Process Analysis Task 3: Identify a suitable overall design and relevant data gathering technique(s)

This next step in the research process is important as it calls on you to identify a relevant and effective way of gathering the data to 'answer' your question. You should note that there is not necessarily just one method that is suitable. Your expertise and the time available are likely to influence the selection of a suitable method.

Before starting to consider specific methods in your group meeting you each need to familiarise yourselves with the issues involved in selecting a relevant and effective methodology, and to be familiar with a range of possible methods. You should return to Bryman (Social research methods) and reread chapter 2 and make sure that you understand the distinction between the overall design of an enquiry project and your specific data gathering method. You may also wish to look at Robson (Real World Research) – pp. 39 – 45 explore the issues of research strategy.

After you have familiarised yourself with the issue of design you should consider which (or what set of) data gathering techniques may be most useful for the research question that your group is considering.   At this point you will have to select what advice is relevant to you, out of the research texts. Make sure that you will know (before considering making a choice) the key features and strengths and weaknesses of the specific methods that the group is likely to consider. You may also wish to consult one of the more specialist texts on specific methodologies. The reading list provides you with information on these texts.

The next stage of this activity is then to be carried out at your next group meeting.   You should together examine and summarise the range of options available and decide which ones to explore in further depth. The outcome of this should lead to each group member being given the task of exploring one of the possible options in depth in preparation for the next meeting. This should allow the group to reconsider the range of possible options at the next meeting, and to reach a decision. Note that, depending on the methods available to you, it may be necessary for two members in the group to explore the same method. Nevertheless, however much the pair may opt to consult, *each should submit a separate report* to the group. You may use email with your tutor in between the meetings if you have any specific queries regarding the suitability of a method.

You should guide your exploration of the particular method allocated to you by considering the following:

- Is it feasible for us? For example – would it
  - provide us with the kind of data that we need to answer our question
  - only require the kind of equipment/sources that we can access
  - be suitable for the number of participants that we can access
  - fit in with the expertise that we have available, for example, note that questionnaires might sound simple – but they are very complex to construct in a sound, valid and reliable form.
- Might it provide us with problems in relation to ethical issues?

Record, briefly, the outcomes of your appraisal in this task as follows:

- Outline the method you have explored – including its general strengths and weaknesses
- List the possible advantages of using this method on this *particular* occasion – here you should try to put the method into the specific context in which it will be used.
- List the possible disadvantages of using this method on this particular occasion – again try to put the method into the context where it will be used

Then summarise briefly what you feel are the main advantages and disadvantages to the group in using this method *on this occasion and for the particular research question that you have identified,* and post this on the group Discussion board, so that these can used in the group discussion and decision-making in the next meeting.

The minutes of your meeting should be posted on the Discussion board. These minutes should follow the standard format but should also include a list of the methods and data gathering techniques that have been explored, together with the names of those who reported on them. Your tutor will comment on these minutes as may members from other groups.

Following the meeting, you should each review the methods proposed, referring to the comments from the group on these questions and the tutor comments from the Discussion Board.

Process Analysis

While you are engaged in this task, write and send to your commenter a 300 - 400 word account in which you think through the answers to one or more of these questions, whose answers are likely to be of immediate use to you:

- How are *we* tackling identifying a methodology?
- What is working well for *us* in this process and why?
- What is problematic for **me** and why? How might I overcome that problem?
- What am **I** learning from this that I can use next time I have to select a feasible methodology and tools for data gathering, in a different context (such as next semester in the project)

   Submit this process analysis to your commenter by the date set out in the course calendar.