

Using a Multimethod Approach to Research Enterprise Systems Implementations

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With the development and legitimacy of both qualitative and quantitative research, the combination of both types of research is expanding (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003). Lately, the alternative of combining methods – the multimethod approach - has emerged in different research areas as a way of improving research process and findings. “Multiple methods are used in a research program when a series of projects are interrelated within a broad topic and designed to solve an overall research problem” (Morse 2003, p. 196). The main advantages of multimethod work are (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998): triangulation – seeking to validate data and results by combining a range of data sources, methods, or observers; creativity – discovering fresh or paradoxical factors that stimulate further work; and expansion – widening the scope of the study to take in contextual aspects of the situation. Qualitative and quantitative methods should not be viewed as polar opposites (Van Maanen 1983) since their combination introduces both testability and context into the research (Kaplan and Duchon 1988). Collecting different kinds of data by different methods from different sources provides a wider range of coverage that may result in a fuller picture of the unit under study than would have been achieved otherwise (Bonoma 1985).

Based in a survey of the top Information Systems (IS) journals, Mingers (2001) mentions that the average of multimethod studies across journals varies rather randomly over time at around the 20%. Because the multimethod design approach is relatively new, there is a lack of research on the topic, and most especially there is a shortage of examples of its applications (Mingers 2001). In this paper we present how we have explored the multimethod approach by using an example domain in a step-by-step manner, learning about the strengths and weaknesses of this approach. The context is a doctoral research project whose aim was to study critical success factors for Enterprise Systems (ES) or Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) implementation projects.

Our research framework presents the different phases of the research study, and with the different research methods mapped and linked in each phase. Considering the research questions and the research context, we asked ourselves which research methods could be useful to address those questions. These are the research methods that we believe were appropriate for this research study. In order to develop this research project we decided to adopt the interpretive research paradigm. Finally, we present the analysis of the research trustworthiness.

Keywords: Enterprise Resource Planning, critical success factors, implementation phases, ERP implementation projects