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9-30-2013

## Dialectical Inquiry—Does It Deliver? A User Based Research Experience

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### Recommended APA Citation

Seligman, J. (2013). Dialectical Inquiry—Does It Deliver? A User Based Research Experience. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(39), 1-23. Retrieved from <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol18/iss39/2>

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## Dialectical Inquiry—Does It Deliver? A User Based Research Experience

### Abstract

Dialectical Enquiry (DI) as a research method was used in the study of customer/student experience and its management (CEM) in not for profit as higher education. The (DI) method is applied to senders, receivers of the customer experience across six English universities to gather real world data using an imposed dialectical structure and analysis. By conducting sixty interviews from the actors involved an extensive data base was developed., The enquiry was grounded in interviewing actors and their real experiences (the phenomena) from which data was analyzed to create scripts, themes and eventually three models of not for profit CEM. Seven for profit models of CEM were analyzed and compared to expose current assumptions, and do they fit in a not for profit setting. The motives and objectives for profit CEM centers on revenues and profits and lifetime value were the customer is manipulated to stay loyal to the organization., Not for profit CEM motives and objectives at universities was to use CEM as a communication and support tool that is used to inform students on secondary services (supports).

### Keywords

Dialectical Enquiry, For Profit and Not For Profit CEM and Models, Dialectic Organization Sense Making, Grounded Analysis

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## **Dialectical Inquiry – Does It Deliver? A User Based Research Experience**

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*Dialectical Enquiry (DI) as a research method was used in the study of customer/student experience and its management (CEM) in not for profit as higher education. The (DI) method is applied to senders, receivers of the customer experience across six English universities to gather real world data using an imposed dialectical structure and analysis. By conducting sixty interviews from the actors involved an extensive data base was developed., The enquiry was grounded in interviewing actors and their real experiences (the phenomena) from which data was analyzed to create scripts, themes and eventually three models of not for profit CEM. Seven for profit models of CEM were analyzed and compared to expose current assumptions, and do they fit in a not for profit setting. The motives and objectives for profit CEM centers on revenues and profits and lifetime value were the customer is manipulated to stay loyal to the organization., Not for profit CEM motives and objectives at universities was to use CEM as a communication and support tool that is used to inform students on secondary services(supports). Keywords: Dialectical Enquiry, For Profit and Not For Profit CEM and Models, Dialectic Organization Sense Making, Grounded Analysis.*

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### **Introduction**

The objective of the paper is to provide an account of the use Dialectical Inquiry (DI) by the researcher and to promote its value as a qualitative research method for the study of two groups within the same piece of research. The challenge was the construction of theory based on case study research and to also expose the value of (DI) in the creation of sense making processes as they emerge based on real world phenomena. In many cases of literature qualitative studies are considered less valuable, as the data is not projectable based on its sample size and nucleus. However, in many cases in DI the results are richer in content. The implication being that DI has a place in research and is grounded in review and analysis of real world data supplied by the actors involved. DI is based on its ability to capture knowledge and information from real actors, however the challenge of DI as a research technique is that DI does not rely on numeric or volume of respondents as in quantitative studies thus validity and reliability is in question by many researchers. However, DI has numerous strengths as it enables the researcher to explore inside the phenomena and understand the mechanics in detail; this insight is missed in quantitative enquiry. Rigorous analysis of DI data and correlation drives validity, and it is the DI method of constant evaluation of scripts that form frameworks and structures that make DI a powerful research method. The paper will promote DI as a useful method in qualitative methodologies and debate its strengths and weaknesses bases on a recent major research project, within a described research setting.

The research project was to understand the conceptual differences between senders and receivers of Customer Experience Management (CEM) within English universities. The challenge was to consider existing for profit models of CEM, gain real word data from not for profit institutions, understand, and interpret differences that exist in the two environments.

Staff and students were considered as subject matter experts as they are the participants in the CEM exchange. The objective was to "make sense" of the secondary data using DI analysis.

It was planned that by testing validity and reliability through various DI analysis, conclusions could be drawn which demonstrates the value of DI as a qualitative research approach. The author of this paper constructed the research question, developed the lines of enquiry and completed the field research. This led to a collection of data that is consolidated using NVivo 8 (recordings, notes, literature) using Nodes analysis.

From here the data was analyzed and subjected to DI imposed analysis which through its rigor created viable patterns and themes, which were then considered with for profit CEM models. The process identified considerable differences between for profit and not for profit CEM that has implications on CEM theory.

DI as a research method is very useful in building a strong picture of what are real live experiences and it reduces loose interpretation and bias as the DI data collection is rigorous and controlled and can be analyzed using coding and word association.

Moreover, DI allows flexibility of response and exploration of areas that are formed during the inquiry; this is highly valuable in the study of processes as an example.

## **Background**

Theory development is a central process in research. Historically, researchers have developed theory by combining observations from previous literature using common sense and good practice (Creswell, 2007). De Jong and Berg (2008) argue that the close connection with empirical "reality" provides for the development of a relevant and valid theory.

There is lack of clarity about the process of constructing theory from cases, it is especially obvious when using the central inductive process. Although Yin (2004), Grinnell and Esrau (2011) examine the rebuilding approaches and their strengths and weaknesses, they do not reach a consensus. Case studies typically combine data collection methods as archives, interviews, questionnaires and observations. The evidence can be qualitative (e.g., words), quantitative (e.g., numbers) or both.

By examining the literature on case study research, the researcher may use cross case analysis, theme and pattern development and positioning of theory building from case studies that can be deployed in the context of social science research. Having established an understanding of case study research and dialectics, the researcher could start considering the integrated research approach to be used.

## **Philosophy**

The research philosophy depends on how the researcher thinks about the development of knowledge, as this effects how the research is actually approached. Two views about the research process dominate the literature (Creswell, 2007; Rubin & Babbie, 2005): positivism and phenomenology. Positivism adopts the philosophical stance of the natural scientist and, according to Leonard (1997); it is working with observable social reality and the product. This approach creates law-like generalisations of those things produced by the physical and scientist, considered the objective analyst. Its platform lends itself to highly structured methods to facilitate replication and statistical analysis; hence, a quantitative approach.

Phenomenology considers complexity and the ability to discover visible symbols and underlying assumptions as to why and what happens (Schein, 1992). It explores the reality working behind the reality through exploration. Kaufman (2003) points out that the phenomenologist has a need to discover the details of a situation; thus understanding reality, or the deeper reality working behind a situation.

Schein (1992) debates organisations typically working on three levels: (a) visible symbols (access to services), (b) espoused values (what the institution stands for), and (c) underlying assumptions (the reality working behind the reality, values and beliefs). Exploring all three insures that the phenomenologist has a deeper understanding of a situation in a changing world and can explain it.

In dialectic critique, reality, social reality is consensual through the research process validated; that is, it is shared through dialogue, discussion and debate. Phenomena are conceptualised in dialogue; therefore, a dialectical critique is required to understand the set of relationships between the phenomenon and its context and between the elements constituting what is "the phenomenon."

### **Approach**

The dialectic approach provided structure and a framework to the research (Remenyi, Williams, Money, & Swartz, 1998). The research approach involves the creation and development of a theory that is subjected to rigorous testing; thus, the dominant research analysis is deductive.

In research by Au (2007), the author explains the casual relationships between variables. A hypothesis is established that is then proved using a structured range of dialectic tests and methodology, which on the results; "generalisations" are made Gill and Johnson (1997).

Induction-based work by Creswell (2007) and Berniker and McNabb (2006) demonstrate the development of an understanding of the meaning behind events and a closer understanding of the context of qualitative data. Induction is more flexible in its structure and permits changes to research emphasis, as the exploration uncovers new material, this is a key benefit to the researcher. It allows the researcher to partake in the study and is less concerned with generalizability. Enquiry paradigms (positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructivism) determine the criteria for any research (Blackburn, 1994). Positivism assumes that the social phenomena, are objects in natural science, and can be treated in the same way. One major criticism of positivism is the issue of separating the researcher from what is being researched.

As a result, positivism, which is also known as post-positivism, acknowledges that, even though the absolute truth cannot be established, there are imbedded knowledge claims that are still valid and that may be logically implied in the data; however, one should not resort to epistemological scepticism or relativism claims (Hammersley, 1992). Interpretivism was defined by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911; Rickman, 1979) in the mid twentieth century and was influential in the interpretivism paradigm or hermeneutic approach.

As the researchers highlighted, the subject matter investigated by the natural sciences is different to the social sciences, where human beings, in contrast to inanimate objects, can interpret the environment and themselves extremely well and articulate their true feelings based on experience (White & Epston, 1990).

In most contemporary research practice, this means that it is acknowledged that facts and values cannot be made separate and that understanding is prejudiced because it is situated in terms of the individual and the event and this point is critical to appreciate in dialectical enquiry as it was found to be a strength (Cousin, 2005; Elliott & Lukes, 2008).

This study's focus is on the social, collaborative process of bringing about meaning and knowledge around CEM in not-for-profit organisations from two perspectives (Neal, Allen, & Coombes, 2005).

The case study research methodology was best suited to this approach (Elliott & Lukes, 2008). Interpretivist research methods include focus groups, interviews and research diaries; these are methods that allow as many variables to be recorded as possible, and strengthen validity relying on a range of data collection.

Similar to interpretivist researchers, critical researchers recognise that research is not value free, but they go further in that the goal of the research is to *challenge interpretations and values* in order to bring about alterations to thinking and processes which supports dialectics. This leads to some common criticism of critical research; namely, that the aim is to support a political agenda (Gadamer, 1960/1999) and not real world facts.

Nevertheless, others argue that in critical research this is a necessary consequence because politics and enquiries are intertwined or inseparable and, by having an agenda of reform or enquiry, all participants' lives can be transformed for the better. This is why the critical approach is sometimes known as the *transformative paradigm*, a way of assessing norms and developing options (Creswell, 2003). Post-structuralism is interested in investigating individuals and social relations, but focuses more on *individuals* as constructs and how they are formed through language (Aubusson, 2002). They gain meaning within specific relations of power in almost all cases (Macdonald & Marsh, 2000). This relationship between meaning and power is embodied in the term "discourse," which encapsulates not only what is said and thought, but also who has the authority to speak (Ball, 1990).

This of course has its limitations in research based on who shouts loudest is the result. In more recent contemporary post-structuralist research, there is a strong emphasis on examining language, which provides indicators of power-knowledge relationships.

An example of a research methodology that a post-structuralist researcher is most likely to use is *discourse analysis*, which considers all material gathered. Nevertheless, others argue (Dash, 2005; De Jong & Berg, 2008) that because individuals are enmeshed in the complex web of social relations, it is essential to interrogate discourses to reveal those power relationships in order to help those individuals. This provides insight and also dialectic understanding.

Considering the literature on the four enquiry paradigms, it was decided to use interpretivism for this research, were people's facts and values, as we understand them be considered, using case study interview research methodology. A basic belief system is normally founded on ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions, according to research by Abbott (2002).

The logical primacy is set out below in table 1.

1. *The Ontological question:* What is the form and nature of reality, real existence and real action? In this case, the reality is what the senders and receivers perceive in the university CEM service experience.
2. *The Epistemological question:* What is the nature of the relationship between the knower or would-be knower and what can be known? The answer is constrained by the answer given to the ontological question. In this case, the sender and receiver contextualisation could be different, with different needs and wants from the university CEM system.
3. *The Methodological question:* How can the enquirer (would-be knower) go about finding out whether what he or she believes can be known? Again, the answer is constrained by the answers given.

Table 1  
*Basic Beliefs*

Item	Positivism	Post-positivism	Critical theory	Constructivism
Ontology	Naive realism— “real” reality but apprehend able	Critical realism— “real” reality but only imperfectly and probabilistically apprehend able	Historical realism— virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values; crystallised over time	Relativism—local and specific constructed realities
Epistemology	Dualist/ objectivist; findings true	Modified dualist/ objectivist; critical tradition/ community; findings probably true	Transactional/ subjectivist; value- mediated findings	Transactional/ subjectivism; created findings
Methodology	Experimental/ manipulative: verification of hypothesis; chiefly quantitative methods	Modified experimental/ manipulative; critical multiplism; falsification of hypothesis; may include qualitative methods	Dialogic/ dialectical	Hermeneutical/ dialectical

Source: adapted from Guba and Lincoln (1989)

Having reviewed the literature, the basic beliefs and enquiry used for this research was constructivism. The rationale for this approach is that ontological position realities are gatherable in the form of *multiple constructions* and are socially and experientially based on university sender and receiver of CEM.

They are usually local, specific in nature, which are dependent for their form and content *on the persons or groups* holding the constructions (Phillips, 1987). Constructs are true, as they are seen as *reality* by the individuals.

From an epistemology transactional and subjectivist position, the researcher and the item of investigation are assumed to be linked so that the finding from the enquiry is created as the investigation proceeds. Thus, the conventional distinction between ontology and epistemology disappears, as in the case of critical theory (Guba, 1990) and supports strongly a dialectical approach.

From a methodological position, which is hermeneutical (interpretation) and dialectical (method of argument), the variable and personal nature of social constructions suggests that individual constructs can be developed and refined only through the interface between the researcher and the interviewee.

These various constructs are compared and contrasted hermeneutically using dialectical exchange. Thus, constructivism is hermeneutical and dialectic methodology is aimed at the reconstruction of previously held constructions or its extension, which leads to new theory development as, outlined in Table 2.

Table 2  
Paradigm Position on Selected Practical Issues

Issue	Constructivism
Inquiry Aim	Understanding; reconstruction
Nature of knowledge	Individual reconstructions coalescing around consensus
Knowledge accumulation	more informed and sophisticated reconstructions; vicarious experience
Goodness or quality criteria	Trustworthiness and authenticity and misapprehensions
Values	Included—formative
Ethics	Intrinsic, process tilt towards revelation; special problems
Voice	Passionate participant, a facilitator of multi voice reconstruction
Training	Re-socialisation; qualitative and quantitative; history, values of altruism and empowerment
Accommodation	incommensurable
Hegemony	Seeking recognition and input

Source: adapted from Strauss and Corbin (1990)

## Strategy

The research strategy contains clear objectives derived from the research question, and it specifies the sources from which the data are collected. Careful thought has been given as to why a particular strategy has been used. For this research, case study has been used White and Epston (1990) using a dialectic approach and analysis.

The case study approach also provides the opportunity to review how CEM is used in universities and why it is used (Au, 2007; Gaddoti, 1994). Using a cross-sectional study of six universities of the particular phenomenon allowed a snapshot in time of current CEM use and application in university settings and explored *sender and receiver* views and opinions of CEM within the *real world* environment. Dialectic enquiry was used, as it provided a platform for gathering information, which allowed for *sense making* using the actors (senders and receivers of CEM (Berkiner & McNabb, 2006).

The purpose was a philosophical analysis of a practical question to examine the application of sense making of CEM in the for-profit setting to the not for profit sector.

The logic on the discovery of forces that developed competing models using a dialectic enquiry was that, if done correctly, the dialectic enquiry uses *a framework* on the research process that parallels better structure-grounded theory methods and fine-tunes emergent theories and data (Carlson & McCaslin, 2003). This strategic dialectic process involved four key steps, which are discussed below starting with a broader understanding.

## The process of dialectical enquiry

As the research process wanted to explore CEM models that exist in the commercial world and consider the suitability for not-for-profit application, organisational and student sense making presented a unique challenge to the researcher.

Morgan (1986) has identified the multiple models, metaphors and constructs we impose on organisation phenomena, which tries to gain valid understanding taken together, the models and theories are seen as inconsistent, incommensurate and paradoxical.

They seek to answer the question of how researchers are to understand the organisational phenomenon.

A related question is to measure actors and understand the phenomena from the sender and receiver positions, which were considered primary in this research study, were views similar or different. Kaplan (1964) argues that one must distinguish between the meaning of an act to the actor and its meaning to the researcher taking that act as a specific subject matter.

Purposeful actors in these actions are guided by their understanding of the process, in which they put a range of persons into separate groups, which constitutes a group of actors.

If one assumes that actors have choices, the meaning becomes necessary, complementary elements are a *valid representation of the truth*. Further, this kind of process makes sense to the actors, as it more or less represents how things function in the organisational environment being studied and that they have witnessed. The actors see it as a representation of the truth and although reflective, it what they believe at interview.

The research opportunity sets up a strategic choice for the researcher. One can review the literature, except that constructs and theories exist and the various instruments available to measure and verify aspects of these models and theories are *bona fide*. Alternatively; one can assume the organisational actors are grounded in their work and that this successful functioning indicates effective theories of action in use.

In that case, it is argued one cannot impose a construct of instruments, but search the qualitative content of narrations and interviews, in order to discover the *true meanings and theories in use*.

The development of dialectical enquiry as a method of qualitative research derives from Churchman (1971) and was further developed by Mason (1969). Churchman (1971) compares several competing scientific approaches to testing that treat the *content of statements*. The dialectic assumes that a thesis and its antithesis can be developed to explain any set of facts and data; this is a strong epistemological assumption that forms *conflicting models* that can emerge from facts and data and models have valid claims to the truth.

Feyerabend (1968) applies these principals to science, arguing that the relationship between theory and data is incestuous; theory defines the data, which in turn verifies the theory. This approach was attractive and made sense to the researcher of this paper.

In principle, dialectic enquiry did not limit the number of competing models that emerge from the data; however, it does *impose a structure* on the qualitative research process.

Dialectic enquiry imposes a “meta-theoretical framework” on the research process, It parallels the structure in grounded theory methods and reduces the “magical moments” that are needed to bridge emergent theories and data (Carlson & McCaslin, 2003); for example, a fabric cognitive map of understanding can be overlaid on a multiplicity of patterns to create scripts.

Scripts work whether they are well understood or not. Moreover, there is no requirement that scripts have to be consistent in case study research; in fact, in the cases studied, there was *considerable variation* in people’s understanding, level of knowledge and application and use of CEM in not for profit setting. This outcome was exactly what the researcher was seeking, as opposing models ensured variation and possible options.

Dialectic enquiry can be used to identify and make explicit models that stretch out the fabric map and expose both patterns and interpretations. To achieve the stretching, each model must be distilled to an *extreme formulation*. For this research, although common themes and scripts existed, there were different patterns of priority and purpose.

Practical scripts are, in fact, defined as composites of these extreme models; hence, inconsistent models can become the basis of what appears coherent and purposeful action.

Discovery and imposition identify conflicting models of enquiry. The first implies enquiry from the inside, while the second infers *a priori* categories.

Everald and Lewis (1981) suggest that *theory should emerge from data*, which was found to be consistent with dialectic inquiry for this research.

Having debated the process of dialectic enquiry, the four steps in the dialectic research process used needs to be exposed so that the reader can understand the dialectic approach use in this research.

What is *new knowledge* is that the dialectic process as defined by the author has *generalizability* as it has worked in another sector and setting through this research study. This adds value to the theory and practice of dialectical inquiry, which may enable other researchers to use this approach in the future.

### **Step 1—Developing / creating scripts and models**

Making sense of recorded interviews and notes is necessarily a *development process*. The reconstructed logic of the dialectical presentation does not mirror sense making as it unfolds. The use of NVivo 8 was invaluable, as it allowed the capture of what was said and it allowed notes to be placed alongside the oral responses and electronically provided the immersion and familiarity of the context.

This made script research strong and exclusive, which provided the support to build new models. Thus, the research process was to seek *themes* in the interview data and infer from these themes, *shared script* and develop the implicit model by examining its underlying assumptions. (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Themes were identified by strong unequivocal assertion found in the interview notes that purports to exclude alternative assertions. Taking this theme as a potential theme, the interviews were reviewed to search for *frequency* using NVivo 8 Nodes, which drove key scripts. In this process, the scripts exposed themes that were analysed and cross-correlated; three models emerged that were contextually different to CEM commercial models.

The first model is defined as the *sender/receiver, HE experience model 2011*, the second model is defined as the *university experience framework model 2011* and the third model is the *university gap model 2011*. See Appendix A.

### **Step 2—Establishing the models**

The next stage in the process was for the researcher to define definitions that matched the emerging models described by Rapp and Goscha, (2006) as theory in use. What evidence will be offered that *generalizability* is perhaps applicable to other organisations and is connected to academic theories?

The purpose of the definitions was to provide a basis for developing a set of assumptions that defined each model. The process that defines each model is considered iterative, a definition based on the interview data is ventured and its assumptions are made explicit (Berniker, 1991). The structure, anchored by extreme conflicting models, creates a framework of understanding within the research that makes sense of the findings.

It must be stressed that the structures represent a framework for thought and that the research goal was to make the content explicit. Consider the model definitions that emerged from the process.

The *sender/receiver HE experience model* places the university service experience at the *centre* of the process, with the sender on one side and the receiver on the other, and considers the phenomena, process and outcomes.

The *university experience framework model* places the core service of a *quality education* at the centre, with supplementary support services to which people, processes, physical evidence and outcomes are structured.

The *university gap model* examines the university's perception of the required student experience and the *gaps that exist* through to the student's expected service experience. The scripts determined the models and, conceptually, each of these scripts is different.

Upon review of these models, there is a decided contextual difference between commercial models that drive revenues, profits, customer retention and CLV, than the needs and wants of a not-for-profit CEM system, as in a university.

### **Step 3—Distinct models**

The meaning of each model is exposed by showing the assumptions underpinning each model. In this qualitative mythology, the researcher maintained relative freedom in developing the taxonomy from the interview data (Rubin & Babbie, 2005).

The models became the objects of further conceptual enquiry and, in seeking assumptions; the researcher had no limitation to the volume of anecdotal data that were allowed.

As stated, the dialectic process is creative and iterative; the assumption of each model is that they are *tested against each other* to reveal any counter assumptions. In turn, these force the clarification of the original assumptions and make logical the differences between models.

### **Step 4 – Identify and define antithesis**

In this step, the process forces each model into *extreme interpretations*; thus exposing differences. Conflicting models suggest that effective CEM in not-for-profit organisations is dependent upon the co-creation and partnership of the sender and the receiver.

In the process, the models try to grasp the *essential truths* exposed and therefore clarify the model's development through the dialectic enquiry process, which can better serve as a basis for discussion on broad concepts as phenomena, processes and outcomes.

In the findings section, the captured truth and the contradictions are exposed; these are considered in the development also of the conceptual models (Abbott, 2002).

### **Considering Authenticity**

Dialectical enquiry has two schools of thought—the philosophical and empirical—and the two are involved in a dialectical conflict over the application of dialectical enquiry to strategic planning. (Grinnell & Unrau, 2011)

The philosophical school states that dialectical enquiry is a suitable method for strategic planning and policy, and recommends field studies as an appropriate research setting. The supporters of the empirical school question the value of dialectic enquiry and contend that control departure experimentation is the proper research setting.

Dialectic enquiry involves a decision-making process that utilises a confrontational thesis (plan) and antithesis (counter-plan) in a structured debate, and a synthesis (integrated plan) of the opposing views (Schwenk, 1990). The researcher considered this approach appropriate in addressing the research question of this thesis and in practice worked well.

The proponents of the philosophical school support their claims regarding the advantages of the dialectic enquiry approach in strategic decision making with a number of uncontrolled field studies dealing with a variety of real-world problems in diversified organisational settings (see Cosier, 1981; Emshoff & Finnel, 1978; Yin, 1994).

These authors suggest that the application and use of dialectical enquiry *extends* the boundaries of research and is an affective problem-solving tool that explores real-world environments and unlocks the phenomenon within. (Berniker, 1991)

In this thesis, creditability has been captured by the methods used in the collection of information from the field.

This includes the storage of electronic data (interview recordings and the collection of communication materials), IT data-driven node analysis (recorded information and notes into patterns and themes), rigorous protocol and analysis and consistency in the lines of enquiry across the six case studies was used.

### **Building Reliability**

Philosophical theories of dialectical interaction frequently, albeit often implicitly, invoke *rapprochement*. Sussman and Herden, (1982) identify that a basic purpose of dialectical interaction is the *construction of consensus*, that is, the collective agreement within a case study or a range of case studies on a range of often opposed issues that emerge from dialogue and other forms of communication. *Rapprochement* is a form of consensus that involves agreement regarding relevant premises but is not the main purpose.

For this research, the interviewees understood the topic and the line of enquiry, which defined the objectives of the study based on their knowledge, and intensive review of literature covering service, services, CRM and CEM.

The researcher encouraged the interviewees to speak openly and honestly about their CEM service experiences in the real world, and to express what they see as problems and opportunities in the CEM system, ideas for improvement, key elements needed, and the CEM elements of satisfaction in a CEM system. (Backman, 1988)

Johnson and Duberley (2000) developed theories of dialectical interaction, harkening back to the Greek Sophists, on which each participant aims to persuade the others to adopt his viewpoint. In this research, the recording of interviews exposing different views, opinions, attitudes, behaviour and patterns created distinctive viewpoints within each case study and across the six case studies.

Rational persuasion or idea generation requires convergence upon mutually acceptable premises; that is, consensus on a range of emergent issues. Many philosophers, including Goldman (1994), argue that a basic purpose of dialectical interaction is convergence to the truth.

Achieving this goal entails achieving consensus: if two interviewees disagree about a proposition, one of them must either endorse a falsehood or else withhold assent from a truth. Thus, convergence to the truth entrains *rapprochement*.

### **Question of Validity**

The process called for the assumptions, counter assumptions and contradictions to become explicit, and it was important to perform *reality checks* on the findings. Argyis and Schön (1978) have argued that researchers should test valid information. Weick (1989) sets out criteria for the validation of theories that are appropriate in this case—the foremost being “plausibility.”

This is considered important in the object of enquiry in sense-making enactments. After each interview, the researcher summarised the true meaning of what was said by the interviewee and confirmation was sought and agreed upon. (Cosier, 1981)

It was asserted by the interviewees that the different anecdotes, stories and themes were expressed truthfully and were consistent with the understanding and knowledge of the interviewee.

Dialectical enquiry in this research was not used as a measurement tool; internal validity was used to *gain meaning and the experiences of individuals*, which meets the criteria suggested by Winter (2000) and Yin (2004).

The emerging conceptual models of CEM were an interesting and believable representation of the data, which had been handled electronically, and datasets using nodes in NVivo 8, which ensured that the data was not corrupted or interpreted incorrectly.

The more significant test is external validity. Winter (2000) argues that external validity is not important in qualitative research; however, Yin (2004) disagrees and defines the characterisation of qualitative research using types of models that can be considered generalizable across many organisations. The external validity is tested by the generalizability of the emerging models; a function of personalities, cultures, structures or management styles (Lord & Kernan, 1987).

### **Can it be Generalizable?**

Despite the many positive aspects of qualitative research, studies continue to be criticised for their lack of objectivity and generalizability. “Generalizability” is defined as the degree to which the findings can be “generalised” from the study sample to the entire population. In this research study, while a qualitative study is not generalizable in the traditional sense of the word; the conceptual models have other redeeming features that make them valuable in the not for profit and HE community. Partial generalisations may be possible in similar populations. According to Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1980), the knowledge generated by superior qualitative research is *significant in its own right*.

The author argues that, the aggregation of multiple studies allows theory building through *tentative hypotheses* culled from findings, the generalisations produced is no less legitimate when they are related to a single finding. The goal of this study was to focus on CEM in the commercial world and assess contextual differences that may exist for not-for-profit organisations.

In a situation, small qualitative studies, as used in this thesis, can provide a more personal understanding of the phenomenon, and the results may contribute valuable knowledge to the community. Yin (1994) is concerned with rigour in non-experimental research and, while he concludes that studies do not require a minimum number of cases, or randomly selected cases, he cautions researchers to work with the situation that presents itself in each case in structuring the best possible study that can be adequately described in the research report.

Based on work by Yin (1994) and Stake (1980), *naturalistic generalisation* ensues more from multiple case studies (even using a dialectic enquiry that constructs different themes and patterns) to one that is similar, than from a single study to a population. It is essential that the research report was descriptive and allows readers to recognise essential similarities to cases of interest, and they establish the basis for naturalistic generalisation.

## **Ethics**

Case study research in education is embedded in the social world of the university within which it takes place.

As education is a social action, data gathering and analysis within case study research will effect the lives of others in those institutions, including pupils, students and colleagues.

The University of Southampton produces guidelines for research involving human participants, and everyone organising research is required to complete an ethical protocol. Case study research involving interviews is focused on the real world of the university.

The open, fluid nature of the research process makes it important that the researcher produces a protocol that will apply to any situation that may arise. The object of the protocol is to ensure individual rights are not infringed and to promote fairness in the interpretation of data, which was the case in this primary research.

## **Selecting cases**

Selection of cases is a primary aspect of building theory from case studies. As in hypotheses-testing research, the understanding of the population is crucial, as it is the population that defines the set of identities for which the research sample is to be drawn. The selection of six specific universities allowed the researcher to control environmental variation and allowed the clarification of varying types of university environments.

As Yin (2004) explains, given the limited number of cases that can be studied, it makes sense to choose cases that are different in kind in which the process of interest is transparently observable. In this research selecting cases, the activity is neither theory- nor hypotheses-based, and it considers a specific population.

The reasons for this are to focus efforts on the theoretical useful cases; that is, those that *replicates* or extends the theory by filling in conceptual categories.

In this particular piece of research, a collection of universities was chosen that was *representative of the nucleus* of English universities: pre-1992 and post-1992 with a subset of Russell Group-defined universities. Two examples of each university kind of are identified. Part of the sample process was access to a mixture of frontline service staff and the student population, both under- and post-graduates, male and female.

## **Crafting instruments and protocol**

Theory-building research embraces multiple data collection methods. While the interviews, observations and archival sources are used by the inductive researcher, they are not confined to these choices. Acar and Druckenmiller, (2011) explain that some researchers use observations for parts of the study, which they combine through triangulation to build and drive a substantially stronger construct and hypotheses using *relevant materials* which was the case for this study.

Yin (2004) discusses the interviewer and their role and personal interaction with the informant, while note-taking and recording provides a complete view of the real world in the actual study environment, other forms of communication (print, visual, audio) add value.

## **Applicability of the approach to the research question**

The theory-building process relies on past literature and observations to create insights for the theorist to incrementally build a more powerful set of theories. Nevertheless, there are times when there is little known about a particular phenomenon.

Current perspectives on CEM in not for profit *are limited because there is little empirical substantiation in a not-for-profit settings*, or there may be a conflict with commercial CEM common sense. Theory building from case study research is considered appropriate; building from case studies does not rely on previous literature or prior empirical evidence, but on what *happens in the real world under study*.

### **Issues of Evaluation**

There are no set accepted sets of guidelines for the assessment of this kind of case study/dialectic research. Moreover, several criteria seemed appropriate. The assessment must be in tune with the concepts, framework or proposition that emerges from the process of good theory. Yin (2004) suggests that excellent theories are parsimonious, testable and coherent. Thus, a strong theory-building study yields a good theory that emerges from the data.

The conclusion that can be drawn is that, case study research works if the process is rigorous and if the method and evidence are grounded in what was said and recorded, which is added to other forms of evidence as identified. For this thesis, some eight tests were applied.

As dialectical inquiry forces the researcher to use the four-step method and thus aggressive analysis, the resultant evaluation is a set of grounded patterns, themes and conceptual models.

### **Strengths of theory building from cases**

Millett (2000) defined one strength of theory building from cases as the likelihood of generating “novel theory.” The creative insight of novel theory arises from the contradictions and paradoxical evidence that refrain and are seen as perception. Building theory from case studies centres on this juxtaposition; that is, it attempts to reconcile evidence across cases, types of data and differences between cases and literature. This constant juxtaposition of conflicts in realities of thinking and processes has the potential to generate theory with less bias is vital in dialectic analysis.

A second strength is the emergent theory is testable with constructs that can be measured, and the hypotheses can be proven to be false. A third strength is that the resultant theory is to be empirically well grounded.

The likelihood of “valid theory” is how rigorous the theory-building process was, whether it was tied with the evidence and, therefore, whether it is consistent with empirical observation. In well-executed theory-building research as in this case, researchers *answer to the data* from the beginning of the research process; this closeness provides an intimate sense of understanding and due diligence according to Mintzberg (1983).

### **Weaknesses of theory building from cases**

Creswell (2003), Yin (2004), and Gersick (1989) considered the downsides of case study research and tried to develop models of theory. For example, the intensive use of empirical evidence can yield complex theory.

Good theory is supported by a volume of rich data, and there is a temptation to build theory, which tries to capture everything.

Another weakness is that building theory from cases may result in narrow idiosyncratic theory. A further weakness of theory building is a bottoms-up approach: that the specifics of the data drive the generalisation behind the theory.

The third risk is that the theory describes an idiosyncratic phenomenon, or that the theorist is unable to raise the level of generality of the theory, according to Yin (2004).

The appropriateness of conducting case study research is to consider theory and its development through incremental empirical testing of an extension (Creswell, 2003; Dybicz, 2010a).

In summary, building theory from case study research is most appropriate on a topic that will provide freshness and a new perspective. The assessment of whether to use case study research is to consider the concepts, framework or propositions that will emerge from the process as good theory.

Part of this decision-making will come down to the assessment of theory-building research as the strength of the methods and the evidence grounding the theory. Strong theory-building research should result in new insights and not confirm what is already known, which is the case in this thesis research.

### **Summary of Dialectic Inquiry used**

Dialectical research, enquiry or investigation is a form of qualitative research that utilises the dialectic method; that is, aiming to discover the “truth” through examining and interrogating competing ideas, perspectives or arguments. The data sets are created via observation using case studies (Evered & Lewis, 1981).

#### **Why it was used?**

The research question was to examine the applicability of our understanding of CEM in the commercial setting to the UK HE sector. In particular, to consider how current CEM models may need to be modified or extended to incorporate characteristics of not-for-profit organisations as a university.

Moreover, the views and opinions of the users of a university CEM—that is, the staff and students—should be considered. Dialectic enquiry was seen as a way of *finding the truth* of existing attitudes and opinions, the phenomena, the processes and outcomes using literature and empirical research, which led to a collection of data.

#### **What was done?**

In the first instance, the researcher formulated a theory that would match the research question, and considered the processes involved; this was applied to a case study research approach and defined three areas of activity: (a) preliminary, (b) fieldwork and analysis, and (c) conclusion.

In stage one; a short telephone interview was conducted with staff at the six universities chosen for the study in order to establish a collection of staff and students to be interviewed as well as the time, interviewee profiles and location.

The lines of enquiry were tested at another university not included in the study, which provided insights to the researcher on the process and logistical issues in conducting the research and collecting materials in the field.

In stage two, the researcher entered the field and conducted six case studies at six different universities covering service staff and students, with a sample of sixty people.

NVivo eight and note taking was used to record what was said, as well as the collection of communication materials at each university.

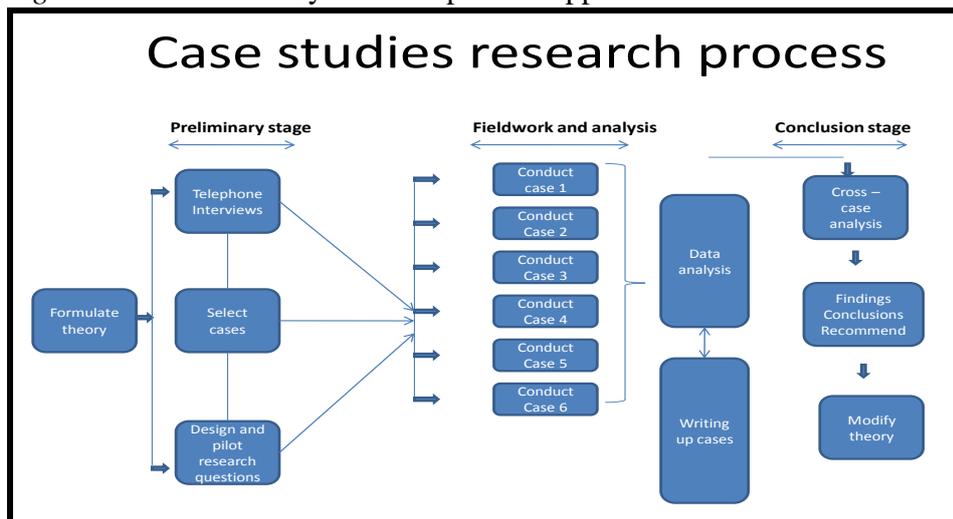
This led to stage three of the process, which involved data analysis, adding information and writing up the cases. With the database established, a rigorous process of cross case analysis (dialectical critique) was completed in order to define patterns and themes, which led to findings and conclusions.

*Dialectic critique* considers the assessment of the *nature of logic*; that is, logic of reasoning, determination of the *truth*, assertions of the *theory* (thesis) and its *denial* (antithesis) and the *synthesis* of the two to form a new theory.

Having completed this, the researcher was able to examine the research question regarding the applicability of our understanding of CEM in commercial setting to the UK HE sector; in particular, how current CEM models may need to be modified or extended to incorporate the characteristics of a not-for-profit organisation as a university.

This leads to the process of exposing *new patterns and themes* from the case study research and the development of contextual models that respond to the research question.

Figure 1. The case study research process applied



### How has it contributed to the research question?

The dialectic enquiry and data analysis have identified the need to modify the existing models of *for profit* CEM. Primary evidence shows that are differences in the objectives and outcomes between commercial and not-for-profit CEMs. The contribution is a set of conceptual models that transform the structure and framework of CEM to better match's not-for-profit organisations, as universities, and that consider staff and student have needs and wants.

Recognition of each of the models was found in the collected data, and the actors, as experts, defined the needs and wants of the CEM University service system.

## Some major Dialectic considerations – user position

### Analyzing within case data

Most research is defined by analysing the data. It is at heart of building theory from case studies, but it is also considered difficult and the least codified part of the process (Horkheimer, 1982). One key step is “within-case” analysis. The importance of within-case analysis is driven by one of the inherent problems of case study research: a considerable amount of data.

As Creswell (2003) states, there is a net present danger of patterns and themes *not* merging. These run-ups are often pure descriptions. Nevertheless, according to Yin (2004), they are central to the generation of insider knowledge.

During analysis, the researcher has broken the data up into *logical frameworks of information* based on the CEM concepts of (a) phenomena, (b) processes, and (c) objectives.

Subheadings were then used, as sender of CEM and receiver of CEM; and people, training, IT and management (under the processes heading). Therefore, the structure of the case study data was logical and considered within-data, and this could be correlated across cases and as a collective of the six cases in the study.

### Searching for cross case patterns

Combined within case study analysis is the cross case search for *patterns*. The tactics here are driven by the need to process *quality information*.

The key to good cross case comparison is counteracting these limited tendencies and examining the data in divergent ways. One tactic used was to examine dimensions and search for within-group similarities coupled with inter-group differences, and a second tactic used was to select pairs of cases and enlist the similarities and differences between each pair. The results of these false comparisons can be categories and new concepts that the investigator may not have been aware of, and that emerge through the *paired comparison* process that leaves the researcher to understand the insight.

A further strategy used was to divide the data-by-data source into logical groups with clusters; this tactic exploits the meaning inside, possibly from different types of data collection. When packed, they form one data source that is corroborated by the evidence from another; the finding is much stronger and better grounded.

### Shaping hypothesis

From the site analysis and cross case tactics, tentative themes, concepts and relationships between variables started to emerge. The next step was to systematically compare the emergent themes with the evidence from each case in order to assess how well it fits with the case data.

Husserl (1982) outlines the shaping of hypotheses by the sharpening of constructs using a *two-part process of refining* the definition of the construct and also of *building* evidence, which measures the construct in each case. This can lead to definitions and measures for several constructs as disengagement and bargaining room. There is no technique in case study analysis as factor analysis that enables the collapse of multiple indicators into a single construct's measure.

The reason for taking this approach in the thesis was to *expose the indicators* that may vary across cases, and qualitative evidence is difficult to collapse (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Creswell, 2003).

## Reaching closure

Two issues are important in reaching closure: when to stop adding cases and when to stop iterating between theory and data.

In the first element, researchers should stop adding cases when theoretical saturation is reached; that is, the point at which incremental learning is minimal and the cause through the observation of phenomena is consistently the same (Creswell, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In the second closure issue, the key idea to stop iterating between theory and data is when one gains *saturation*.

That is, the duration process stops when incremental improvement to the theory is *minimal* (Mintzberg & Waters, 1982). Hence, closure is a decision made when one reaches saturation and replication does not provide any further evidence of clear patterns from the case studies. After six cases, the data analysis was found to be repetitive.

## Summary

Theory developed from case study research has important strengths, as novelty, testability and empirical validity, which arise from the intimate linkage with first-hand evidence. Given the strength of the case study building approach as well as the evidence and prior literature, it is a research technique that is well suited to gaining insights and understanding into people's attitudes and opinions that cannot be achieved through quantitative data. Further, several guidelines now exist for assessing the quality of theory building from case studies as the dialectic four-point framework.

Strong studies are those that present frame-breaking theories that meet the tests of good theory-conceptual development (parsimony, testability and logical coherence) and are grounded in convincing evidence. Most empirical studies lead from theory to data; however, the collection of knowledge involves a continual process between theory and data.

The use of case studies and a dialectical approach has responded to the research question by providing a collection of data that have been analysed and thoroughly tested. This has formed a new opinion on the contextual differences that exist between commercial CEM and CEM in a not-for-profit organisation as a university. The three not for profit conceptual models can be seen in Appendix A.

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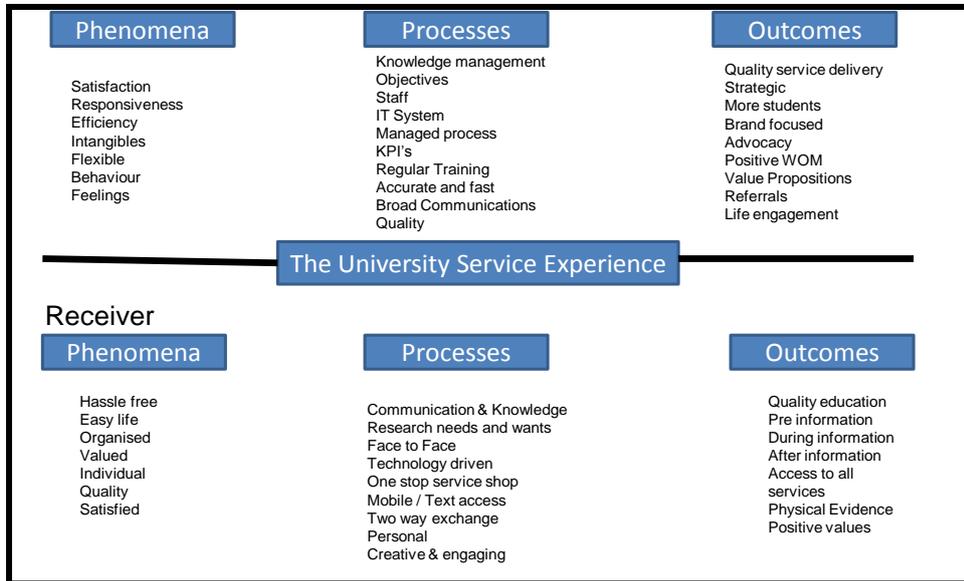
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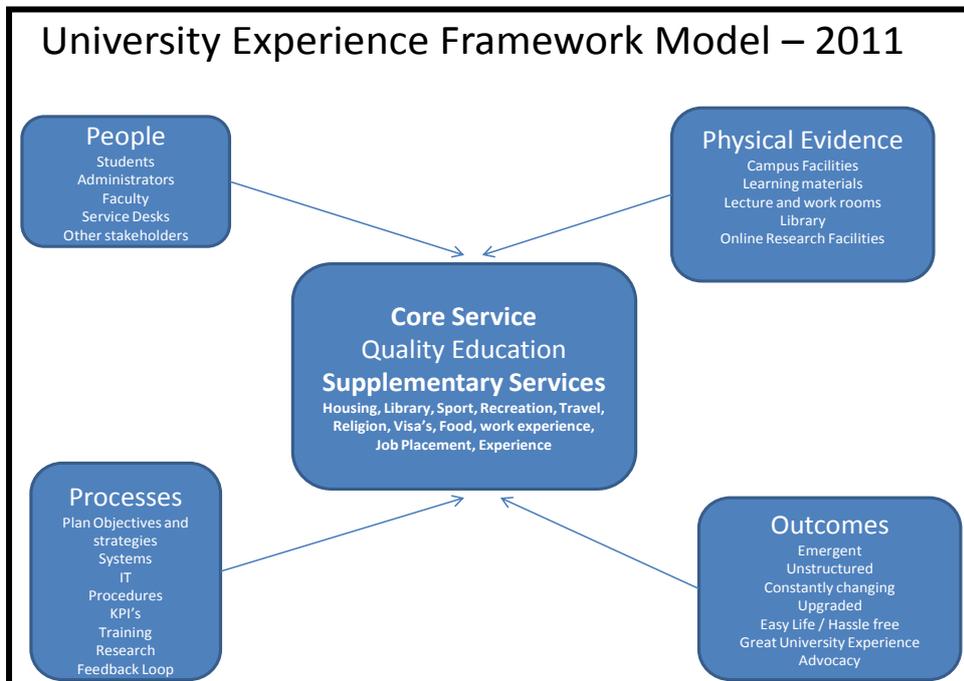
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### Appendix A: Conceptual Models from the primary research

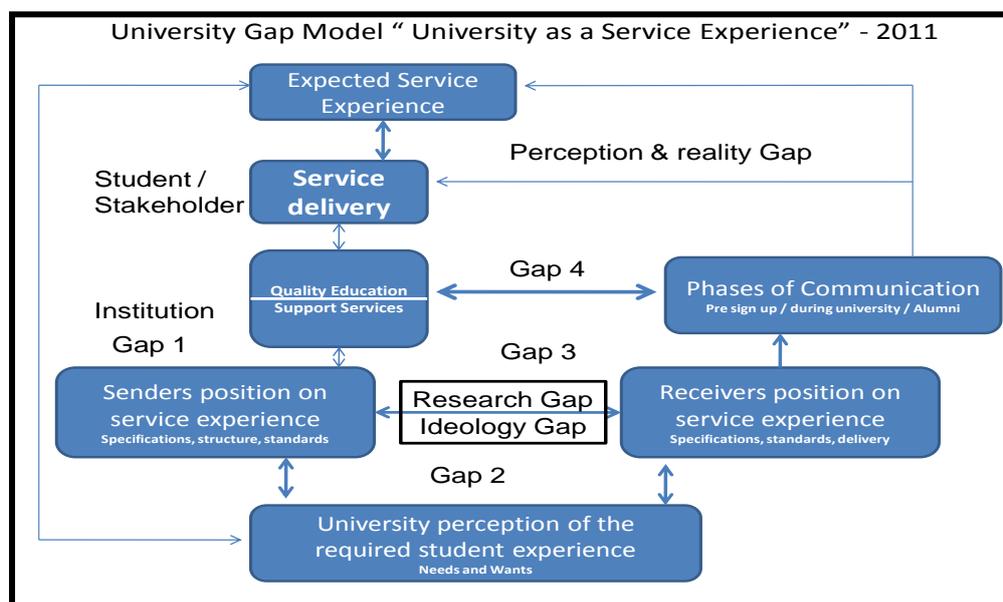
Model 1: Sender/Receiver HE Experience Model 2011



Model 2: University Experience Framework Model: 2011



Model 3: The University Gap Model ‘University as a service experience’ 2011



#### Author Note

James Seligman is the Director of the MSc in Marketing Management and a Principal Fellow at the Management School at the University of Southampton. As a faculty member and in the marketing subject group his PhD was on the study of customer experience management in online communities as a follow on from his Masters which was on customer relationship management. He has also degrees in Education, Psychology, and Business Economics and is a master NLP practitioner. The subject group developed the New DNA of Marketing which is a new dynamic form of approaching the theory and application of marketing based on research into industry needs and wants of marketing students for employment. The research study found the four or seven Ps of marketing was out of date and no longer worked in reality in many organizations, the New Marketing DNA addresses these gaps which are now embedded in the authors Masters curriculum for students at Southampton University. Prior to going into higher education he worked in industry; working his way up the corporate ladder from a brand manager to worldwide President, CEO, SVP international operations. He has worked for Coca-Cola, Pepsi, Beecham, Speedo, Regatta, Commonwealth Games, and Timberland in senior executive capacities globally where the understanding of the customer and driving awareness, value propositions was a way of life and drove success. As an Australian, he has worked in most continents and countries and uses his wealth of experience through extending his knowledge through teaching, writing and consulting to industry and the public sector.

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### Article Citation

Seligman, J. (2013). Dialectical inquiry – does it deliver? A user based research experience. *The Qualitative Report*, 18(78), 1-23. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/seligman78.pdf>

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