

Contextualist research: iterating between methods while following an empirically grounded approach

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Abstract

An alternative approach to research is described that has been developed through a succession of significant construction management research projects. The approach follows the principles of iterative grounded theory, whereby researchers iterate between alternative theoretical frameworks and emergent empirical data. Of particular importance is an orientation towards mixing methods, thereby overcoming the existing tendency to dichotomise quantitative and qualitative approaches. The approach is positioned against the existing contested literature on grounded theory, and the possibility of engaging with empirical data in a ‘theory free’ manner is discounted. Emphasis instead is given to the way in which researchers must be *theoretically sensitive* as a result of being steeped in relevant literatures. Knowledge of existing literatures therefore shapes the initial research design; but emergent empirical findings cause fresh theoretical perspectives to be mobilised. The advocated approach is further aligned with notions of knowledge co-production and the underlying principles of contextualist research. It is this unique combination of ideas which characterises the paper’s contribution to the research methodology literature within the field of construction management. Examples are provided and consideration is given to the extent to which the emergent findings are generalisable beyond the specific context from which they are derived.

Keywords: Contextualist research; Co-production; Grounded theory; Interpretive research; Research methodology