STUDYDADDY

Get Homework Help From Expert Tutor

Get Help

THE ESSENTIAL
GUIDE TO DOING RESEARCH

ZINA O'LEARY

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO DOING RESEARCH

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO DOING RESEARCH

ZINA O'LEARY

Ⓢ SAGE Publications
London ● Thousand Oaks ● New Delhi

1 Research as a Creative and Strategic Thinking Process

'How do creativity and strategic thinking fit into "analytic" research?'

Chapter Preview

- **Exploring 'Research'**
- **The 'Construct' of Research**
- **Working Through the Complexity**
- **Putting It All Together**

EXPLORING 'RESEARCH'

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (2002) defines research as, 'the systematic study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions'. Now this may sound straightforward (and is often presented that way), but in practice research is often an open-ended process that is likely to generate as many questions as it does answers.

So how does the inexperienced researcher get a handle on the process? Well it is my contention, and in fact the premise of this book, that just being able to make sense of, or even being a scholar of, methods is not enough to 'do' research. The methods of research, particularly in the social and applied sciences, have evolved to become highly complex and diverse, and having some basic knowledge is certainly a necessity. This knowledge, however, is not in itself sufficient to begin designing and carrying out a study. Without a doubt, you must creatively and strategically 'think' your way through the process. Research needs to be considered both a 'thinking game' and a 'whole-brain' activity.

Research as a 'thinking person's game'

Contrary to many research methods texts that offer 'recipes' for research, I do not believe that the competent researcher can rely on any defined set of rules for selecting, designing, and carrying out research. Good research is a thinking person's game. It is a creative and strategic process that involves constantly assessing, reassessing, and making decisions about the best possible means for obtaining trustworthy information, carrying out appropriate analysis, and drawing credible conclusions.

Now there are many researchers out there who rely on, and even come to 'believe' in, particular methodological approaches. Janesick actually coined the term 'methodolatry' – a combination of method and idolatry that she defines as a 'preoccupation with selecting and defending methods to the exclusion of the actual substance of the story being told'; she describes methodolatry as a '… slavish attachment and devotion to methods' (1998: 48).

As a budding researcher, it is important to remember that particular research strategies are good or bad to the exact degree that they fit with the questions at hand. The perspectives you will adopt and the methods you will use need to be as fluid, flexible, and eclectic as is necessary to answer the questions posed.

Research as a 'whole-brain' endeavour

'Logical', 'analytic', 'systematic', 'formal', 'factual', 'linear', these are words we tend to associate with research, while 'organized', 'disciplined', and even 'pedantic' are words we associate with researchers. These are also the words that psychologists use to describe left-brain thinking. In fact as shown in Table 1.1, many of the descriptors for the left-brain double as adjectives for research itself.

TABLE 1.1 LEFT- AND RIGHT-BRAIN ATTRIBUTES

Left hemisphere		Right hemisphere	
Analytic	Formal	Intuitive	Informal
Logical	Linear	Spontaneous	Holistic
Temporal	Verbal	A temporal	Non-verbal
Sequential	Factual	Random	Imaginative
Orderly	Concrete	Diffuse	Metaphoric
Systematic		Causal	

(Adapted from Cherry et al. 1993)

But what about the creative or the right side of the brain? Words such as 'intuitive', 'spontaneous', 'random', 'informal', and 'holistic' are rarely associated with 'rigorous' research. Well in my mind, this is like trying to understand a two-sided world using only one-sided skills and thought processes. As Albert Einstein once said: 'The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift' (Einstein 1931, p. 97). Research needs to be seen as a process equally reliant on both the creative right as well as the strategic and logical left.

The creative right-brain
The right-brain explores the possibilities of situations and thrives on creativity. Its primary functions are synthesis, seeing relationships, and providing an overview. Now given the criteria of 'originality' in research and the unexpected complexities that invariably arise throughout the process, the right-brain would be as essential researching as the left. As researchers, a lack of creativity will see us finding exactly what we expect to find. Without the ability to 'think outside the square', we will always dwell within it.

While creative, right-brained thinking may not be credited as endemic to rigorous research, it can often be found as an unarticulated part of the process. For example, Kekule, the chemist who discovered the 'benzene ring', described the moment when he came to question the presumption that all molecules were based on two-ended strings of atoms, as one of profound creativity and vision:

> I turned my chair to the fire and dozed. Again the atoms were gamboling before my eyes. … I could distinguish larger structures, of manifold conformation; long rows, sometimes more closely fitted together; all twining and twisting in snakelike motion. But look! What was that? One of the snakes had seized hold of its own tail, and the form whirled mockingly before my eyes. (in Findlay 1965)

Like Kekule, those most closely associated with creative genius speak of inspiration as a space between the rational and irrational; a place where the known and the unknown converge and the conventional and the innovative meet. Box 1.1 lists some of the traits/skills that are important for creativity. Some are traits you may already possess; others are skills that can be acquired and developed.

Box 1.1 Working Creatively

The thinking processes of the 'creative' often involve:

- **Fluency and flexibility** – can think somewhat effortlessly, can easily abandon old ways of thinking and adopt new ones
- **Originality** – can come up with ideas that are outside common logic
- **Remote associations** – can form associations between elements that most would not see as linked together
- **Redefinitions** – can use familiar objects in new ways
- **Sensitivity to problems** – can perceive difficulties or deficiencies in bio-physical, social or environmental institutions
- **Acceptance of ambiguity** – can accept some uncertainty in conclusions
- **Divergence** – can engage in open-ended thinking, where there is not a single right answer

---

The logical left-brain

Stressing the importance of creativity is not meant to imply that there isn't a place for the logic and strategy of the left-brain. In fact, if good research is dependent on thinking outside the 'square', then it is equally dependent on the ability of the researcher to find focus and structure. Research is an activity that needs to be attacked, while not necessarily in a prescribed fashion, then certainly in a logical one.

Unfortunately, there are many creative and brilliant people whose potential to contribute to a body of knowledge is never met. More than one research student with incredible insight and creative 'potential' has abandoned the research endeavour

because they could not manage their way through the process. As shown in Box 1.2, while it may be advisable to openly explore a topic, a story line must eventually be scripted, followed, and told.

Box 1.2   The Case of the Perpetual 'Mapper'

I have a linear mind. It is logical and structured and thinks in terms of lists and dot points. I can think from start to finish, but it takes a conscious effort to explore connections between various issues. I was therefore quite intrigued to take on a research student whose notes were always jotted down in bubbles, doodles, and interconnecting linkages with no obvious linear structure. I worked closely with this perpetual 'mindmapper' and found that the student was quite exceptional at building theory and finding possibilities. He seemed unlimited in his ability to find remote associations and engage in insightful analysis that was not always self-evident.

The student was committed to this non-linear approach and had great success in building richness and depth. When it was time to begin the writing of the final document, however, the process became more difficult – so we discussed the need for a more linear approach. I explained that even for a perpetual mindmapper, a thesis needs to have a structure; a structure that invariably includes both chapters and pages presented in a numerical order. It is after all, a linear document.

The challenge for the 'linear thinker' is to consciously look for interconnections and possibilities, while the challenge for the 'mindmapper' is to be able to construct and tell their story in a logical and structured fashion.

I think the best researchers are those who manage to be creative in thinking, yet logical in structure. They manage to:

- be original, innovative, and imaginative … yet know where they want to go
- think outside the square … yet stay squarely on target
- use their intuition … but are able to share the logic of that intuition
- are fluid and flexible … yet deliberate and methodical
- are inspired, imaginative, and ingenious … in the development of methods that are realistic, practical, and doable.

THE 'CONSTRUCT' OF RESEARCH

Thirty or forty years ago, defining the construct of research would have been a breeze. I could have defined it as 'the production of knowledge through rigorous scientific investigation'. Researching was simply a scientific enterprise that followed the rules of scientific method. Sure, the object of scientific inquiry might differ, i.e. chemistry, biology, physics, the social, etc., but research was united by

common objectives, logic, presuppositions, and general methodological approaches. Social science fell under the scientific paradigm of the day (positivism) and worked within its assumptions. Enter the later half of the twentieth century, however, and many positivist assumptions, and therefore research assumptions, began to be questioned, critiqued, and even denigrated.

Positivism

For positivists, the goal of research is describing what we experience through observation and measurement in order to predict and control the forces that surround us. The social is seen as an object that can be studied 'scientifically'. Put simply, positivism assumes that social phenomena can be approached with scientific method and makes a number of assumptions about the world and the nature of research.

The world
Positivists believe that the world is a fixed entity whose mysteries are not beyond human comprehension. They believe that the world is: *knowable* – what we do not know will be uncovered in the future as technology improves and science evolves; *predictable* – there are laws, theories, and maxims that regulate the world, for example the theory of relativity and the law of gravity; and *singular* in truth and reality – there is a truth out there that is applicable to all.

The nature of research
For positivists, social research is a purely scientific endeavour that needs to follow set rules and procedures. It is *empirical* – involves exploration of those things that can be seen, felt, heard, tasted, and smelled as the grounds for all scientific knowledge; and it is often *reductionist* – involves the study of discrete parts of a system, rather than the system itself or its interconnectivity.

The researcher
Positivists believe that research is a specialist activity that needs to be undertaken by trained and qualified 'scientists'. Researchers should be: *experts* – generally scientists who have appropriate experience and qualifications; and always *objective* – a researcher's personal biases have no part in the research endeavour. The purpose of research is to produce knowledge not contingent on the researcher's beliefs, desires, or biases.

The methods
For positivists, methods are defined sets of procedures that need to be carried out with exacting detail. The methodologies are usually: *deductive* – researchers test a theory and look for confirmation through observations; *hypothesis-driven* – researchers propose a tentative statement that they attempt to prove/disprove; *reliable* – researchers use methods that will give the same results under repeated trials; and *reproducible* – methodological procedures can be repeated by other scientists who will glean similar findings.

The findings
Positivists generally want their findings to have broad applicability to the whole of a population. Findings are generally: *quantitative* – represented through numerical data; *statistically significant* – results are shown to be true beyond mere chance; and *generalizable* – findings are applicable to a population beyond a sample.

The times they are a changing

Enter the 1960s and things get much more complex. I saw a cartoon recently that showed two scientists staring at a blackboard full of formula. One says to the other 'You know what's really depressing? Knowing that everything we prove now will be disproved in a few years.'

There are probably a lot of scientists who don't find that joke particularly funny. It is, however, a joke that we now have a place for in a society that is increasingly sceptical of positivist assumptions. For example, is the world really knowable and predictable? Physicists now recognize the role of chaos and complexity in a universe that we may never 'capture'. And what about the nature of truth in the social world? Whose truth is it anyway? There are many 'post-positivists' who are looking at possibilities for the construction of knowledge beyond positivist assumptions, and in doing so are questioning the very heart of the scientific endeavour.

While there is much debate over the nature of post-positivists, anti–positivists, and many other postmodern 'ists', I have chosen to use the term 'post-positivist' to simply refer to the diverse range of philosophers, scientists, researchers, and others who are calling the assumptions of positivism into question.

The world
Post-positivists believe that the world may not be 'knowable'. They see the world as infinitely complex and open to interpretation. Post-positivists see the world as: *ambiguous* – science may help us to someday explain what we do not know, but there are many things that we have gotten wrong in the past and many things that we may never be able to understand in all their complexity; *variable* – the world is not fixed, 'truth' can depend on the limits of our ability to define shifting phenomena; and *multiple* in its realities – what might be 'truth' for one person or cultural group may not be 'truth' for another.

The nature of research
For post-positivists, reflexive research demands that understandings of the scientific endeavour begin to shift. While research can be based on the senses, it can also be: *intuitive* – hunches, metaphorical understandings, and the creative are all legitimized as appropriate ways of knowing and exploring the world; and *holistic* – research needs to explore systems because the whole is often seen as more than the sum of the parts.

The researcher
Post-positivists believe that the traditional gap between the researcher and the researched is one that can (and should) be diminished. Post-positivists researchers can act in ways that are: *participatory and collaborative* – rather than research focusing

TABLE 1.2 THE ASSUMPTIONS

from *Positivist*		to *Post-positivist*
The world		
Knowable	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Ambiguous
Predictable	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Variable
Single truth	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Multiple reality
The nature of research		
Empirical	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Intuitive
Reductionist	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Holistic
The researcher		
Objective	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Subjective
Removed expert	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Participatory & collaborative
Methodology		
Deductive	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Inductive
Hypothesis-driven	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Exploratory
Reliable	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Dependable
Reproducible	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Auditable
Findings		
Quantitative	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Qualitative
Statistically significant	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Valuable
Generalizable	⇦ -------------------------------------- ⇨	Idiographic or transferable

solely *on* a particular group, post–positivist researchers can also work both *for* and *with* participants; and *subjective* – researchers acknowledge being value-bound. They admit to biases that can affect their studies. The question for post–positivist researchers is how to recognize and manage, and in some situations, even–value and use subjectivities endemic to the research process.

The methods

For post-positivists, methods often reject or expand upon the rules of scientific method. Methods are often: *inductive* – the process moves from specific observations to broader generalizations and theories; *dependable* – while reliability in method may not be possible, post-positivists attempt to use systematic and rigorous approaches to research; and *auditable* – the context-specific nature of researching may not lend itself to reproducibility, but research should be verifiable through full and transparent explication of method.

The findings

Post–positivists recognize the uniqueness of situations and/or cultural groups, but can still seek broader value in their findings. They seek findings that are: *idiographic* – (unique) may not be able to be generalized, yet have their own intrinsic worth – or are *transferable* – the lessons learned from one context are applicable to other contexts; *valuable* – post-positivist researchers are often interested in both the

production of social knowledge and contributions to change; and *qualitative* – findings are often represented through imagery and words.

The position of the creative and strategic researcher

Many researchers feel a need to position themselves as a particular type of researcher, and identify themselves with a defined way of knowing. The question to consider is whether there can be value in accepting various assumptions that lie at divergent points across Table 1.2. Can divergent, disparate, and distinct understandings of the world, and in particular research, simultaneously exist? For the researcher who approaches research as a 'thinking game', the answer is yes. As highlighted by the example in Box 1.3, there is no need to be pigeonholed. Each research situation and research question is unique, and assumptions can be as varied as the situations. The trick is to understand what assumptions you are working under and how they might affect your study.

Box 1.3   Positivist Assumptions and Banana Consumption!

I once had a student who wanted to explore whether recycled 'grey' water could be used to irrigate bananas. She did this in two phases. The first phase involved the formulation of a hypothesis that stated there would be no bio-physical differences between bananas irrigated with town water and those irrigated with recycled grey water. For this phase of the study she (quite appropriately) accepted the positivist assumptions, and conducted her research according to the 'rules' of scientific method – she was the consummate lab-based objective scientist.

   Her second phase explored whether consumers would buy bananas irrigated with recycled water regardless of 'no difference' in quality. For this phase of the study, the student thoughtfully explored her assumptions and realized that in relation to this particular question, she found herself moving into 'post-positivist' territory. She struggled with her own subjectivity and realized that 'truth' and 'reality' can be two different things (many consumers who believed findings of 'no difference' claimed that they would still be hesitant to purchase the bananas). There was no defined set of rules to best answer this question, but her willingness to 'think' her way through the process and be flexible in her approach allowed her to draw conclusions that were seen as both credible and valuable.


WORKING THROUGH THE COMPLEXITY

Given the diversity of assumptions that are represented by positivist and post–positivist perspectives, the plethora of approaches that have emerged for engaging in research may not be too surprising. In the past few decades, the number (and complexity) of research methods has increased dramatically, particularly in the social/applied sciences. Let's see … there are quantitative and qualitative approaches.

There is empiricism, positivism, social constructivism, and interpretivism. Don't forget grounded theory, ethnography, critical ethnography, radical ethnography, and auto ethnography. What about conversation analysis, document analysis, univariate analysis, and multivariate analysis? Oh yeah I almost forgot … hermeneutics, unobtrusive methods ethnomethodology and phenomenology. Then there's surveying, interviewing … ARGHHHH!!!! No more. I'm confused …

It really is a bewildering tangle of methods, and the challenge for any research student is to be able to make some sense of it all. Unfortunately, this is something that can be quite difficult. Research methods/approaches are often lumped together and not organized in a logical fashion. For example, some methods texts tend to treat things like positivism, interviewing, and ethnography in a parallel fashion without a logical schema to understand how it fits together. But this is essential. In order to make your way through the tangle of 'methods' you need a framework for organizing the various aspects of research.

One way to construct such a framework is to consider the diverse range of methods listed above as 'answers' to particular research questions. Once you know the question, the methods simply fall into place. Table 1.3 offers a set of questions for wading through methods. Understanding the relationship between these questions and various aspects of method can help you make sense of, and navigate your way through, a highly complex field.

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER
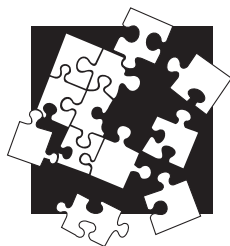
Paradigms, perspective, methodologies, methods, rules, procedures … How does the reflexive researcher (one with the ability to think both creatively and strategically about and within the research process) go about putting all the pieces of the research jigsaw together? Well for a start, there needs to be recognition that there is no 'best type' of research. There are only good questions matched with appropriate procedures of inquiry, and this is always driven by the researcher, not the method. It is up to the researcher to thoughtfully put together the pieces of the jigsaw in order to form a meaningful picture of the world being explored.

The goal of this book is to act as a guide for bringing the picture into focus with clarity and authenticity. In doing so, it explores: the groundwork necessary for getting started; how to define a topic/question; central considerations in 'reflexive' research; how to work with the literature; how to adopt, adapt and create designs, methodologies, and methods; and finally how to communicate findings.

Laying the groundwork

Chapter 1 has highlighted the need for creative and strategic thinking in the research process, and introduced you to the paradigms, perspectives, and methods that make up 'research'. Having some understanding of the discipline can go a long way in helping to ground your own research approach.

TABLE 1.3 WADING THROUGH METHOD

How do I understand the world?	This is the land of *isms*. It is the set of assumptions that define an intellectual understanding of how the world operates and how knowledge is produced, i.e.:

- **Positivism** – the view that all true knowledge is scientific, and can be pursued by scientific method
- **Empiricism** – belief that all concepts are derived from sense-experience
- **Interpretivism** – acknowledges and explores the cultural and historical interpretations of the social world
- **Constructivism** – claims that meaning does not exist in its own right; rather it is constructed by human beings as they interact and engage in interpretation
- **Subjectivism** – emphasizes the subjective elements in experience and accepts that personal experiences are the foundation for factual knowledge.

What methodological approach will best answer my questions?	This is the strategy or set of procedures used to gather and analyze data. It is often paradigm and discipline driven, and covers a diverse range of approaches. Some of the more common methodological approaches used in the social and applied sciences are:

- **Scientific method** – methodological procedure that consists of: developing a theory that is consistent with observations; using the theory to make predictions (hypothesis) and to test those predictions (see Chapters 8 &12)
- **Ethnography** – exploration of cultural groups in a bid to understand, describe, and interpret a way of life from the point of view of its participants (see Chapters 9 & 10)
- **Phenomenology** – description of a 'phenomenon' as it presents itself in direct awareness. Phenomenology disregards historical or social contexts (see Chapter 9)
- **Ethnomethodology** – study of the methods that individuals use to make sense of their social world and accomplish their daily actions (see Chapter 9)
- **Action research** – a research strategy that pursues action and knowledge in an integrated fashion through a cyclical and participatory means (see Chapter 10).

What are the methods or techniques that I will use to collect my data?	These methods (which are discussed in detail in Chapter 11) get down to the nitty gritty of data collection and can be used in conjunction with any of the methodological approaches discussed above.

- **Interviewing** – asking questions and listening to individuals in order to obtain information or opinions
- **Surveying** – questioning or canvassing a wide array of people in order to obtain information or opinions
- **Document analysis** – exploring written documents for content and/or themes
- **Observation** – can be 'removed' or 'participant' and involves the recognition and recording of facts, situations, occurrences, and empathetic understanding.

(Continued)

TABLE 1.3 CONTINUED

What type of data will I be collecting?	There is a plethora of literature on quantitative and qualitative methods, but in actuality, quantitative and qualitative refers to types of data – not method. There are plenty of methods – in fact, all of those listed above that can collect data of both a quantitative and qualitative nature (see Chapter 7). • **Quantitative data** – numerical data; can be naturally occurring numbers, i.e. age/income, or data that is numerically coded, i.e. female = 1, male = 2 • **Qualitative data** – data collected as words and/or images' not numerically coded for analysis.
How will I analyze my data?	As discussed in Chapter 12, quantitative and qualitative data demand distinct treatment with quantitative data analyzed statistically and qualitative data analyzed thematically. • **Statistical analysis** – can be descriptive (to summarize the data), or inferential (to draw conclusions that extend beyond the immediate data) • **Thematic analysis** – can include analysis of words, concepts, literary devices, and/or non-verbal cues. Includes content, discourse, narrative, and conversation analysis; semiotics; hermeneutics; and grounded theory techniques.

Chapter 2 acknowledges that undertaking research can be both a difficult and alienating activity, and attempts to offer strategies for staying on top of the process. It covers: what you need to know to start your research journey; how to best navigate the research process; and how to stay on track.

Defining your question

Chapter 3 discusses the art and science of knowing what you want to know. It takes you through the process of defining research questions so that they can guide your 'methods'. Now this may sound like common sense … questions direct methods … but with so many competing paradigms and perspectives, it can be hard to remember. It's just too easy to fall into the trap of selecting a familiar method rather than approaching method as a critical thinking exercise aimed at answering particular research questions. It is amazing how much simpler it is to adopt, adapt, or create appropriate methodological approaches when you are absolutely clear about what you want to know.

Researching reflexively

Reflexivity in research refers to the ability of the researcher to stand outside the research process and critically reflect on that process. Research as a 'reflexive' thinking process involves constant consideration of the researcher, the researched, and the integrity of the process.

Chapter 4 explores relationships of power and the ethical dilemmas that can arise from the distinction between the researcher and researched. The chapter discusses worldviews and highlights the importance of understanding dominant and alternate 'realities'. It asks how researchers can best negotiate their role in order to protect the integrity of the research process.

Chapter 5 discusses the criteria and indicators of good research that are used to assess the credibility of a process aimed at creating new knowledge. The goal of research is to make a contribution to a field, a contribution that may influence policy and practice or will become the basis for other people's learning. There is therefore a huge responsibility to 'get it right', to make it credible, and to approach it with rigour and integrity. This chapter looks at the underlying criteria for credibility and offers indicators that are appropriate to various research approaches.

Exploring the literature

I often tell students that before they begin 'doing' research, they need to convince me of three things: (1) that the questions they wish to answer are worthy of research; (2) that they are the right person for the job (they know their stuff); and (3) their methodological approach is the best 'doable' way of getting the answers to the questions they pose. And to do this, they need to read. They need to show me that they have thoroughly engaged with both the general and scientific literature in their area.

Working with literature, however, is a big challenge for any student researcher. Knowing what to read, how to find it, how to put boundaries on it, how to manage it, how to organize it, how to annotate it, and how to construct arguments with it, means that new researchers need a tremendous amount of guidance in negotiating the process. The goal of Chapter 6 is to help students work with literature.

Exploring design, methodologies, and methods

Conducting research is more than simply adopting and carrying out particular methodologies and methods. It is about thinking your way through the process. Yes, you need to be familiar with methodologies and methods, but you also need to be able to reflexively consider their appropriateness to the task at hand.

Chapter 7 highlights the importance of thinking your way through methodological design. It covers the possibilities for moving from questions to answers; prerequisites for good methodological design; how to work through the nitty gritty of design; as well as some thoughts on the qualitative/quantitative divide.

Of course being able to best think your way through methodological design is highly dependent on your knowledge base. The variety of research paradigms and perspectives that have constructed research offer quite a few well-defined options for exploring the social world. Chapter 8 addresses the methodological approaches commonly used in exploring and representing populations, while Chapter 9 tackles methodologies that can help researchers delve into the complexities of a particular

case, culture or phenomenon. Methodological approaches that legitimize change as a goal of the research process are explored in Chapter 10.

Chapter 11 covers methods of data collection and highlights the rigour needed to achieve credibility in any and all approaches. This chapter discusses issues of access before tackling the complexities, basics, and procedures of surveying, interviewing, observation, and document analysis.

Communicating through research

Too many students think that once their data is collected, they are pretty much finished. They just need to run some analysis and write up. Well, your research relies on your ability to not only analyze and write-up, but on your ability to think your way though the process of analysis and communicate your finding with an audience.

Chapter 12 emphasizes the importance of keeping a sense of the overall project as you work through statistical and/or thematic analysis. It stresses the importance of grounding your analysis in the questions, aims, and objectives of your research project so that significant, credible, and valuable storylines can emerge.

Finally, Chapter 13 discusses writing as a process, or even a mode of analysis, rather than just a product. The chapter stresses the importance of seeing the write-up as a 'conversation' that needs to be mindful of its audience, have a logical structure, and communicate a clear storyline. The chapter concludes by offering a number of suggestions for preparing your work for submission and highlights the importance of dissemination.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Creative and strategic thinking should be seen as central to the research process. Research can be thought of as a 'thinking game' and a 'whole-brain' activity that often demands that researchers think outside any set of prescriptive 'rules'. It demands creativity that is effectively balanced with focus and structure.
- Scientific research was born of 'positivism' and adopted the assumptions of that paradigm. These assumptions include: a knowable and predictable world; empirical and reductionist research; objective and expert researchers; hypothesis-driven methods; and statistically significant, quantitative findings.
- Over the past decades, the assumptions of positivism have been brought into question. Post-positivist researchers acknowledge: a world that is ambiguous and variable; research that can be intuitive and holistic; researchers that can be subjective and collaborative; methods that can be inductive and exploratory; and findings that can be idiographic and qualitative.
- Rather than positioning the researcher according to paradigmatic assumptions, the reflexive researcher can consider whether it is possible to explore the assumptions of various paradigms as they relate to particular research questions.

- A potential strategy for wading through methods is to ask a series of questions that can help organize the methods landscape. These include questions related to: worldviews; methodological approaches; methods of data collection; data types; and data analysis.
- Getting your head around the pieces of the research jigsaw can be confusing. The major pieces of the puzzle include: laying the groundwork; defining your question; researching reflexively; working with literature; understanding design, methodologies, and methods; and communicating your findings.

STUDYDADDY

Get Homework Help
From Expert Tutor

Get Help