpose of the study.

4.2 Identifying potential organisations and interview subjects using internet research techniques

In order to identify potential organisations to include in the study, convenient sampling technique was utilised. Convenient sampling entails identifying potential respondents who have the knowledge required in a study and can be accessed more cheaply and timely than randomly sampled respondents (Suri, 2011; Morse, 2010; Neuman, 2004; Cohen et al, 2004; Marshall, 1996). Thus initially focusing on the research questions, the researcher searched for information on key players in the banking sector of South Africa, by surfing the internet and listing down potential organisations. Research supporting the use of social media to mine data from online discussions, to recruit participants and to facilitate research networks is ubiquitous Benson et al., (2014). Internet searches were fast and free, and can be conducted from anywhere where there is internet connection. The Reserve Bank of South Africa's website provided vital information about the FDIs, for instance, web addresses, physical addresses, telephone numbers and even names of the senior officers in the key informants' organisations. The researcher continued using web-searches to handpick organisations and individuals with characteristics suitable for answering the research questions, then started making contacts through professional networks such as Twitter and LinkedIn.

4.3 Contacting and gaining commitment

After identifying the research respondents, the next task was to get personal contact details of the relevant people. The internet and professional network approach the researcher adopted required tact and diplomacy in order to gain access to organisations and to elicit senior persons' commitment to a scholarly research successfully. At first, this was not easy because of the unfamiliarity between the researcher and the potential participants. Carnegie (1951)'s teachings on how to win people were found useful. He wrote that if you want people to be genuinely interested in yourself, you need first to become genuinely interested in them. He advised that one can only gain access to somebody and be in their good favour, if one learns about them and their interests. The process is reciprocal, those people will think well of you in return. People need to feel that their importance is acknowledged and appreciated and one can disarm people by showing them that their importance is appreciated, that way, they will not have to make a point of proving to you that they are important because they already know that you think they’re important. Carnegie (1951) suggestions implied that, people’s defences will be lowered and they will be much more likely to help you. This is the teaching that helped establish and maintain a rich network of potential participants remotely.
Social network tools such as LinkedIn and Facebook were used to identify and initiate a professional relationship in this study. The sites are quite rich and informative in terms of the organisations and individuals profiles and can be used to mine personal and professional data for research (Vladlena and Stephanie, 2013). The researcher was able to identify and select suitable persons from the profiles on LinkedIn. From there, she made direct communication to a person holding a position of interest using email on LinkedIn messaging. Of all these internet communication media, LinkedIn professional networking site was the most effective and efficient because of the number of responses compared to other Media. The researcher was able to connect with significant research subjects and had access to view their connections, most of which would be linked to other significant subjects for the study. The beauty of social and professional Medias is that they all provide free access to information as long as one has internet connection.

Once connections were established, the researcher introduced the persons to the research by sending information packs that included an introductory letter, an information sheet that clearly stated the purpose of the research, a consent form listing their rights, ethical issues, as well as contact details of this researcher and the University supervisory team. Communicating the research purpose is commended by many researchers who have tackled elite interviews. Interview subjects were all furnished with information about the research, thus, its purpose, the interview structures and the intended outcome. Besides helping answer the question “what is in this research for us?” it is believed that this approach will make individuals visualise the long term benefits of the research (Welch et al, 2002; Delaney, 2007). The researcher inspired the subjects by informing them of the potential changes that the research may instigate in as far as FDI policies are concerned. For example, the researcher emphasized that their participation might give them, for the first time, a platform from which to air their views about the advantages or disadvantages of the investment climate in which they are operating. As for the politicians and policy makers, motivation to participate was none other than the knowledge that they are doing something good, something highly appreciated in their policies which researchers have identified and would like to spread their good deeds through research.

In most cases people contacted were the rightful persons but whenever the person felt he or she was not the right person, they would mention the name of the person they knew was the appropriate respondent, resembling the progressive snowballing sampling technique the study employed. The snowball sampling technique was handy and proved to be an effective way of recruiting respondents whenever additional lines of enquiry were sought from other participants with who trust was already built. LinkedIn provides quite a useful platform for the snowball technique for continual recruitment of more participants as and when necessary. It should be mentioned that it is not always or automatic that very senior and important people respond and connect with a stranger on LinkedIn. But LinkedIn helped mitigate this challenge. For example, the researcher would ask for permission from already connected networks to act as referees to potential connections, an approach similar to Welch et al (2002) cascading approach. Also, it appears as if once some senior and important persons agree to connect, their presence in the researcher's network attracted other senior and important persons.

In retrospect, it is important to maintain a long lasting relationship with potential participants once the relationship is established. After accessing and having most of the research respondents within her communication network, the researcher built and nurtured friendly but professional relationship by continuously communicating with them on a regular basis through social networks such as Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn. For example, the researcher ‘followed’ them on these social networks, commenting on their postings or writing on their virtual walls, which implements Carnegie (1951)'s suggestion appropriately in the research. Taking interest in the career and even personal interest of identified participants was a strategy that helped this researcher to gain their attention and in turn, interest in what she was also doing. As a matter of fact, some of them started following the researcher on the same networks, a positive indication that they were interested in the relationship. Being followed or connected with some of the powerful individuals strengthened the researcher’s position in terms of gaining trust, and facilitated further recruitment of more potential participants. By so doing, the researcher and the participants became familiar with each other. Familiarisation before the actual interviews was helpful because it helped to reduce tension during interviews, which is common when strangers meet. The rapport with the study participants was built on trust, respect and honest agendas of the study, which were communicated to the respondents from the outset.

4.4 Summary of strategies used in dealing with challenges of access to the studied elites

Having pre-explored literature on accessing and interviewing elites, the researcher was aware of the likely challenges associated with elites, in particular gatekeepers. In the view of this major stumbling block, some
invaluable strategies to accessing potential interviewees are highlighted in literature. For example the researcher's own contacts and networks, and the importance of trust building are highlighted. Mikecz (2012), for example, highlights the problem of gatekeepers in contacting elites and the subsequent costs because of the hurdles researchers encounter and suggests using networks and social capital for instance, in order to gain access to elites. However, although some researchers have attempted to provide practical knowledge on building networks for example (Mikecz, 2012) conversations on how researchers initiate or develop those important and trustworthy relationships and how to nurture them are remain limited and the strategies are dated.

4.5 The Relational Perspective approach
Taking on the process from a relational perspective (Cunliffe and Alcadipani, 2016) the challenge of gatekeepers was mitigated by first, a deliberate desktop research; a cost effective approach that is mostly free, quick and easy, facilitated by internet. Researchers can get access to potential respondents' data, contact them directly and get quick responses. Depending on individual tact and skills, personal charm in communication and relationship building research samples can be achieved at the convenience of the research using minimal resources. In most cases, and for as long as the professional profile of the target individual is online, the gatekeepers challenge is eliminated. Cutting off the middle links reduces significantly the time and cost challenge.

The significance of writing and sending strong introduction letters stating the purpose of the research as advised by Goldman and Swayze (2012) for example cannot be underplayed, but this was done after establishing relationship rather than as letters soliciting for connections or networks. The researcher sent out information packs comprising of a) introduction letter detailing the purpose of the study, expected contributions of the interviewee, b) interview guide listing topics for discussion, and 3) consent form highlighting interviewee's rights to access interview data before and after the research if they wish.

5 Summary of contributions to knowledge
The paper demonstrates the tips for cultivating trust among potential organisational elites in qualitative research. It addresses the need to support early-stage researchers with an immediate experience they can relate to. It fills a gap in this area which is due to lack of deep networks of research students with these elites, which is also important to mature researchers without such a network. The paper developed ideas related to challenges around gaining access organisational elites in qualitative research by providing a contextually-informed set of practical tips for overcoming those challenges. It detailed the thought processes, research framework which serves as a thinking frame and strategies for side-stepping gatekeepers to such elites in the research process. This way, researchers are able to build trust with potential elites via online professional media (LinkedIn, Facebook for example), which helps researchers to effectively, conveniently, timely, and cost-savingly secure rich qualitative data from the elites relevant to successful exploration of stated research questions. These affordances are particularly helpful to beginning researchers like research students, a focus that has not been adequately covered in the literature. The immediacy of such new researchers learning these success tips from one of their own (as the author is having just completed her PhD research in 2015) will make the ideas easier to grasp by such new researchers.

It may not be right to say that there is a pronounced conceptual framework which underpins this research, since the paper dealt with a limited facet of the PhD research topic, which used suitable conceptual frameworks in the FDI field. That said, interpreting the term 'conceptual framework' broadly to mean accepted ideas in the literature which inform the thesis point of the paper (challenges of access to organisational elites in qualitative research), the paper explicated received ideas in the literature on strategies for overcoming the challenges. At least, it exemplifies such strategies using a recent doctoral research as a case in point, and in light of how they are facilitated by modern internet research techniques, as explained above. A subtle and stand-out framework for enhancing access to organisational elites lies beneath the steps discussed in the paper for enabling researchers to gain access, namely: eliciting suitable lists of elites; approaching them using their profiles in professional networks; refining the list down to a core pool of experience elites using snowballing by colleague referrals; relating with the ethnographically within the professional networks in order to build trust with them; finally sensitizing them about the research topic, what they can contribute to it, and what it means for them, and for the ‘world’.
Methodologically, the paper surfaces such methodological novelties as: a) the said use of modern internet research techniques to overcome access to studied elites, b) use of an emotionally immediate recent case study to convey the strategies to new researchers who suffer the disadvantages of access, cost and time pressures more than mature researchers; c) a combination of the internet techniques and face-to-face interviews in order to triangulate and deepen the evidence base for the research; and d) inclusion of elements of research thinking and implementation that provide wider training in research methods to new and mature researchers (Flick, 2009). An example of these additional elements is the eight criteria in the ladder of criticality which the author uses here, following Ezepue (2015).

The researcher appreciates the need for novel research as implied in this criterion, and notes that the novelty of this paper consists mainly in a) an explication of how to use internet research techniques to overcome challenges of access to organisational elites in a way that is directly focused on the needs of early researchers, and b) a development of wider skills in advanced research thinking which benefits all researchers, for example, the use of a simple research framework to clarify key points in the research process. The theoretical puzzle resolved by the paper is the subtle issue of ‘access to needed research subjects in the internet age’ (a sense of next generation research techniques), which alleviates not only access problems, but also cost and research time pressures. The practical puzzle is how to use a mini-doctoral research story as a case study in teaching these skills to new researchers who typically have neither the networks that facilitate easier access to organisational elites, nor the resources to prosecute more expensive traditional research approaches.

The researcher feels that the paper, albeit modestly, energises an increasing focus on modern internet-based research techniques, using professional networks, as first-line strategies in research thinking across almost all topic areas, in social sciences, humanities, business and management, for example. This is because of the substantial cost advantages, time saving affordances, ease of access, and wider ethnographic scope which these techniques facilitate compared to traditional approaches such as face-to-face questionnaires, and visit to organisations.

6 Integrating innovative methodologies training into curricula

Pedagogically, the publication of the paper in the proceedings of the 15th European Conference on Research Methodology for Business and Management Studies ECRM 2016 was the first step in the dissemination of the PhD research methodology to which the paper relates. The researcher uses the ideas to design curricula for inclusion of such topics into the teaching of research methods to university students. For example a blackboard training portfolio packed with Future Research Education on Application and Practice (FREAP) for developing students’ research knowledge and practical research skills deriving from tried and tested methodological innovations, through approaches such as:

- **Research training initiatives**
  
  Block release classes or periodic research training masterclasses dedicated to formally train students at variant levels in preparation for their level dissertations/research including field work phases.

- **Research conversations lounge**
  
  Designing learning slots which allows for informal conversations with invited guest speakers and tutors with variant research experiences (qualitative/quantitative) sharing knowledge and practical research tips; and students encouraged to ask questions about different stages of research, for example practical tips on accessing participants.

- **Research methods consultations**
  
  Dedicated and personalised research surgeries where students get 30-60 minutes time slots to come in and ask/discuss selected research methods topics with member of teaching staff. Personalised discussion with students on the practicalities of conducting field work. Members of staff can provide field work guidance based on experience and practice based research.

- **Blackboard wikis and discussion boards**
Discussion boards and wikis dedicated to provide platforms from which students can discuss, with the opportunity to share knowledge and experiences, with each other and with members of the research methods teaching team.

7 Conclusion and recommendations

This article drew on a PhD study (Maramwidze, 2015) to present the author's experiences on recruiting organisational elites from the South African banking sector, in an endeavour to continue adding knowledge on how to access organisational elites. It offered insights into how some barriers to gaining access to elites can be overcome, specifically practical tips on strategies for identifying and recruiting potential informants, scheduling and preparing for the interview, establishing, building and nurturing rapport.

The paper particularly highlights the use the advantages of using internet research techniques in qualitative research compared to other traditional approaches, and the need to combine approaches, where necessary. It emphasized the scope of these contributions for enhancing the teaching of research methods such as mainstreams the needs of early researchers.

7.1 Limitations

It should be noted that this article is context- and topic-specific. Therefore, the lessons and ideas offered are based on experiences interacting with organisational elites in a FDI context, and not philanthropic elites for example. Whilst some procedures may be applicable across elites, some may be adjusted depending on the suitable categories of the elites.

7.2 Suggestions for further research in view of all these?

The paper has developed additional perspectives for the ‘theory development’ in the wider area of modern online research techniques, mainly in form of a suggestion that researchers consider the feasibility of these techniques first, before and/or other techniques, depending on the nature of research questions involved. It is important to do this for all kinds of qualitative and other research topics. In terms of research practice, this remark holds, and further consideration should be given to how the kinds of methodological novelties achieved in the paper could be applied to further work in the area, and research methods generally. Areas to look at include mixed-methods research, quantitative research, and policy-leaning applied research, which call for differing emphasis in the techniques explored in the paper. An area of practice that is germane to all research fields is the teaching of research methods, which the paper has foregrounded as discussed in the foregoing criteria. The mainstreaming of the needs of early researchers in these quests is worthy of further attention by researchers.

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