

Chapter 18

Qualitative Research: Ex Cultura

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a conceptual discussion about investigating management issues relating to global business operations. Current global business operations provide an opportunity to conduct Ex Cultura research. This term represents the situation where researchers conduct investigations beyond their own culture. A Grounded Theory approach within a qualitative perspective is proposed so that newly emerging themes may be identified. These themes may not be known before hand because of the Ex Cultura environment. Two methods are suggested; the first method, Personal Construct Theory and the RepGrid technique, documents what the research participant thinks about a particular research question. The other method, Narrative Inquiry and the Long Interview technique, documents what a research participant has done relative to a research question. Both methods document the research participant's interpretation of their personal experiences. Further, the methods support Ex Cultura research into management issues involved in global business operations.

INTRODUCTION

Global operations seem to be the standard taken by many businesses. Product manufacture may be established close to raw material and/or less expensive labour. Some businesses may search

out skilled personnel as a way to decide where to establish their operations. The distribution function is located in relation to the end market. Governments, in order to stimulate their respective economies, may create tax regimes which facilitate the establishment of global business operations within their nation.

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Usually, the establishment of global business operations is carried out by large corporations. They have the necessary resources to begin and maintain such ventures. Indeed, the business model of some large corporations necessitates expansion beyond the country in which they originally began operations. However, small businesses now may also be able to provide products and services on a global basis. The advent of the Internet which facilitates e-commerce has provided vast market opportunities for businesses of all sizes.

The globalization of business leads to operations in many different cultures. Management researchers, as a consequence, may now conduct investigations which incorporate a cultural perspective. These management researchers will have the opportunity to conduct their studies outside of their own culture—as is suggested in the title of this chapter—*Ex Cultura*. It is thus incumbent upon management researchers to consider and adopt methods which will respond to the inherent cultural diversity in global business operations. This is the main thesis of this document.

This chapter takes a conceptual approach to presenting two methods for conducting qualitative investigations by *Ex Cultura* researchers within the purview of global business operations. The next section presents an overview of a cross-cultural perspective by renowned cross-cultural researcher, Hofstede. Then, a qualitative perspective is outlined. Qualitative research is proposed because it promotes an in depth investigation of a subject in its natural surroundings. This interpretive approach facilitates identifying emerging themes in a relatively under-researched or novel (to the researcher) area such as cross-cultural investigations. A description of Grounded Theory is also included in this section. An investigation is initiated relative to an interesting research question. Data are gathered relative to the question, usually through interviews. The transcripts of these interviews are analyzed to identify emerging themes which are compared across a series of interviews employing Ground Theory Method.

Grounded Theory provides the context for the two proposed methods. The objective of both the proposed methods is to document the research participant's personal interpretations of their past experiences. The first method based on Personal Construct Theory (PCT) (Kelly, 1955; 1963) attempts to document what the research participant thinks about a subject through the administration of a Repertory Grid which facilitates the elicitation of a person's individual constructs. The second method, proposed here, is based on Narrative Inquiry (Girden, 2001; Scholes, 1981; Swap et al., 2001; Tulving, 1972), which documents what a research participant has done through an approach known as the Long Interview Technique (McCracken, 1988). Following the description and analysis of these two methods, relative to conducting cross-cultural research, a series of issues are described which the researcher must address when planning and conducting these types of investigations. The chapter concludes by returning to the initial idea of conducting management research of global business operations.

CROSS-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

It is obvious cross-cultural qualitative researchers will include research participants from cultures which may not be from their own culture. A series of publications (Webber, 1969; Yang, 1986; Ronen, 1986; Berry, 1990; Headland et al., 1990; Triandis, 1972; Early & Mosakowski, 1995) have presented a perspective on cultures which may be employed to develop comparisons across a number of cultures. These publications are generally attributed to Hofstede. This chapter will not delve into some of the issues that others have raised regarding Hofstede's work. But an overview of his cultural comparisons is presented.

Hofstede (1980; 1983; 1988; 1990; 1993) suggested culture represents the "...collective programming of the mind..." Thus, individuals will adopt assumptions about how to act based

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