

The Practice of Social Research

DTC Core Module Module Handbook

2012-13

Convenors:

Dr Kevin Morrell
Warwick Business School
kevin.morrell@wbs.ac.uk

Dr Eric Jensen
Department of Sociology
e.jensen@warwick.ac.uk

Introduction

This module is designed to support you as you think through what it means to do a PhD in the social sciences and, potentially, to begin an academic career. Our core aim is to help you to plan effectively for doing a PhD that is of sufficient quality to satisfy the examiners, and that is completed in a reasonable time. In doing so, we will also encourage you to see yourselves as part of a community of scholars.

Each topic has an underlying theoretical foundation although we will place emphasis on developing practical skills and, as part of the lectures, we will encourage you to work in smaller groups. This is similar to the way that seminars will be used in the companion module *The Philosophy of Social Science* led by Dr Bhambra, however we will stay together as one group.

One advantage of keeping the group together is that will allow us to pool any tips or strategies more effectively so as to share learning for the entire cohort during the session. It also allows a little more flexibility in terms of using a mix of activities in a way that best suits each topic.

In order, the topics for this module are: The PhD Process: Myths, Tips and Strategies; Ethics and Research; Combining Methods and Research Paradigms; Quality in Social Research; Practical Research and Putting Research into Practice; What is a Contribution? The case of Replication Studies; Stories and Documents; What is Evidence?

For each topic there is stipulated 'core reading' of one article, or chapter, or other source in order to provide a focus to discussion which *each of you is required to read*. There are also suggestions for 'further reading'.

Assessment

For the assessment you need to provide a portfolio of work comprising:

- a title for your PhD,
- an abstract for your work,
- an aim and two or three research questions,
- identification of any ethical considerations,
- a research diary.

You will be briefed on each of these components in the first session, which will also set out how these aspects are integrated into the course.

Sometimes a distinction is drawn between assessment that is *formative* (usually written feedback for development) and assessment that is *summative* (typically given a mark, or grade). The assessment for this module is formative, which is to say that you will receive constructive feedback, but it is not

marked per se. **However** if you do not hand in a portfolio that comprises the elements above you will not pass this course.

Schedule

The sessions for The Practice of Social Research will take place on Wednesdays 10-12 in term 1, in the Wolfson Research Exchange, Library. Except in week 6 (Nov 7th) when owing to a timetabling issue, it is split between 2 rooms - 10.00 – 11.00, A0.23; then 11.00 – 12.00 in S0.03. There are no classes in weeks 1 or 7.

Autumn	Session Title	Convenor
Week 2	The PhD Process: Myths, Tips and Strategies	Kevin Morrell (KM)
Week 3	Ethics and Research	KM
Week 4	Combining Methods and Research Paradigms	Eric Jensen (EJ)
Week 5	Quality in Social Research	EJ
Week 6	Practical Research and Putting Research into Practice	EJ
Week 7	<i>DTC Conference in Nottingham</i>	
Week 8	What is a Contribution? The case of Replication Studies	KM
Week 9	Stories and Documents	KM
Week 10	What is Evidence?	KM

AUTUMN TERM

Week 2	The PhD Process: Myths, Tips and Strategies	Kevin Morrell
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There are plenty of myths associated with the process of doing a PhD. These can have some truth in them, but they can be extremely unhelpful if you believe that they are wholly (or even largely) true. If you don't recognise the dangers of these myths, then you will not have realistic expectations about doing your PhD which will make you less effective and is likely to lead to disappointment. At best these myths can slow you down, at worst they can even become excuses for not finishing. We will discuss some common myths and strategies for overcoming these.

Essential Reading:

<http://www.kevinmorrell.org.uk/PhDTips.htm>

Further Reading:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2002/nov/08/highereducation.books>

Phillips, E. M. and Pugh, D. S. *How to get a PhD*, Open University Press: Buckingham.

Activity for next 2 weeks: keep a diary of all your activities for 2 weeks. It can be very broad for all things that are not related to the PhD but try to make it as detailed as you can for activities that are related to the PhD (e.g. literature search, reading articles, surfing, writing). Try to identify each alongside activity the amount of time you spent doing it.

Week 3	Ethics and Research	KM
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There is various guidance available at Warwick on research ethics and ethics committees. This session takes a more fundamental approach to the question of ethics in research, looking at related terms such as ethics, values, morals and standards. The aim is to give you a solid grounding in the three most influential approaches to ethics: Virtue Ethics, Utilitarianism and Kantianism (though we will look at other systems). Even if you are doing a PhD using secondary data there will be ethical implications to how you carry out your research, and in its implications (which you may not always be able to foresee). For many of you, if you are carrying out research that involves asking questions of people (even by survey) there are inescapably ethical implications to your research. Ethics is an applied discipline and the practical implications from this session.

Essential Reading:

Espeland W. N. and Stevens M. L. (1998). 'Commensuration as a Social Process'. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24: 313-343

Further Reading:

Morrell, K. (2004). 'Decision Making and Business Ethics: the implications of using Image Theory in preference to Rational Choice'. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 50: 239-252.

Week 4	Combining Methods and Research Paradigms	Eric Jensen (EJ)
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This week will cover the following topics:

- The practical implications of paradigms of social research
- Principles of good research design
- Combining research methods:
 - Epistemological and methodological implications of combining qualitative And quantitative methods
- Practical strategies for combining quantitative and qualitative methods
 - Drawing upon David Morgan’s practical strategies for combining research methods
 - Introduction to a specific method that uses qualitative data in quantitative analysis: Content Analysis

Activity: Research design and you!

Workshop-style activity discussing possible approaches you could take in your own dissertation. Think about whether mixed methods social research makes sense for your topic (discuss in small groups).

Essential reading:

Morgan, D. (2007). Paradigms lost and Pragmatism regained: Methodological implications of combining qualitative and quantitative methods. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1(1), 48-76.

Morgan, D. L. (1998). Practical strategies for combining qualitative and quantitative methods: Applications to health research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 8(3), p. 362-376.

Week 5	Quality and Technology in Social Research	EJ
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This week addresses both quantitative and qualitative definitions of research quality. The lecture/seminar will include discussion of the following topics:

Quality in Social Research

- What does good quality social research look like?
- Procedures for ensuring quality
- Recording and Transcription
- Criteria for assessing / ensuring quality (validity, reliability and alternative methods)

Technologies of Social Research

- Practical and critical issues in using analytic software, web-based surveys, online interviewing, digital audio recordings and other forms of research technology available for the social sciences.

Essential Reading (Quality):

Gaskell, George, and Martin W. Bauer. 2000. "Towards public accountability: Beyond sampling, reliability and validity." Pp. 336-350 in *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound*, edited by Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell. London: Sage.

Further Reading (Quality):

Thorne, S. 1997. "The art (and science) of critiquing qualitative research." Pp. 117-132 in *Completing a qualitative project: Details and dialogue*, edited by J M Morse. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Further Reading (Technologies):

Kelle, Udo (2000). "Computer-assisted analysis: Coding and indexing." Pp. 282-298 in *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound*, edited by Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell. London: Sage.

Week 6	Practical Research and Putting Research into Practice	EJ
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This week addresses the topic of applied social research conducted both inside and outside academia. Topics to be discussed include:

- Evaluation and impact research
- Action and applied research
- Social sciences outside of academia: The role of the internal social scientist and the social scientist as consultant or external expert
- Public Engagement
- The 'Impact Agenda'

Essential Reading (Public Engagement):

For the public engagement element of the week's discussion, please have a look at the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement's website: <https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>

In particular, have a read of the 'what is public engagement?' page:

<https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/what>

Further Reading (Action Research):

This website has some useful (free) reading on action research:

<http://www.web.ca/robrien/papers/arfinal.html>

In particular, I would suggest starting with this page:

http://www.web.ca/robrien/papers/arfinal.html#_Toc26184651

Week 7	<i>DTC Conference in Nottingham</i>	
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Week 8	What is a Contribution? The case of Replication Studies	KM
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How 'New' does your PhD have to be for it to be a contribution? It's impossible to answer this in general terms because it depends on the discipline, the nature of the project and the kind of contribution you are aiming for. You also need to explore this question with your supervisor. What I will do in this session is give you some tools to think about this and think about how to locate your work in relation to other peoples. To do this, I will focus on the idea of a replication study (an attempt to reproduce the findings of another study). Replications are a feature of work across all

the sciences (and even sometimes the humanities). We will consider three different accounts of replication in organizational theory: the 'scientific project'; the 'social artefact'; the 'aesthetic object'.

This informs understanding of: how the practice of replication is represented; how replication studies are presented; how they are received. It also will explain why calls to replicate theory can sometimes be ignored. I'll share some experiences of my own attempts to replicate theory with reviewers and editors. The practical implications of this will be that this could well save you some time and give you a better idea of how to position your contribution.

Essential Reading:

Eden, D. (2002). Replication, meta-analysis, scientific progress and AMJs publication policy. *Academy of Management Journal*, 45(5): 841–846.

Further Reading:

Hubbard, R. and Vetter, D.E. (1996). 'An empirical comparison of published replication research in accounting, economics, finance, management, and marketing'. *Journal of Business Research*, 35(2): 153–164.

Morrell, K. and Lucas, J. W. (2012). 'The replication problem and its implications for policy studies', *Critical Policy Studies*, 6(2): 182-200.

Week 9	Stories and Documents	KM
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An increasingly popular way of thinking about organizations, and social research more generally, is to see people as story tellers. This approach suggests that we make sense of our surroundings and our own actions through stories. This session will introduce some of the relevant literature on stories and story-telling before inviting you to think about your own project in these terms. This has particular practical relevance for two aspects of your research: how in writing your PhD might you create a compelling story? how can you treat the various sources you look at as stories?

Essential Reading:

Barry, D. and Elmes, M. (1997). 'Strategy retold: toward a narrative view of strategic discourse'. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(2): 429–52.

Further Reading:

Gabriel, Y. and Griffiths, D. S. (2004). 'Stories in organizational research'. In Cassell, C. and Symon, G. (Eds), *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*. London: Sage, 114–26.

Green, S. E. (2004). 'A rhetorical theory of diffusion'. *Academy of Management Review*, 29(4): 653–69.

Week 10	What is Evidence?	KM
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Evidence based' management is a popular contemporary account of the relationship between research and practice in management studies. This session critically examines the implications of this account introducing criticism of the evidence based approach - which is used much more widely in other disciplines such as policy studies and sociology. The criticism centres on some epistemological and technical issues and also incorporates political and moral implications of the evidence based approach. These are important given the relationship between claims to knowledge and the use of power; and the interaction between management research, and management as practice. The practical implications for your research are to consider what sources you bring to bear to support your argument, and what counts as 'evidence' in your discipline. Are there any hierarchies of evidence - and are these always sensible or relevant to your topic.

Essential Reading:

Morrell, K. (2008) 'The Narrative of 'Evidence based' Management: A polemic', *Journal of Management Studies*, 45(3): 613-635.

Further Reading:

Briner, R., Denyer, D. and Rousseau, D., 2009. Evidence-based management: concept cleanup time? *Academy of management perspectives*, 23 (4), 19–32.

Learmonth, M. and Harding, N., 2006. Evidence-based management: the very idea. *Public administration*, 84 (2), 245–266.

Rousseau, D.M., 2006. Is there such a thing as evidence-based management? *Academy of management review*, 31 (2), 256–259.