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Editorial

Mixed methods research: An opportunity to improve our studies and our research skills



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Mixed methods research is the combination and integration of qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study. Although researchers have combined qualitative and quantitative data for many years, current conceptualizations of mixed methods research did not emerge until the 1980s. Mixed methods research has developed rapidly in these last few years, emerging as a research methodology with a recognized name and distinct identity (Denscombe, 2008), especially in some fields such as education, health sciences, psychology and sociology. In these fields, this methodological approach is recognized as the third methodological movement, along with qualitative research and quantitative research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). This distinctiveness is reflected in the publication of many books focused on mixed methods, in a methodological journal (*Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, Sage) and in a scientific association (Mixed Methods International Research Association, <http://mmira.wildapricot.org/>).

An important aspect regarding mixed methods research is why to use this methodological approach. The use of mixed methods research in business studies may play an important role in the development of our field because results obtained from different methods have the potential to enrich our understanding of business problems and questions. In this regard, mixed methods research may add value and contribute to advance our research topics in the business fields (Molina-Azorin, 2007, 2011, 2012; Molina-Azorin & Cameron, 2015; Molina-Azorin & López-Gamero, 2016; Molina-Azorin, Lopez-Gamero, Pereira-Moliner, & Pertusa-Ortega, 2012).

The overall purpose and central premise of mixed methods studies is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena than either approach alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Better understanding can be obtained by triangulating one set of results with another and thereby enhancing the validity of inferences. Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989) point out other important purposes, rationales and advantages of mixed methods research: complementarity (elaboration or clarification of the results from one method with the findings from the other method), development (when the researcher uses the results from one method to help develop the use of the other method) and

expansion (seeking to extend the breadth and range of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components).

Another important issue about mixed methods is how to conduct a mixed methods study. There are two main factors that help researchers to determine the type of mixed methods design that is best suited to their study: priority and implementation of data collection. Regarding priority, the mixed methods researcher can give equal priority to both quantitative and qualitative parts, emphasize qualitative more, or emphasize quantitative more. This emphasis may result from the research question, from practical constraints on data collection, or from the need to understand one form of data before proceeding to the next. Implementation of data collection refers to the sequence the researcher uses to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. The options consist of gathering the information at the same time (concurrent design) or introducing the information in phases (sequential design). In gathering both forms of data concurrently, the researcher may seek to compare them to search for congruent findings. When the data are introduced in phases, the sequence relates to the objectives of the research. Thus, when qualitative data collection precedes quantitative data collection, the intention may be first explore the problem being studied and then to follow up on this exploration with quantitative data that are amenable to studying a large sample, so that the results can be applied to a population. Alternatively, when quantitative data precede qualitative data, the intention may be to test variables with a large sample and then to explore in more depth with a few cases during the qualitative phase.

A key aspect of mixed methods research is the integration issue (Fetters & Freshwater, 2015). In order to add value and contribute to advance business research, scholars that use mixed methods research must integrate the quantitative and qualitative parts. Authors of mixed methods studies should consider the question: what synergy can be gained by the additional work of using both qualitative and quantitative methods? This aspect urges researchers to carefully plan their works with intentional choices that can leverage integration. The issue is to produce a whole through integration that is greater than the sum of the individual qualitative and quantitative parts.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) pointed out that conducting mixed methods research is not easy, and Bryman (2007) indicated that there are several barriers. Mixed methods studies are a challenge because they require more work and financial resources, and they take more time. Increased time demands arise from the

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time it takes to implement the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study. In addition, mixed methods research also requires that researchers develop a broader set of skills that span both the quantitative and the qualitative. But in my opinion, this aspect must not be considered as a barrier but as an opportunity. Researchers tend to rely on the methods initially learned. When researchers develop expertise in using some methods where they feel comfortable, it is hard to break from that. Extending and sharpening our methodological skills, we can increase the rigor of our conceptual thinking, see new ways to answer research questions, and even identify questions that would not have occurred to us otherwise (Edwards, 2008). And here mixed methods research can play a key role. Because mixed methods research combines and integrates quantitative and qualitative methods, the researcher is motivated to develop a broader set of research skills. Training in mixed methods research can overcome the tendency to rely on known methods and play an important role in widening and extending our repertoire of methods (Mertens et al., 2016).

EJM&BE encourages mixed methods studies, and also pure quantitative and pure qualitative papers. EJM&BE encourages empirical articles that are rigorous and also relevant to business practice. Together with empirical articles, EJM&BE also publishes conceptual/theoretical articles and rigorous systematic literature reviews (qualitative reviews, meta-analysis and bibliometric studies). Works about the use and added value of specific methodological approaches and techniques are also welcome.

I agree with the “paradigm of choices” emphasized by Patton (1990). A paradigm of choices rejects methodological orthodoxy in favor of methodological appropriateness as the primary criterion for judging methodological quality. Thus, this paradigm of choices recognizes that different methods are appropriate for different questions. In any case, as noted above, mixed methods research and a wide repertoire of methods in our methodological toolbox can stimulate researchers to better define and analyze innovative problems and research questions in business research.

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