

Types of qualitative research methods commerce essay



As pointed out in the previous chapter, this research seeks to gain a thorough insight on how best project managers can understand how to address the ethical dilemmas faced in project management.

In order to understand this, it is possible to conduct a qualitative or quantitative research. However, this is highly dependent on the research questions (Jensen 2010).

According to Mohr (1982), quantitative research seeks to understand if, or to what degree, the “variance” in one element affects the “variance” in another element, while qualitative research is interested in how one factor contributes to the results of another factor. In other words, qualitative research can be explained as the “process” that links both factors together (Mohr 1982, pp. 40). In other words, the quantitative approach is focused with determining casual relationships between variables and focusing on the outcomes from such relationships while the qualitative approach concentrates on understanding the processes that led to such outcomes (Maxwell, 2005).

However the qualitative approach does not only focus on processes. It also focuses on the particular situations or people, hence the reason why it is called an inductive approach (Maxwell, 2005).

Furthermore, the qualitative approach provides some form of flexibility that enables a researcher to change the focus of the research during the course of trying to understand new relationships (Daengbuppha, Hemmington and Wilkes, 2006). On the other hand, the quantitative approach requires the researcher to clearly define the research plan to avoid any alteration in order

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to achieve the desired outcome (Maxwell, 2005). Thus it can be argued that the qualitative approach is most suitable for researchers with little or no background in the research area who seeks to understand the reasons to a particular problem (Daengbuppha, Hemmington and Wilkes, 2006).

Based on these reasons, it can be argued that while the quantitative approach can be used to study project managers' ethical decision making, such an approach will place more emphasis on questions like ' why?', ' how much?' or ' to what extent?'. A typical example of such question is: ' Do project managers take the right ethical decisions?' With such questions, it can be argued that a quantitative approach would be best suited to employ as the researcher seeks to gain a definite answer rather than the processes that will lead to the intended outcome (Hughes, 2012). A qualitative approach, on the other hand, will seek to understand how project managers can take ethical decisions. Thus a typical question for this research approach will include:-, ' How will project managers understand how to take the right ethical decisions?' From this example it can be seen that the researcher is not only focused on the outcome but also on the processes. Therefore a qualitative approach has been selected to address the research question for this dissertation.

The research question which seeks to understand, how to ensure that project managers are equipped on how to take ethical decisions, requires an understanding of the research context. In other words, this refers to the behaviors of project managers in different scenarios or events, the processes that led to certain actions and the different perceptions of project managers

on instances of ethical decision makings, hence the use of the selected approach.

Another reason as to why the qualitative approach was selected was due to lack of an in depth knowledge of the research area. It is expected that the selected approach will give the researcher the flexibility to change the research plan if the need arises.

However there are various ways to conduct a qualitative research. This will be discussed in the next section and the preferred method that was selected for this research.

Qualitative Research Methods

According to Mason (2002), the different ways to conduct qualitative research includes; interviews, observations, questionnaires, the use of visual methods and documents. However she pointed out that before selecting the method for the qualitative research, the source of data and the techniques for generating data from such sources should have been clearly identified (Mason 2002). For instance, people can be identified as a source of data and the different ways to generate data from people can include through observations, interviews, texts, video recordings, etc (Mason, 2002). Thus data sources can be described as the “ places or phenomena” through which the researcher believes data can be generated, while methods are the “ strategies and techniques” used to achieve this (Mason 2002, pp. 51). The reason for the distinction between sources and methods is to enable the qualitative researcher work out the best method to generate data from the sources that have been identified for the research.

Once the different methods to generate data from identified sources has been considered, the qualitative researcher can select the most suitable methods to generate data from such sources by assessing the methods based on the following factors (Mason 2002):-,

a. The amount of information the different methods can generate in relation to the research question (Mason 2002). According to Maxwell (2005), the selected methods for a research must be compatible with the proposed research questions. He also goes on further to propose that the “ most critical connection is with your research questions” (Maxwell 2005, pp. 102). Thus if the selected research method or methods does not provide the researcher with the data needed to answer the research questions, then the method or the research question should be changed (Maxwell, pp. 102).

Also, a clear aim and objectives plays an important role in determining the amount of information different methods can generate. Meyrick (2006) argued that if a clear aim and objective is set out in a research, then a researcher can easily demonstrate the amount of information a selected method will generate.

b. The ability to feasibly achieve everything what the researcher wants to do. In other words this refers to the researcher being able to generate or have the required resources such as money, time skills, etc in order to achieve the research objectives using the selected methods (Mason 2002). This is the most important factor to consider especially for researchers using multiple methods as some researchers tend to discover half way into the research that the required resources are not sufficient, hence increasing the chances

of the researcher's inability to achieve the goals of the research.(Mason 2002).

c. The practical implications of using the selected methods. According to Mason (2002), a qualitative researcher is expected to think through the implications of integrating the kind of data they have in mind with their selected qualitative methods. Example of such implications can include; ethical issues, the level of responses from participants, the skills of the researcher (Learn Higher, 2008).

Types of Qualitative Research Methods

Interviews

Frey and Oshi (1995) define an interview as a conversation where one person asks questions that have already been prepared and the other responds to such questions. It is normally done to gain more information on particular topic or area in which both parties share an interest in (Oatey 1999).

There are two basic structures of interviews. They include the unstructured interviews and the structured interviews (Nichols, 1991). Structured interviews consist of closed ended questions, where the questions are asked in the same order (Bryant, 2012). In other words, the questions share a pre arranged set of answers for the respondent to choose from (Nichols, 1991).

On the other hand, unstructured interviews consist of open end questions, where the questions are not asked in the same order or format. The questions are asked in any order depending on how the interview develops

(Breakwell, Hammond and Fife-Schaw, 1995). These types of interviews allow the interviewer to clarify any issues based on the initial responses given by the respondents. Thus the amount of data collected is highly dependent on the respondents (Oatey, 1999).

Although Interviews are powerful tools for data collection they still have their disadvantages. The method is time consuming as a lot of time is required to compile and analyze the interview questions and answers (Mason, 2002). Also, the interviewer might be required to possess a specific skill to avoid misinterpreting the answers provided by the respondent (Cohen, Manion and Morisson, 2008).

Finally, using structured interviews requires the respondents to fit into categories that might not represent their perception about the questions being asked (Cohen, Manion and Morisson, 2008).

Observations

This technique requires a researcher to generate data by immersing himself or herself in a “ research setting” in order to experience and observe at first hand the different dimensions of that setting (Mason 2002, pp. 85). It allows the researcher to understand the situation that is being described (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2008).

There are different types of structure for the observation technique. They include the structured observation, the semi-structured observation and the unstructured observation.

A structured observation usually knows in advance what it is looking for and already has the categories for the observation planned out. A semi structured observation and unstructured observation are quite similar in that they gather data in a less systematic manner. However while the unstructured observation is not clear on what they are looking for, the semi structured observation is determined on what it is looking for with just a couple of unclear issues it intends to clarify during the observation (Cohen, Manion and Morisson, 2008).

This qualitative research method is very useful when recording non verbal behavior in a particular setting, yet there are some limitations that come with this approach. For instance, there are some settings in which a researcher might find difficult to gain access while using this technique. Also observations conducted in a controlled environment might require measurements or tools that are expensive (MBA, 2010).

Furthermore, observation takes a lot of time as an event has to take place for it to be studied. Also sampling cannot be used with this technique, hence this might prompt one to question the reliability of the data collected (MBA, 2010).

Questionnaires

A questionnaire is a series of written questions given to individuals to provide their answers. It is the most widely used instrument for data collection (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2008).

Questionnaires can be structured into two different types of questions. They include closed ended questions and open ended questions (Canon, 2012). Open ended questions are questions that require the respondent to answer the questions in their own words. On the hand, closed ended questions provide a list of possible answers for the respondent to select their choice (Canon, 2012).

Although questionnaires are commonly used for qualitative research, it still has its disadvantages. Questionnaires are time consuming as the researcher is expected to pilot and refine the questionnaire to fit the research's objectives (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2008). Also open ended questions are difficult to categorize as the researcher has no control over the responses (Canon, 2012).

Furthermore, some questions might be misinterpreted by the respondents which lead to the provision of wrong answers to such questions.

Selected Qualitative Method

Having discussed the various methods for conducting qualitative research, the research method for this dissertation was selected based on the core factors for selecting methods previously discussed.

The use of questionnaires over interviews was the method that was initially selected as it was expected that questionnaires would provide more information on people's knowledge and perceptions about the research area as opposed to interviews where more time is required to set up interview dates with the participants. Nevertheless, it was concluded that although questionnaires required less time resources and provide better comparability <https://assignbuster.com/types-of-qualitative-research-methods-commerce-essay/>

than interviews, the chances of getting the required response rate from the participants is not guaranteed. Also questionnaires, even though they provide large amount, it limits the participants from providing detailed information, especially with closed questions.

Furthermore, the time allocated for the dissertation does not provide enough time to conduct a qualitative research using questionnaires. As discussed earlier, the required resources need to be in place for a researcher to feasibly achieve the objectives of the research. Questionnaires, on the other hand, take a lot of time to design, administer and process. Thus due to the research's limited time frame, the use of documents (existing literature) to conduct a critical review has been selected as the most suitable approach for this dissertation.

The research will be focused on using the information from published literature to critically review the different perceptions of people on ethics and project management. Hence based on this review an analysis will be done to provide a better understanding on how project managers can best make ethical decisions.

Use of Documents

According to Mason (2002), a researcher who chooses to use documents or articles might be interested in the processes by which such documents are developed or used. This proposition by Mason is without a doubt one of the objectives of this research. As pointed out in the first chapter, one of the objectives of this dissertation is to investigate and analyze the processes used to develop the different approaches used to address ethical dilemmas

in project management. Thus it can be argued that, this approach is most suitable for this research considering the time frame, the ethical issues (informed consent) associated with interviews and questionnaires, comparability issues, etc.

However, one can argue that a critical review might not provide a rich in depth analysis of the research area as the research is dealing with secondary and not primary data. On the other hand, it is expected that a thorough and detailed critical review would provide enough information to address the objectives of this research. Therefore, this expectation is highly dependent on the search strategy for the research. In other words, this refers to how the various articles were selected and the reasons for their selection.

Search Strategy/Approach

According to Mason (2002), the decision about the strategy for a qualitative research study is a continuous process. Thus in this case, the search strategy for this dissertation would be under constant review as the research progresses. The discussion about the search strategy prior to the research will be discussed in this chapter, while any modifications to the proposed strategy will be discussed in chapter 8 .

Source of Data

Prior to the search for articles, a list of keywords and key phrases were generated using the research question. The identification of these keywords and key phrases was to provide initial search terms to search for information. The list was narrowed down to six based on their relevance to

the research area and the words that represented an alternative way of describing the research question. They include;

- a. Ethics and Project Management
- b. Ethical decision making
- c. Ethical dilemmas
- d. Ethical training
- e. Ethical responsibilities and the project manager
- f. Ethical values and Project Management

The next step to generating search terms for more information was drawing up a list of phrases related to major concepts for the research topic. These phrases were selected from two different perspectives, the broad and narrow views. The use of broad words for phrases was to generate general or background information on the major concepts for the research. On the other hand, narrow words were to generate specific views on major concepts for the research topic.

Various articles were discovered using the selected key words and phrases, some of which were related to the research area but strayed outside the research question. Therefore the articles were evaluated and selected based on certain criterion.

Journals and books that were focused on key concepts of the research topic were selected to provide background information on the research area.

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Examples include Velasquez's book on Business Ethics, Brady's article on a systematic approach to teaching ethics in business, Hildur's article on the ethical dimension of project management, etc. They were also selected to provide the current literature in regards to ethics and project management and the issues that has been discussed till date.

The next set of articles/journals that were selected were those that proposed various approaches to addressing ethical dilemmas faced in project management. Furthermore, since one of the objectives of this dissertation is to investigate and analyze different approaches in regards to ethics and project management, journals proposing similar and different approaches were selected. In other words, the search was not limited to a specific approach.

Finally, articles that were focused on how ethics is incorporated into project management were selected. Given that the main aim of this dissertation is to gain a thorough understanding on how project managers understand how to make the right ethical decisions, selecting articles that discussed ethics in project management was imperative. In other words, it is expected that the selected articles will provide information on what the common practice is in addressing ethical dilemmas and its implications.

Data Analysis

The approach that has been adopted to analyze data for this dissertation will be a critical review. The critical review will be done based on review of the research areas that will be discussed in the following chapters.

The purpose of the critical review is to analyze the information that has been discussed in the various chapters of this dissertation and draw up conclusions that will provide a better understanding for project managers while addressing ethical dilemmas.

The critical review will be carried out in a systematic order considering the following factors below:

- a. A brief summary of the discussions on the key concepts of the research area.
- b. A thorough discussion and evaluation of how the different approaches reviewed were developed.
- c. An evaluation of the current existing practice for project managers while addressing ethical dilemmas, the limitations of such practices and an analysis of such limitations. The analysis of such limitations is to point out what went wrong with such practices and then propose the need for better approaches.
- d. The practical implication of the various approaches while addressing ethical dilemmas, a comparison of such implications and its impact on project managers.

It is important to note that the points listed above will be used as a working outline for the analysis chapter. Thus as the dissertation progresses, some modifications might be made and these changes will be included in the next methodology chapter.

Summary

This chapter discussed the research approach that was selected for the study and provided the reasons for its selection. The qualitative research was selected as the approach provides detailed understanding to the context of the research area. Secondly, the flexibility of the qualitative research is suitable that lack an in depth knowledge in the intended area of research.

The selected type of qualitative research was also discussed and the reasons as to why it was selected were addressed in this chapter. Review and critical analysis were the selected research method. This was due to less time and resources required to implement the approach.

Finally, the chapter addressed the form the critical analysis for the research will take. The search strategy was discussed and the key categories that formed the basis for the critical analysis were also discussed.