

Finding the Themes Related to Designing Learning for Post-Experience, Management Professionals: How to Conduct Qualitative Research

Caroline Ennis¹

¹Department of Management Birkbeck University of London. caroline_ennis@msn.com

The current landscape of management learning literature, concerned with curriculum design, (and more specifically postgraduate level management learning) is reviewed by drawing from several eminent works within this domain of study, to identify the points being made overall and then to draw out the key themes. The process by which this is conducted is defined to provide a structure and framework in an applied example of literature theming at postgraduate level research. It indicates how to explore the extent of what is presently understood within a discipline area and how to determine the further explorations to be undertaken. The author contributes to the important debate on how we can demystify qualitative research in the domain of social science and applies this to how we can explore Higher Education's responsiveness to the curriculum needs of post-experience, management professionals.

Demystifying Qualitative Research within the Social Sciences Research can consider the existence and nature of phenomena, the scope and extent of which, for the social sciences, is set out within Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC,2018:) guidelines indicating the way in which this is undertaken in specific domains. The two approaches related to the education discipline research emanate from the perspective of *promoting* theoretical and/or empirical social science; and from the perspective of *informing* judgements and decisions about educational policy and practice (Wilkinson, 2005:29).

1. Distilling the High-Level Themes in Preparation for Primary Research Rigorous and credible qualitative social science research requires that there are thematic based categories within which the investigator applies the art of description, comparison and explanation (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Moreover, the explicit establishment of these themes substantiates the research process and will direct the focus of the study to enable constructive communication of the findings. However, the two categories which have currently been established are the *high-level* themes of management learning; that is: (1), curriculum design and (2), pedagogy. We can adopt the research specific aspects of these by referring to them as: management learning content, and the teaching of management. As the themes of the study are further clarified, it is essential that the contextual application of these are kept with close consideration of postgraduate provision of management education as designed for post-experience, professional managers. So, we can now confirm that the study relates to postgraduate curriculum design and pedagogy in the context post-experience, management education.

2. Conclusions Understanding higher education change and marketization has led to adopting a more critical consideration of how the curriculum and pedagogy for postgraduate, post-experience management learners can be understood and how further study might inform future developments and a more qualitative variation. The initial categories of the study are justified to be that of curriculum content and the teaching process. The narrower focus is identified to be MBA course design and the interests of executive management learners. A future paper will give an account of the next stages of the process.

Keywords: qualitative research methods, postgraduate educational research, theming literature, management learning, curriculum design and pedagogy.



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