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Fieldwork in practice

RESEARCH INFORMATION FROM IMIT - THE INSTITUTE FOR MANAGEMENT OF INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Fieldwork in practice

By Martin Sköld

A few years ago, I developed a slipped disk. A condition which crept up on me as a result of too much sitting still and not enough exercise. I therefore had a specific problem and sought expert medical help at the hospital. I was admitted as a patient and remained in the orthopedics department for 8 days. There I received the medical treatment I needed. I also contributed to their research during this time. The doctors who treated me were involved in a research project to compare two groups of patients; those who were operated on and those who were not. They wanted to find out how the groups were two years after first seeking help for their condition.

Mutual gains

My experience from the hospital reminded me of Edgar Schein and his 1987 book, "The clinical perspective in fieldworks". There he suggested a method for carrying out research which lead to mutual gains; a method which has gained significance. The expert, in my case the doctors, help a patient who has a problem. The patient receives treatment, recovers and at the same time, contributes to research in the form of data.

IMIT is not a medical practice, but a significant part of its work over the past 40 years has consisted of projects based on this method, known as clinical management research. In a project with IMIT the patient is the organization requiring help from the academic experts. The expert is typically a researcher who has a PhD and is an expert in a certain area such as Lean Production, Digitalization, AI or Modularization, and can contribute with their knowledge to benefit the organization who has approached them. At the same time, the expert is carrying out research which can be used for future academic publications. This leads to mutual gains and values for both parties.

Taking the initiative

Just as a patient seeks treatment from a hospital to help them recover, an organization seeking help wants to function better, increase profitability and become more efficient in order to increase its competitiveness. Who it is that takes the initiative regarding "the problem" has shown to be of significance in the design and execution of the study:

- **Clinical management research** is characterized by the patient, for example the CEO or Head of Research, initiating the contact with an academic expert and asking for help.
- **Action research** is where academic experts initiate contact with a person within an organization and suggest a study.

The difference between these two methods or approaches therefore lies in who initiates the contact and this can have great significance for how a study is conducted, often in terms of access to data, which in the long run will determine how well the expert understands the problem.

Access to unique data

What makes clinical management research unique, is with regards to "wanting to get better". A patient with agonizing back pain who is prevented from living the life they want, is probably more inclined to make sacrifices in terms of time and money in order to get better. In the same way, a CEO who has promised the board and shareholders better returns, has a strong personal incentive to succeed.

To achieve this the patient has to be honest, set aside time and commit the necessary resources, all under the guidance of the expert. This provides a number of advantages for the expert. From a scientific point of view this means, (1) access to information, data and observations from senior level employees who would not normally share unless the incitement was sufficient, (2) data can comprise of documents, plans for new product launches, development projects and future investment projects, or (3) opportunities for in-depth interviews with people who would normally prioritize other things. It can even add value in the

' As a footnote in this context, it can be mentioned that IMIT protects the client, and the researcher does not have to disclose data if an outside party does not wish it. However, ultimately, clinical management research, like other types of research, relies on a shared ethical and intellectual contract where sensitive data remains confidential between the parties.

form of (4) funding, as funds are needed to conduct research[1].

Clinical management research is often carried out as a longitudinal study, over a long period of time. This type of project lends itself to studying: (i) the introduction of new philosophies, (ii) new investments in product or service development, (iii) the implementation of change, as well as (iv) comparative studies of different processes.

Advantages and value

The goal of clinical management research is to, (a) improve how an organization functions, and (b) for the researcher to develop within their field. This is achieved through access to proven and documented competence with a researcher who is well established in their field, who is able to design and plan a longer study, and who has the ability to translate, interpret and analyze results. The value perceived can be in terms of concrete

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or simplified social constructs, models, reaching consensus and verbal reasoning, anything which allows the patients to understand their needs and enables them to translate the advice into action.

For me it took six years of recovery before I was able to go out for a run. I had been through a comprehensive rehabilitation program, from firstly making sure we knew what "the problem" was, to finally eliminating it. This followed a sequence beginning with acute medical intervention and medical care to later focusing on rehabilitation and physiotherapy and regular checkups. I am now at a level where I can self-diagnose and can interpret my symptoms as well as being confident I am doing the right things.

The researcher, on the other side, has access to data they would otherwise be unable to attain, meaning the value of the study increases due to its exclusiveness. In turn, it can lead to the publication of scientific articles in international journals. It can also provide input for teaching in forms of real examples and cases, or in the form of academic opinion in the media and other forums in society; the so-called science outreach. Finally, financing is also necessary in academia in order to carry out research.

Fig. 1.

ADVANTAGES FOR BUSINESS

- Access to real expert help
- Based on proven and documented expertise
- Proximity to latest research
- Customized plan and implementation
- Regular meetings and a structured plan
- Practical and applicable results
- Long-term honesty and sincerity

ADVANTAGES FOR RESEARCHER

- Opportunity for exclusive studies
- Access to unique and exclusive data
- Establishment in a life-long area of expertise
- Publications in international scientific journals
- Ability to cite opinions, comments and interpretations in external context (media)
- Real examples for teaching
- Financing

IMIT's vision

IMIT has a unique tradition, among other things, of conducting this type of clinical study. In addition to being small, effective and a nonprofit organization, it is guided by the exciting vision: that IMIT shall contribute to renewal within the *Management of Innovation and Technology* to provide *gains* for academia, business and society.

Renewal is achieved through research projects which can be translated into relevant results for academia and business. Research projects are carried out in collaboration with national and international experts who have leading knowledge within the scientific disciplines. Results are shared through publications, seminars and workshops. .

Management (leadership and control) *of Innovation* is about creating new value for industry, academia and other sectors of society. We see innovation as being closely linked to knowledge development and new ways to combine existing knowledge to create this value.

Management (leadership and control) *of Technology* is about the knowledge and utilization of technology, tools and systems. Our ambition is to contribute to increased understanding for how emerging technologies, for example digital technologies and AI, can be used to increase sustainability and competitiveness.

Gains can be economic, social or ecological at the individual, organizational or societal level.

RECOMMENDED READING

> Schein, E.H. (1987), The Clinical Perspective in Fieldworks, SAGE Publications, London.

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