

Perspectives on management research design and orientation: Quandaries and choices

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The purpose of this paper is to discuss some of the quandaries or difficult choices that affect detailed research design as well as the 'big' orientations or paradigms that motivate studies in the field of business and management research. Many of these choices and decisions are now commonly assumed to be mere preferences, no longer worthy of debate. As in the case of whether to collect data that is say, more easily quantified than qualified. Or whether the demands of practice are incommensurable with those of the social sciences. Yet a researcher's liking for one or other approach generally calls for differing mindsets. Centring discussions on recent surveys of managerial work points up certain of these oppositions and tensions. Also, a researcher has to 'trust the process' of a particular research orientation, if he or she is to achieve worthwhile, credible findings. Contract research or consultancy, for instance, requires a very different 'trusting of the process' from studies that are intended to lead to a doctorate. Predicaments in the former paradigm may arise where expectations are for politically acceptable findings. This is not like the formidable psychological contract between the student, supervisor and examiners in the latter example. Deliberate use is made here of Cartesian grids to illustrate such sharp contrasts in attitudes, expectations, needs and values in research with markedly differing points of reference. The symmetry, however, may well underplay the impact of certain research strategies. The stark choices as presented are not necessarily equally important. Each chink in integrity, for instance, regardless of the research orientation is a potential threat to the whole academic community with an interest in business and management research. On the other hand, advances in design and researcher sensitivities have the potential to transform the discipline of business and management research in imminent and unexpected ways.

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