Resources for Chapter 8

Some examples of evaluations (p.178)

Note: The titles give an adequate indication of the topic of the evaluation.


Curry, L. C., Walker, C. and Hogstel, M. O. (2006) Educational needs of employed family caregivers of older adults: evaluation of a workplace project. *Geriatric Nursing*, 27, 166-173. Employed caregivers report a need for care-giving information; however, they seldom think of their workplace as a valuable resource. A needs assessment was completed by employees of a large institution, followed by an evaluated project where educational sessions were offered.


Raphael, A. (2006) A needs assessment: a study of perceived need for student services by distance learners. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 9, Number 2, Summer 2006. Examines what online degree seekers express as their perceived needs with regard to the student support services that exist for students attending on-campus classes. The study also explored to what extent online degree seekers, at the undergraduate and graduate levels, report that their student support services needs are being met.


Weigel, D. J. and Martin, S. S. (2006) Identifying key early literacy and school readiness issues: exploring a strategy for assessing community needs. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*, 8, No. 2, Fall 2006. Presents the results of a needs assessment project aimed at identifying priorities for community intervention programs aimed at ensuring that young children enter school ready to learn. A panel of
carefully selected early childhood panellists completed four rounds of questionnaires designed to develop
a prioritized list of key community needs and programs.
Cost-benefit analyses

Belfield, C. R., Nores, M., Barnett, S. and Schweinhart, L. (2006) The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program: cost benefit analysis using data from the age-40 follow-up. *Journal of Human Resources*, 16, 162-190. An updated cost-benefit analysis of a preschool program, using data on individuals aged 40. Children were randomly assigned to a treatment or control group. Program costs are compared against treatment impacts on educational resources, earnings, criminal activity, and welfare receipt. Net present values are calculated for participants, the general public, and society. The treatment group obtains significantly higher earnings. For the general public, higher tax revenues, lower criminal justice system expenditures, and lower welfare payments easily outweigh program costs by over 12 to 1.


Caldwell, M. F., Vitacco, M. and Van Rybroek, G. J. (2006) Are violent delinquents worth treating? A cost-benefit analysis. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 43, 148-168. A report on the cost benefits of an intensive treatment program for unmanageable juvenile delinquent boys, compared to the usual treatment in a secured juvenile corrections facility. The initial costs of the program were offset by improved treatment progress and lowered recidivism, especially violent recidivism. The treatment group yielded a benefit-cost ratio of more than 7 to 1 over the ‘treatment as usual’ group.

Cost-effectiveness analyses

schools and the negative effects of large schools on students, teachers, and members of the community, as well as the ‘diseconomies of scale’ inherent in large schools. Presents data showing that small schools can be built cost effectively.

Cummings, K. M., Fix, B., Celestino, P., Carlin-Menter, S., O'Connor, R. and Hyland, A. (2006) Reach, efficacy, and cost-effectiveness of free nicotine medication giveaway programs. Journal of Public Health Management and Practice, 12, 37-43. A set of interventions to make free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) available to smokers wishing to quit. The reach of the different programs was evaluated by computing the proportion of eligible smokers within a given area enrolled in the program and tracking call volume to a quitline before, during, and after the free giveaway promotions. Efficacy was evaluated by a telephone follow-up survey to measure use of the medications and smoking behavior. In all cases the quit rate was higher than that observed among smokers not sent NRT (21%-35% vs 12%). The offer of free NRT appears to be a cost-effective method to induce large numbers of smokers to make a quit attempt.

Yeh, S. S. (2007) The cost-effectiveness of five policies for improving student achievement. American Journal of Evaluation, 28, 416-436. DOI: 10.1177/1098214007307928. Presents comparisons of student achievement effect sizes suggesting that systems in which student performance in math and reading is rapidly assessed between 2 and 5 times per week are 4 times as effective as a 10% increase in per pupil expenditure, 6 times as effective as voucher programs, 64 times as effective as charter schools, and 6 times as effective as increased accountability. Achievement gains per dollar from rapid assessment are even greater - 193 times the gains that accrue from increasing preexisting patterns of educational expenditures, 2,424 times the gains from vouchers, 23,166 times the gains from charter schools, and 57 times the gains from increased accountability.
Examples of realist evaluations (p.188)

Evaluations based directly on Pawson and Tilley (1997)


Evaluations following realist principles

Duguid, S. (2000) *Can Prisons Work?* Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press. Quantitative evaluation of a higher education course in Canadian prisons. The basic hypothesis is that undergoing the course will not be beneficial to all but will have a differing effects on different groups of offenders. Looking at the
Duguid hypothesizes the operation of different mechanisms for different subgroups of prisoners. These include a ‘shelter’ mechanism explaining why the youngest of the toughest cases benefit significantly from the programme. It might be that the course offers a second chance before they have to confront and become drawn into the macho culture of the wings and a continuing criminal career. The significant benefit for two older groups might be due, by contrast, to ‘last chance’ and ‘maturation’ mechanisms. For the group in the middle showing little benefit, it may be that education cannot penetrate those for whom criminal status might be the ‘badge of honour’ recognized for survival on the inside. Evidence for the existence of these mechanisms is strengthened by further quantitative analyses and qualitative work in which practitioners and prisoners voice their reactions to opportunities and constraints offered by an education-in-prison regime.

Campbell, C. and MacPhail, C. (2002) Peer education, gender and the development of critical consciousness. *Social Science and Medicine, 55*, 331-345. Evaluation of a peer education programme used as an HIV prevention strategy in South Africa. A well-developed programme theory started with the idea that young people established norms about sexual conduct in a process of collective negotiation within group settings and hence that peer education settings might provide an ideal context to challenge existing relationships and behaviours that put their sexual health at risk. Interviews and focus groups were held with both peer-educators and subjects, gathering information on group activities and the perceived challenges in mounting the intervention. These responses were then taped, translated and transcribed. The realist formula, context + mechanism = outcome was used to identify and code the process and circumstances that were deemed to influence the success (of failures) of the programme in achieving its desired outcome. The overall finding is that the programme theory has little chance of being developed and sustained in this context.

Clarke, R. and Goldstein, H. (2002) Reducing theft at construction sites. In N. Tilley, ed, *Analysis for Crime Prevention*. Monsey, NY: Criminal Justice Press. The authors worked with the local police to formulate a plausible strategy to identify a specific aspect of the problem where a preventive mechanism could plausibly be activated. Theft of electrical goods that had been installed in yet-to-be occupied houses accounted for 22% of commercial burglaries in the area, most being of plug-in rather than hard wired appliances were most often taken, suggesting that opportunist rather than organized and determined thieves were at work. A realist account of the problem suggests that, in the context of new housing developments residents were poorly placed and little motivated to watch over unoccupied new dwellings.
With the comings and goings at a construction site they were unlikely to notice suspicious movements of goods, creating opportunities for thieves to take high value disposable electrical goods that could be readily sold. An opportunity reducing mechanism was suggested as most promising in these circumstances... The postponement of the installation of plug-in electrical goods until the dwelling was occupied deprives the prospective thief of the key reward and incentive to the burglary that had hitherto been available. Although there were implementation issues (e.g. persuading builders to change routine installation practices) substantial reductions in theft were obtained. Earlier strategies such as security patrols and watch schemes had been ineffective.

Note Further details about these evaluations are given in Pawson and Tilley (2004, Appendix 2, pp. 27-31).

Reference

Examples of action research projects (p.192)

Fern, E. and Kristinsdóttir, G. (2011) Young people act as consultants in child-directed research: an action research study in Iceland. Child and Family Social Work, 16, 287–297. DOI:10.1111/j.1365-2206.2010.00740.x. An action research study, conducted in Iceland, which involved young service users as consultants to the research. Participatory group work methods were used to activate the young people’s knowledge and guide social workers in developing their practice. The emphasis on the quality of relationships and attention to children’s concerns was crucial in developing the concept of child-directed practice.

Holmes, C. M. (2008) How can curriculum action research be used to promote post qualifying practice teaching award candidates' interest in research articles? Social Work Education, 27, 695-709. The author used Curriculum Action Research as a tool to make manageable changes to her teaching practice, by routinely introducing secondary research articles in every teaching session. This approach encouraged the candidates’ learning and enabled their completion of their research assignment on their chosen topic, whilst also supporting or challenging their existing attitudes to the role of research in social work practice.


Richardson, L. and Reid, C. (2006) I've lost my husband, my house and I need a new knee: why should I smile? Action research evaluation of a group cognitive behavioural therapy program for older adults with depression. Clinical Psychologist, 10, 60-66. DOI: 10.1080/1328420060690453. The paper details an action research approach to developing and evaluating a group cognitive-behavioural therapy program for
older adults experiencing depression. This approach allowed the development of a novel program and for each component of the program to be evaluated and modified in an iterative, developmental fashion.

Rolfson, M. and Knutstad, G. (2007) Transforming management fashions into praxis: action research project in AutoParts. *Action Research*, 5, 341-357. DOI: 10.1177/1476750307083724. In a project with the automotive supplier ‘AutoParts’ the researchers’ goal was to implement team organization. The top manager thought of the implementation as a planned process that should be discussed in the management team and then implemented. The researchers participated in these discussions, but meanwhile worked out practical solutions together with the actual teams of workers as an action research project. The management team did not make any progress while the bottom-up strategy was quite successful. They consider that the success could not have been achieved without the action research method, where they were regarded as both insiders and outsiders, spent a lot of time on the shop floor, and worked together with the team members as co-researchers to define their own concepts of the team.

*Note:* Many other examples of studies using action research can be found in the journal *Action Research.*
The relative roles of practitioner-researchers, researchers and consultants in carrying out real world research - with practical advice on fulfilling these roles (p.193)

Practitioners such as nurses, social workers and teachers will not necessarily have expertise in the strategies, methods and analytic techniques needed to carry out research. Notwithstanding the obvious benefits that skills and experience bring, the underlying common-sense core to the practice of social research is not difficult to grasp. Such a grasp enables the interested practitioner to be directly involved in carrying out worthwhile studies - to become a ‘practitioner-researcher’. Involving practitioners in research, whether through following an action research model or otherwise, provides an obvious means of facilitating change.

The practitioner-researcher

A practitioner-researcher is someone who holds down a job in some particular area and is at the same time involved in carrying out systematic research relevant to the job. In education, this might be the teacher carrying out a study of a way of helping an individual child with a learning difficulty; or a project on delivering some aspect of curriculum to a school class; or (possibly working with colleagues from the same or other schools) a project evaluating an initiative to improve communication between first and secondary schools. Corresponding foci of enquiry, from individual through group to organization, are not difficult to envisage for practitioners in other professions. In all these cases, carrying out the project is likely to be in addition to their normal full-time responsibilities. Another version of the practitioner-researcher role is the true hybrid: someone whose job is officially part-practitioner, part-researcher. This might be a short-term arrangement to enable a project to take place, or a continuing joint appointment. Or there could be less formal arrangements, with some remission of normal responsibilities.

Increasingly, post-graduate and post-experience study is moving away from the notion that the practitioner-student determines the focus of a project or thesis solely on the basis of their own individual interests. The move is towards study relevant to the professional setting, in part at least determined by the agenda and concerns of that setting. Reduction in individual freedom is balanced by an increasing likelihood of implementation, and of additional resources and time for the practitioner-researcher.
Practitioner-researchers might be thought to be at a considerable disadvantage compared to outside professional researchers, but they have complementing advantages. Box 8.A lists some of them. Anyone
Box 8.A

Practitioner-researchers compared with ‘outside’ researchers

Disadvantages of the practitioner-researcher role

1 *Time* Probably the main disadvantage. Being involved in a research project on top of normal commitments is very difficult.

2 *Lack of expertise* This obviously depends on the individual. There is a need for some background in designing, carrying out and analysing studies. A major problem can be ‘not knowing what it is that you don’t know’.

3 *Lack of confidence* Lack of experience in carrying out studies leads to lack of confidence.

4 ‘*Insider*’ problems The insider may have preconceptions about issues and/or solutions. There can also be hierarchy difficulties (both ways, i.e. with high-status and low-status practitioner-researchers); and possibly the ‘prophet in own country’ phenomenon (i.e. outside advice may be more highly valued).

Advantages of the practitioner-researcher role

1 ‘*Insider*’ opportunities You will have a pre-existing knowledge and experience base about the situation and the people involved.

2 ‘*Practitioner*’ opportunities There is likely to be a substantial reduction of implementation problems.
‘Practitioner-researcher’ synergy

Your insights and role as a practitioner help in the design, carrying out and analysis of useful and appropriate studies.

Carrying out a sequence of studies in a particular setting can build up a specialized expertise about that type of setting which may well be unrivalled.

Most professional workers in the ‘human services’ professions, whether in the public or the private sector, are busy people. There appears to be an increasing acceptance that investigation, enquiry, evaluation and innovation are all part of the professional role, in concepts such as ‘extended professionality’ and the ‘reflective professional’ (Schon, 1983), but the time and energy to carry them out on top of one’s normal load is often missing. However there is a potential synergy between research and practice, such that their integration is of benefit to both. The traditional division of labour in professional work between practitioners and researchers has its own problems when the intention is to influence practice. Neither does it help in developing the extended professional.

What other solutions are possible? One could increase the amount of time available for research by reducing the weight of other commitments. If the extended professional is a better professional, then find the time for this extension to take place. Or the time commitment needed to carry out worthwhile studies could be decreased, that is, we look for an economical approach to enquiry, feasible at the same time as a substantial practitioner workload. Or the practitioner-researcher gets support; perhaps in terms of research assistance or at a consultancy level. Ex-practitioners have their uses. The former nurse or salesman will retain considerable knowledge and experience and should have high credibility.

These suggestions are not mutually exclusive. The other disadvantages of lack of expertise and confidence, and those arising from the fact that the person is working inside their own organization, could all be mitigated by access to a research consultant. An experienced consultant could, in a short span of time, suggest what is feasible in a given situation, giving the practitioner-researcher confidence as to its feasibility and appropriateness. Similarly it is, paradoxically, often easier for an outsider to spell out the likely problems to arise from insider status.

Winter, Burroughs, Crosson and Thorne (1989, pp. 34-7) point out that:
Experienced practitioners approach their work with a vast and complex array of concepts, theoretical models, provisional explanations, typical scenarios, anticipation of likely outcomes, etc. . . . A ‘research’ process must demonstrably offer something over and above this pre-existing level of understanding’ (p. 34)

This suggests a clear difference of procedure between the research and the procedures of professional practice itself, to guard against the ‘we knew that already’ or ‘we do that every day of our professional lives’.

They also consider that the methods used must be accessible, in the sense that they must be readily available to anyone who seeks to adopt them, and rigorous - that is, that they are ‘systematically grounded in justifiable and coherent principles’ (p. 36). Winter et al. consider that practitioner action research cannot simply use the research methods of conventional social science and advocate a reflexive, dialectical approach.

It is possible to accept this analysis of the problems without necessarily adopting their solutions. The need for a differentiated, rigorous and systematic approach to real life issues as faced by any real world researcher is fully accepted. Accessibility is an interesting problem. It was argued in the first chapter that research methods are not a private garden to which only the social science graduate has access. Some time and effort will certainly be needed by the professional without this background if she is to enter, but again this is a process facilitated by the sympathetic and experienced adviser or consultant.

Advice to practitioner-researchers

Part of your time will be devoted to carrying out research. This book is intended as a general resource in aid of this task. There are some features specific to the joint nature of your role:

*Negotiate a time allowance to carry out the research* - If this dual practitioner-researcher role has been agreed, your firm, institution or whatever presumably sees the advantages of an ‘insider’ carrying out the project. Make it clear that to capitalize on these advantages you need adequate time to carry out the project properly. In particular, don’t forget the time needed to write up the report(s) and disseminate the findings and their implications. If the dual role is a long-term arrangement, it is better to have an agreed proportion of your time allocated to the research work on a continuing basis rather than to negotiate separately for each project.
Work in a team whenever possible - Research work, particularly if it involves evaluation or has change implications, can be very stressful and it helps for this to be a collective endeavour. There are practical advantages in assessing the reliability of observational and other data, and more generally in sharing perceptions about issues, developing conceptual structures, analytical frameworks, etc.

Seek support - There is much 'legwork' and drudgery in carrying out even small-scale research. It is likely to be more cost-effective for your organization to provide clerical and similar support to help with surveys, code questionnaires, transcribe tapes etc., rather than have you do it all yourself.

Seek advice - Unless you have a strong and up-to-date research methodology background, and considerable experience in carrying out real world research it is again likely to be cost-effective for your organization to buy in consultancy support. This need not be extensive. Working through this book will not substitute completely for such advice, but should substantially reduce the consultancy time requirement as you will have an appreciation of what it is you need to know, and will be able to return to the book for details about specific methods and techniques of analysis.

There are numerous research consultancy firms and individuals offering consultancy services they vary considerably in quality and relevant experience. Unless you have personal recommendations a safer choice is to contact an accessible university which provides training and courses in applied social research. They are highly likely to have faculty staff prepared to offer consultancy support.

An alternative well worth considering is to register for a research degree or other postgraduate award in applied social research methods (or a professional course which includes this training as a component) and carry out the research project as a part of it, receiving supervisory support to do this. Credit accumulation and transfer schemes, now running in many higher education institutions, permit the kind of prior experience and learning acquired as a part of professional work to count as substantial credit toward such qualifications.

Incidentally, university teachers are a particular breed of practitioner-researcher. The good news is that your research could and should have a close link with your teaching role. The bad news is that in many countries there is an increasing expectation that you produce the research goods in terms of outputs such as papers in refereed journals at the same time that the demands of the teaching and administration part of your professional life increase with higher student numbers and a decreasing unit of resource. The advice given
above to other practitioner-researchers to negotiate a time allowance, work in a team, seek support and seek advice, applies with equal force.

The researcher

Persons with academic research expertise can take on a variety of roles in real world research; either actually carrying out projects themselves (with or without colleagues or other support), or advising other persons who then carry it out. We will consider the latter separately, under the heading of the ‘consultancy role’.

If you are going to carry out real world research it is, usually, because someone has asked you to do so. The basic notion is of a client, sponsor or boss who wishes you to do this. This includes the situation where you made the first move - perhaps persuaded your head of unit, or the manager of the firm down the road that it would be a good thing if . . . and they took the suggestion on board. It also covers the situation on a course in ‘Applied Social Research Methods’ or the like, where it is the course tutor who has asked you to carry out the study, in part as a training for carrying out subsequent real world enquiries. As a researcher rather than a practitioner-researcher, you are most likely to be external to the setting or organization forming the focus of the research, if only because relatively few ‘human service’ organizations have so far appreciated the wisdom of having a researcher per se on the payroll.

The assumption that the study is carried out for this kind of instrumental purpose does not preclude the possibility that it might make some contribution to understanding in general terms what goes on in the primary classroom, or of the selection process for sales trainees, or of personality disorders, or whatever. But such a contribution is a spin-off from a well-designed, executed and analysed study rooted in previous work and/or conducted within a particular theoretical framework. The main concern of the study is practical, and to provide answers relevant to that specific context. Does the study help to solve the problem or throw light on the issue presented?

Real world research has tended to be viewed as a methodologically flawed version of ‘proper’ research:

In terms of the traditional model this is perfectly true - much ‘real world’ research is messy - uncontrolled variables abound, predictor and criterion measures interact, alternative hypotheses cannot be ruled out; standard statistical measures cannot be applied without massive violation of assumptions. (Boehm, 1980, p. 498)
This material tries to indicate how you might go about things in this difficult situation. The real world investigator’s responsibilities often extend further than is expected in traditional models of research. It may not be your responsibility actually to implement the results in the sense of overseeing a change in practice or whatever, but what might somewhat clumsily be termed their ‘implementability’ has got to be very much in the mind of the researcher, both in conducting the research and in the form in which the results are presented. Utopian solutions involving impossible staff ratios or physical resources that are way outside budget are of no great help. As the teacher said when one-to-one teaching sessions were advocated to solve her problems in teaching slow learners to read - ‘what do I do when the other twenty-nine are swinging from the lampbulbs?’ If one-to-one sessions really do provide a solution, then the task of the investigator is widened - either come up with some solution for the other twenty-nine, or give convincing arguments to ‘management’ for the necessary resources.

Advice to researchers

Know the environment of the study - If you are an outsider, you will need to find out a substantial amount about the ‘client’s’ needs and expectations, and to be aware of the setting and context in which the study will take place. An awareness and recognition of these matters will enhance your credibility and be likely to obtain more interest from participants in the study. You will need to be able to show the link between ‘internal’ issues and the research questions.

Be prepared to ‘sell’ the idea of the research - Persuasion is one of the many skills you need to carry out this kind of applied work. There seems to be an idea about that it is morally wrong to seek to ‘sell’ your research project to the client and other likely participants. I don’t see this; always provided, of course, that you are acting in good faith, and that you are selling rather than over-selling. Even when the commission to carry out a study comes directly from the client, you are likely to have to persuade them that, for example, while they saw the problem as X, your view is that it is really about Y; or that while they wanted a sample survey, the question would be better addressed by a case study (or vice versa). It is important to try to give your best estimate of the likely costs and benefits, both of the project itself and of any changes that seem likely to arise.
if its findings were implemented. In an organization, persuasion may well be needed at several levels in the hierarchy, with the message appropriately tailored to the audience.

**Be prepared to ‘sell’ the findings of the research** - The same case for ‘selling’ can be made in connection with outcomes from the research. For the client, the findings and their usefulness are the most important part of the process. Persuasion is particularly important when, as is often the case, implementation of some new approach or way of working is indicated. You need an understanding of the change process and the likely barriers that will be erected.

**Remember that you are likely to be judged on your communication and interaction skills** - There will be little interest in your knowledge of the literature or of research methodology. Much more important is how you ‘present’ when interacting with the client and participants, initially during the project and when disseminating the findings.

Hakel, Sorcher, Beek and Moses (1982) provide a useful analysis of the communication skills required by the applied researcher, summarized in box 8.B. They focus on organizational studies but the points that they make have general relevance. Suggestions are provided for role-play (behaviour modelling) exercises designed to develop these skills.

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**Box 8.B**

**Communication skills needed by the real world researcher**

1. *Explaining the rationale for a project* (showing the client and others what is in it for them):

- describe objectives in non-technical terms and advantages of conducting the project with suggested methodology;
- ask for and listen to reactions;
- explain how findings will benefit client and organization, and contrast this with consequences or implications of not being involved.
2 Listening and reacting (showing understanding and generating confidence in the researcher):

- convince client of your personal interest in the project;
- ask client how their personal or organizational effectiveness might be influenced by the project - listen openly;
- ask client to elaborate on points where you disagree and discuss your own views;
- thank client for views and promise they will be considered before proceeding;
- (if appropriate) set follow-up date to redefine project or get agreement.

3 Defending or presenting an idea, opinion or project (showing professional competence and ability to contribute to management/organizational objectives):

- express your opinion and explain why you hold it (versus alternatives);
- explain relationship between what you propose and their objectives;
- ask for and listen to reaction;
- ask for elaboration on points where you disagree;
- discuss and compare your opinion and theirs in reference to the best criteria you can identify for measuring their objectives.

4 Redirecting or redefining their expressed interest or objectives (ensuring that research results will be useful and making sure that the research answers the questions they should be asking):

- express your understanding of their interests and objectives and suggest a more fundamental perspective, together with your reasons for offering it;
- explain the relationship between your more fundamental perspective and their need;
- ask for and discuss their reactions to your recommendation;
- (if necessary) outline how their interest or objectives will be met by following a more fundamental recommendation.
5 Getting agreement and commitment (making sure that they understand what must be done to provide support and follow-up):

- review with client/management the rationale of the project;
- indicate and discuss specific responsibilities, tasks, milestones and deadlines;
- ask for and discuss reactions;
- agree to summarize the schedule and actions in writing, and submit these for record;
- set specific follow-up dates to review progress at each milestone.

(Adapted and abridged from Hakel et al., 1982, pp. 105-8)

The research consultant (project adviser) role

Organizations make use of many kinds of consultants, such as legal experts, financial advisers and advertising agents. There are also consultants who provide expertise based to a greater or less extent on the theories, findings and methods of the social sciences, such as communications, job training, management, marketing, organizational development (OD), personnel selection and public relations consultants. Consultancy as a role is not limited to formal organizations.

Research consultancy as envisaged here amounts to a personal advisory service to the individual or group charged with mounting some form of research project. Indeed, because of these other connotations of the term ‘consultant’, it may be wiser to refer to the role as ‘research adviser’ (or even, because of the antipathy to ‘research’ in some contexts, as ‘project adviser’). The aim is to provide advice, information and support so that internal practitioner-researchers can overcome their relative lack of expertise and experience in designing, running, analysing and reporting on the enquiry.

Within this general framework, several variants are possible - mainly reflecting the extent to which the project remains internal; or is a partnership between consultant and internal researchers; or becomes the consultant’s project with the internal researchers carrying out most of it. There are advantages and disadvantages of each, although in the latter two the role is not so much consultant as researcher: they
provide one way of minimizing the disadvantage of being an outsider by involving internal colleagues. In action research and other approaches focusing on change, the distinction between researcher and consultant becomes blurred. In any case it is important to establish at a very early stage which role you are expected to play.

The following discussion assumes that you are simply advising rather than taking over the project. A common approach is for the consultant to have a substantial voice in the design, choice of research strategy and methods to be used, but after that simply a watching brief where further advice is proffered if problems crop up, and when important milestones are achieved.

*The ‘giving away’ of skills* - Your task as consultant is in part to ‘give away’ skills and experience. This is increasingly seen as a necessary task for social scientists if what these disciplines have to offer, both in terms of theories and findings, and methodologically, is to make an impact on society. However, dangers of misuse and misapplication, have to be guarded against.

Work of this kind is open to the criticism that the skills are necessarily esoteric and should only be open to the select few who have completed a full academic and professional training in psychology or other relevant discipline. The answer to this is in part through such attempts to give away skills being fully evaluated to determine their success or otherwise empirically (e.g. Robson, Sebba, Mittler and Davies, 1988).

The ‘evidence-based’ movement has, in recent years stimulated the practices of the ‘human’ professions being increasingly subject to systematic evaluation. Pressures in that direction may lead to researchers being asked to carry out such studies, which is to be welcomed. However, the trend in many services seems to be to seek to do this ‘in-house’. There are clear advantages to this trend, both in extending the professionalism of the practitioners concerned, and in increasing the likelihood of findings being implemented. But the work may be of poor quality. This is where the consultant comes in: not only to provide advice on specifics but to reinforce the notion that the only worthwhile studies are rigorous, systematic and unbiased.

Advice to the research consultant (project adviser)

*Seek an early clarification of your role* - Is the role purely advisory? Is it one-off advice in setting up the project, or is there a continuing involvement (e.g. to comment on instruments used or developed; to give
advice on development of fieldwork and possible modification of design; to make suggestions about analysis, need for further data, form and content of report, dissemination strategy and tactics)?

Assess capability of the practitioner-researcher(s) - Have they sufficient knowledge/experience/skills to carry out the intended project? Can you assist them so that they can cope? Or can the project be reformulated so they can handle it? Are they sufficiently committed to the ideals of research to produce a full and unbiased study (or would they just do a ‘cosmetic’ job)? If you are not happy with these answers, withdraw (let them, and the organization, know why - tactfully).

Seek answers to these questions:

- Where does the project come from? (Who wants it done? Why?)
- What is the problem/issue?
- What do they see as the research question(s)?
- What resources are available (mainly time availability of practitioner/researchers)?
- What is the time-scale of the project?
- What methodology (strategy; research methods), if any, is proposed?
- What problems do they envisage? (Opposition? suspicion?)
- How will the study be reported?
- How will the findings be used?
- What is the position on confidentiality/anonymity?

The extent to which you get answers on these issues gives an indication of their research sophistication, and of the extent to which things have been thought through. This helps you to assess the feasibility of their task within the constraints of time and resources, and to give realistic advice.

References


Annotated references to further reading for chapter 8 (p.193)


Fox, M., Green, G. and Martin, P. (2007) *Doing Practitioner Research*. London: Sage. Focuses on helping practitioners conduct research in their own organisations, and the best methods for doing this effectively and sensitively. Discusses the theoretical, political and organisational context of doing research, as well as addressing the ethical and practical issues of undertaking research.


involvement as participants through to service user-led research. The chapters are written collaboratively with users themselves providing a range of voices and good practice case studies.

