

A Note on Exploratory Research

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When a researcher has a limited amount of experience with or knowledge about a research issue, Exploratory Research is useful. It ensures that a more rigorous, more conclusive future study will begin with an inadequate understanding of the nature of the problem at hand. Usually, exploratory research provides greater understanding of a concept or crystallizes a problem. Exploratory research is initial research conducted to clarify and define the nature of a problem.

Exploratory Research may be a single research investigation or a series of informal studies intended to provide background information. Researchers must be creative in the choice of information sources to be investigated. They must be flexible enough to investigate all inexpensive sources that may possibly provide information to help understand a problem. This need to be flexible does not mean that researchers do not have to be careful and systematic when designing exploratory research studies.

USES OF EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

DIAGNOSING A SITUATION

Much has already been said about the need for situation analysis for clarifying problem's nature. Exploratory research helps diagnose the

dimensions of problems so that successive research projects will be on target. It helps set priorities for research. In some cases exploratory research provides an orientation for researcher by gathering information on a lesser known topic. Although a research project has not yet been planned, information about an issue is needed before the appropriate diagnosis of the problem can be developed.

SCREENING ALTERNATIVES

When several opportunities arise but the budget precludes investigating all possible options, exploratory research may be used to determine the best alternatives. Perhaps several good investments are available and exploratory research can be used to point to better ones. Or an exploratory look at market data reveals that the market for a planned new product is too small, and the product launch is not worthwhile.

Although this aspect of exploratory research is not a substitute for conclusive research, certain evaluative information can be acquired in exploratory studies. The need for concept testing is a frequent reason for conducting exploratory research. Concept Testing is a general term for many different research procedures which help in clearing connotations and definitions of a research problem to be studied.

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DISCOVERING NEW IDEA

Exploratory research is often used to generate new ideas. An exploratory research based on factory. Workers' suggestions for increasing production or improving safety may be used to finalize productivity studies in a factory. Consumers' perceptions may be used in a product launch study.

CATEGORIES OF EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

A researcher may choose from the following categories of exploratory research method,

EXPERIENCE SURVEYS

In order to understand the problem a researcher may discuss the problem with experienced and knowledgeable individuals in the field and use their insights for understanding. However this information is not conclusive and best results in formulating the problem or objective of the study. e.g. telephonic surveys.

SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

Searching through existing data sources is another method of gathering information. Literature reviews are of great help and are also economical. Synthesizing available secondary data is a method meaningful to a researcher. The techniques of meta-analysis and meta-synthesis can be

effectively used to analyse secondary data sources.

CASE STUDIES

The purpose of the case study is to obtain information from actual situation which is similar to the research problem at hand. However case study development is a time consuming process in itself. Hence, a researcher can avail of existing data base of case studies.

PILOT STUDIES

A Pilot Study implies generation of primary data but on a smaller scale. The data collected can be analysed qualitatively and / or quantitatively. These findings can be used to scientifically formulate the research problem and finalise the research proposal. A survey of employee motivation using a questionnaire method on a small sample (around 30) is an example of pilot study. Thus exploratory studies have a definite role to play in research process. They help in formalizing a research proposal and chalking out a full-fledged research study plan.

REFERENCES

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QUOTES

Peace begins with a smile
Mother Teresa