



# SNIPPET

*Cutting-edge Applied Research*

NUS SOCIAL SERVICE RESEARCH CENTRE



## Editor's Note

by Dr Rosaleen Ow

Issue 3 of the Snippet in 2020 is here!

This issue focuses on methodology in practice research based on the studies carried out in two agencies. First, the article by Goh Wai Fu on the coaching and training of ex-offenders in a job-support scheme will provide insights into the potential and challenges of such a coaching and training programme. In addition, it will provide an idea of how the QIT (Quality Implementation Tool) was adapted and used in the study design and evaluation.

The second article by Lim Wei Loong clearly explains a form of research methodology that many are familiar with. Mixed method research is now widely used but perhaps the nuances among the different approaches in mixed methods had not been fully understood. This article is for researchers and practitioners who want to know more about the what, why and how mixed methods can be used in different contexts and for different purposes.

We hope these two articles will prove useful in learning across agencies and in improving service provision to many other groups of service users in addition to those mentioned in these articles.

Keep well and stay healthy!

## IN THIS ISSUE

### EDITOR'S NOTE

### IMPLEMENTATION STUDY FOR A PILOT TRAINING- COACHING JOB SUPPORT PROGRAMME FOR EX- OFFENDERS

### MIXED METHODS RESEARCH: AN INTRODUCTION

### UPCOMING SSR EVENTS

# Implementation study for a pilot training-coaching job support programme for ex-offenders

by Goh Wai Fu, Social Worker, Blended Concept Pte Ltd

## 1. Background

Each year, approximately 11,000 inmates are released from penal and drug conviction in Singapore (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2018). Employment assistance in Singapore typically consists of pre-release vocational skills training as well as job coaching and placement. In 2017, the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprise (SCORE) helped approximately 20 percent of inmates to secure employment prior to their release.

Despite the effort, ex-offenders continue to face difficulties retaining employment. As of 2017, job retention at the 3-months mark was 81 percent before dropping to 63 percent by the 6-months mark (Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises, 2017). While there are national initiatives to support low-wage workers to upskill in Singapore, many ex-offenders continue to face barriers when accessing these resources. Employment support services to help ex-offenders navigate employment challenges and retain jobs remain scarce.

Given the lack of in-job programmes supporting ex-offenders, we designed and implemented a training-coaching job support programme to help ex-offenders overcome workplace challenges as well as to foster stronger attachment to employment. The programme is currently implemented to ex-offenders who are hired under the halfway house as full-time employees.

## 2. Intervention Implementation

The training-coaching job support programme aims to complement existing job placement initiatives. Aside from building ex-offenders' workplace self-efficacy, it also provides a platform for ex-offenders to discuss solutions to workplace challenges, build meaningful social ties and reinforce conventional job goals.

The programme is currently piloted with 13 ex-offenders with the collaboration of The Helping Hands, a half-way house. As illustrated in Figure 1, this is an eight-month programme consisting four employability skills packages (modules), including developing personal effectiveness, communication, conflict management and problem-solving skills. Lessons are conducted once a week after working hours.

At the point of this evaluation, participants have completed two out of the four modules. As part of the halfway house programme, residents who have completed their mandatory supervision and choose to work with the halfway house are hired as permanent employees. Participants' scope of work includes customers relationships management, furniture movers, carpentry, furniture sales, security, and operations.

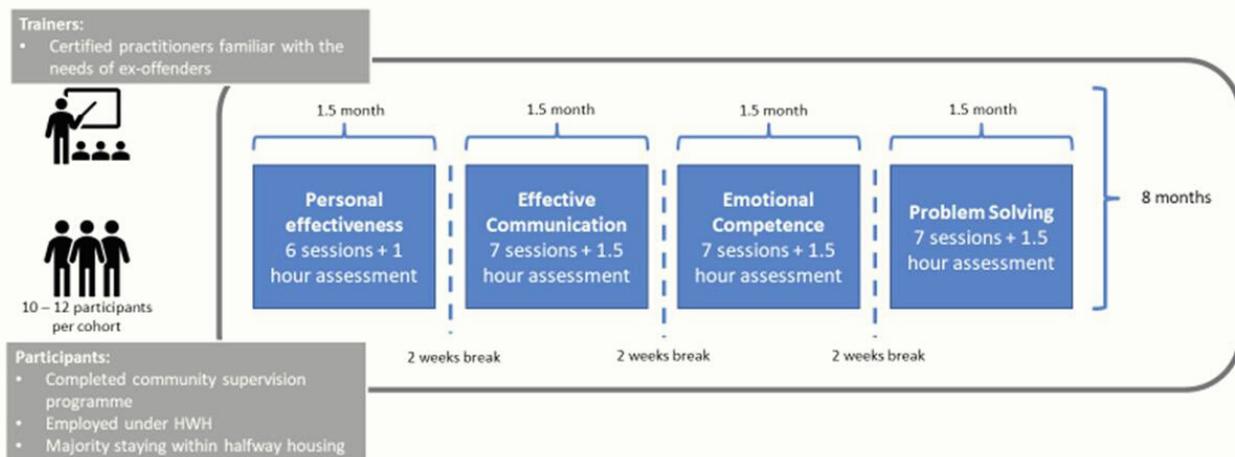


Figure 1: Structure of job-support programme

New batches of participants are recruited, and the commencement of new groups are expected once every four months. Screening for suitability is conducted by the Operations Manager of the halfway house. Criteria for participation includes having completed the mandatory supervision that ranges between six to twelve months from their point of placement to the halfway house.

Figure 2 shows the process of the job-support programme, where participants alternate between classroom-based training and group-based coaching every week. The training focuses on equipping learners with employability knowledge and skills. Participants are divided into smaller groups of six to seven learners for the group-based coaching, where they share and discuss workplace challenges and explore solutions to overcome the challenges to build their workplace self-efficacy. An assessment is conducted at the end of each module.

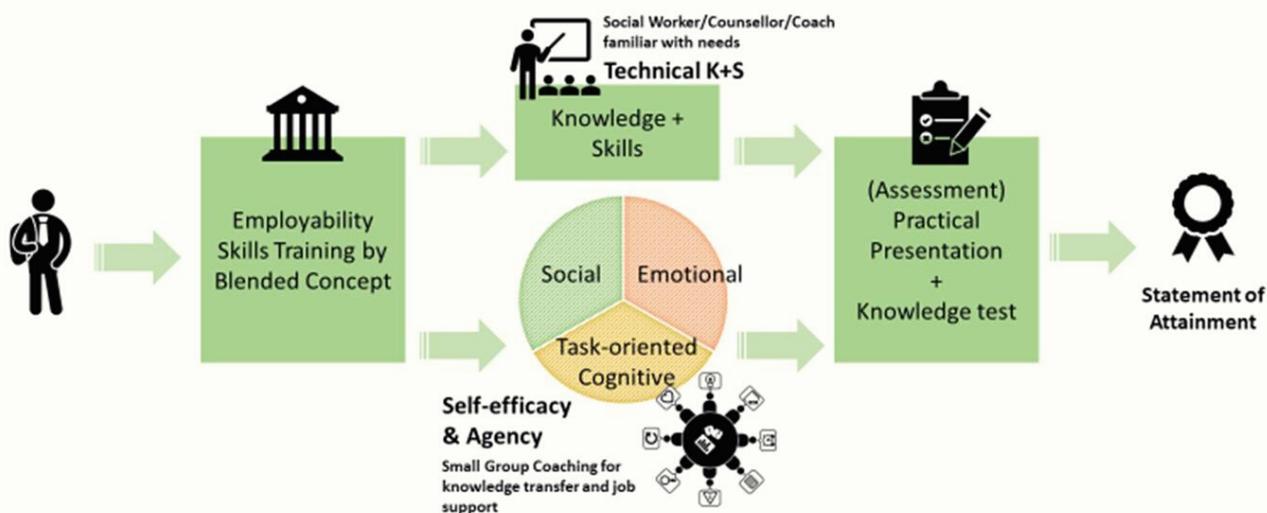


Figure 2: Job-support programme design

### 3. Research

As the programme is the first of its kind in Singapore, the aim of the research is to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation of the training-coaching job support programme. The objectives of the research are:

- To evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation in terms of its quality, the dosage of the program and participants' motivation and engagement.
- To uncover factors influencing the effectiveness of, or participation in, job-support programmes amongst ex-offenders in the community

We identified the Quality Implementation Tool (QIT), proposed by Meyer and colleagues, as a framework to conceptualise the implementation study (Meyers, et al., 2012). The QIT was proposed as a tool to guide quality implementation of innovations. We chose the QIT as it excluded pre-implementation processes (i.e. adoption and selection processes) and identified 6 critical steps for quality implementation, one of which included evaluating the effectiveness of implementations, which was the focus of this study. Using the QIT, we focused on 3 out of the 8 action steps that had been identified to be important for measurement when evaluating the implementation process. This includes the following areas of quality implementation:

- Quality of delivery: What are the factors that have facilitated or impeded the delivery?
- Dosage: Is the dosage adequate in supporting participants in their work? Is the dosage appropriate based on the competing life demands that ex-offenders experience?
- Participant motivation and engagement: To what extent are participants engaged in the training-coaching? What are the factors impacting participation in community-based programmes?

### 4. Methodology

We adopted an exploratory qualitative research methodology. We conducted face-to-face semi-structured interviews with participants to explore their experiences of the programme, as well as to uncover factors influencing the effectiveness of programme implementation. We interviewed 12 out of the 13 male programme participants who consented to taking part in our study. One participant could not attend our interview. Slightly more than half of our interviewees were aged 50 and below (58%) and the remaining were aged 51 years and above (42%). One quarter (25%) of the participants have been in the community for 1 to 3 years. The remaining participants have at least 3 years or more (75%) years in the community.

The interviews were conducted by trained external interviewers to mitigate social desirability bias that could occur because our researchers were also involved in the programme development and training. Despite that, this study presents some limitations. As this is an interim evaluation where participants had only completed two out of the four modules, some implementation implications may not be reflected at the point of this study. The findings are conclusive only for this pilot programme because of the small sample size. Also, as participants of the study are employees working within a rehabilitative environment of a halfway house, this may not represent ex-offenders who are employed within the general market.

## **5. Key findings and implications**

### **5.1 Quality of Implementation: Training**

*Content that focuses on building social and emotional self-efficacy, rather than technical skills deemed useful*

Participants found content to improve self-regulatory skills and to manage social relationships the most helpful to their work. Participants found these content relevant to their challenges, such as managing negative emotions associated with stigma, stress from work, handling workplace conflicts or managing unmotivated team members within the workplace.

Rather than lacking the technical skills required of jobs, building soft skills to improve social and emotional self-efficacy may be key to supporting ex-offenders in sustaining and performing at the workplace.

*Need for experiential activities involving realistic workplace scenarios to support skills transfer*

Even though most participants found the skills useful, some were unsure if they could apply the skills when challenges arise. Ensuring activities reflect workplace realities and selecting trainers with an understanding of the challenges and realities of low-wage work may foster meaningful discussion and encourage more proactive application of skills to workplace realities.

### **5.2 Quality of Implementation: Coaching**

*Small group coaching facilitated building of trust and safety amongst participants, as compared to the training sessions*

Trust and safety in small group coaching provide an environment that facilitates sharing. However, familiarity was raised as a dilemma by one participant. Since some of them were colleagues, familiarity could either facilitate relationship-building or become a barrier to in-depth sharing due to workplace politics.

These findings seem to validate the literature which suggests that the effects of incarcerations, experiences of betrayal and subcultural norms often lead to high level of distrust (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, 2001). Overcoming these barriers by ensuring safety and building trust in the programme was paramount for its effectiveness. It was also noted that the effects of incarcerations, as well as sub-cultural norms from ex-offenders' past experiences, were brought into the workplace with some participants sharing that there lacked a general sense of trust amongst co-workers due to the "background" and "culture" of "people like us" (ex-offenders).

#### *Vicarious learning helps prepare participants for workplace challenges*

Hearing about the experiences of co-workers helped normalised and prevented personalisation of their problems that often led to higher levels of distress. The importance of learning from the experiences of co-workers may reflect the effects of poor employment history. Prolonged period of casual work or inconsistent employment may have prevented ex-offenders from gaining experiences needed to manage expectations and challenges associated with long-term stable employment. This could have made cross-learning especially helpful as participants pre-empt themselves for possible challenges by hearing from other group members and identify solutions to cope with these issues.

#### *Group-based coaching helped developed perspective-taking among participants*

A few participants shared that they were able to consider the interests of the organisation and the perspectives of the customer when handling customer-related conflict. This finding was consistent with the literature on the strengths of group-based coaching. As compared to dyadic coaching, group coaching allowed for the development of systemic-level thinking (Brown & Grant, 2010; Senge, 2006). In the context of the programme, group-based coaching helped participants put themselves in the perspectives of others as well as the organisation when making sense of their challenges.

### **5.3 Quality of Implementation: Trainer-specific factors**

#### *Showing empathy for participants' life constraints and challenges outside the programme improved trust in trainers' abilities to support them*

Trainers' ability to exercise flexibility such as allowing them to leave earlier to attend to family matters or conducting make-up sessions allowed them to connect better with the participants as well as increased their trust in the trainers' abilities to support them.

### **5.4 Dosage**

#### *Programme, lasting eight months, deemed too long due to participants' competing life demands*

Participants shared that the need to juggle between work, family, and caregiving, impacted their motivation for the programme. In addition, participants indicated that they were also not willing to commit to more than once a week session for the same reason.

As the majority of ex-offenders are often at a disadvantaged position due to multiple rehabilitation challenges aside from a lack of financial stability, having to juggle these challenges pose some challenges to programme design. We assessed the need to reduce programme duration without increasing the frequency, while not compromising on the quality of the content.

*Session duration, lasting three hours was perceived too long due to participants' work fatigue*

Participants were mostly employed in labour-intensive work and were exhausted when they attended the programme. Work fatigue affected both concentration and motivation to continue their attendance. Shorter duration was suggested to help participants adapt to learning as most of them have not engaged in any form of classroom-based learning since their formal education years. Aligned with cognitive psychology, shorter duration can make learning more effective. Content broken into intervals of 15 to 20 minutes can help increase satisfaction and knowledge retention (Cooper & Richards, 2017). The ability of the trainers to include humour was raised by a few participants to be an important way to keep members engaged.

## **5.5 Motivation: Factors affecting motivation to learn and commit to the programme**

Employers' endorsement of the programme can increase the programme's credibility amongst workers (Hamilton & Scrivener, 2012). In the context of this programme, the halfway house, as an employer, supported the programme through needs analysis and making programme participation compulsory for selected employees. This resulted in mixed sentiments amongst participants. Some participants felt pressured and helpless about having to attend the programme, another group saw selection for the programme as a positive indicator of job progression while a few shared that this was a good opportunity for personal development, which would not have happened if left on their own accord.

Despite it being a compulsory programme and participants had mixed views on this, we found other factors that affected their motivation to learn and stay committed to the programme.

*Dissemination of detailed programme information is key to preparing participants mentally, hence, enhancing their motivation for programme*

A factor influencing participants' motivation was the clarity of programme information prior to enrolment. Participants mentioned that they were not sure what they could achieve from such a programme prior to its commencement. The lack of information, such as the total number of modules that they must attend, objectives of each modules and the total length of the programme duration, resulted in apprehension about the programme. Providing clarity can help participants identify personal goals for their participation in the programme. Also, it can help prepare them mentally and to adapt their lives to accommodate the programme.

### *Internal motivation helped increased commitment to the programme*

Personal development, improving work advancement opportunities, or proving to oneself to be able to complete the course, were the main reasons cited as internal motivation factors. These factors impacted their readiness to learn and their commitment to the programme. This finding suggests the importance of pre-programme engagement to work on participants' motivation, and to help them identify personal reasons and goals for the programme.

### *Finding relevance and usefulness of content in addressing workplace challenges increased motivation to complete the programme*

Generally, the participants were more ready to engage and learn when the content was identified to be relevant to their own goals. As described by Taylor and Hossam (2013), learners' desire to know begin when they realise that their existing knowledge is incomplete, resulting in learner dissonance. Conversely, one of our participants mentioned a decrease in motivation as he felt that the content was not applicable to the context of his work as a mover. Aside from working with the organisation to tailor and contextualise content, having trainers with an understanding of participants' work challenges is important to help make content relevant and useful for participants.

### *Tangible incentives coupled with perceived progression in the programme led to increased motivation to complete the programme*

As part of the programme, participants received overtime pay and some were able to receive government incentives from the Workfare Training Support (WTS) scheme. [1] While tangible incentives were rarely cited as the main reason for programme participation, it was highlighted as a factor underlying commitment to complete the programme in all the participants' responses. This motivation was further strengthened when participants saw their own progress in the programme overtime.

As most of the ex-offenders are engaged in low wage work, financial remuneration for completion of the programme can serve as an incentive to support their life goals. Programmes targeting newly released ex-offenders, or those seeking employment or transiting between employment may especially benefit from the tangible support to offset cost of programme participation or to meet their daily needs. Designing the programme in modular packages and pegging incentives to the completion of each package can also help sustain motivation as participants see themselves advancing through the programme.

### *Social bonds and ties among participants encouraged participation and sustained motivation*

Participants shared that the programme provided a platform for them to socialise with their colleagues in a way that they would not have otherwise. Coaching over meals helped strengthen social ties which motivated participants to attend the programme. Incorporating opportunities for participants to interact outside of the formal programme setting such as pre-session dinner or mini celebrations throughout the programme may strengthen social bonds and increase participants' commitment to the programme.

[1] As part of the national framework to support low-wage workers, participants who are above 35 years of age and are earning less than \$2000 are eligible for post-training incentives, including \$200 for every 2 modules completed. All participants also received overtime pay for after working hours training participation

## 6. Discussion

### 6.1 Addressing confluence of factors impacting the implementation of job interventions for ex-offenders

Designing effective employment interventions for ex-offenders remains a complex and complicated task. Early onset, cycle of offending and effects of incarceration have long and lasting psycho-social-emotional effects on offenders. Ex-offenders also experience reintegration challenges while in the community such as family, employment, financial, housing or re-offending issues. These factors combined, impact the participation in and effectiveness of the programme. These factors can be grouped as internal barriers consisting of personal attributes, and external barriers referring to environmental challenges that ex-offenders face in the community.

*Strategies to manage and overcome internal barriers resulting from early onset of offending, cycle of offending, and effects of incarceration*

Aside from providing 'soft-skills' content, programmes need to focus on the process of interactions occurring during the training to help participants gain insights to their behaviours and challenges, and apply the skills to improve their self-regulatory or social interaction skills. Incorporating small group coaching into employment interventions helps build trust, address issues of safety, encourage problem solving, and is a potential way to facilitate these processes of learning. However, there is a need for trainers to be able to identify, process and address these inter-group dynamics and to draw parallel processes to participants' management of workplace situations. This may require trainers to possess basic group-work skills, or to be trained in group work facilitation prior to the conduct of the programme.

*Overcoming external factors resulting from ex-offenders' lived realities*

Reintegration challenges such as family, employment, financial or managing triggers to re-offending complicate programme participation. The nature of low-wage manual work often involves longer working hours, higher level of work fatigue and rigid work schedules. Through the study, employer's endorsement and providing programme information is important to overcome initial barriers to programme participation. Negotiations with industry employers for job-support programmes to be conducted during work timing can reduce tension between programme needs and life demands. Incorporating soft skills coaching into on-the-job training that enhances ex-offenders technical skills, can also reduce the programme duration needed for ex-offenders to attend these courses otherwise.

*Leveraging on factors that support motivation*

Programmes should also leverage and build on motivational factors to address responsivity factors. Instead of post-programme incentives, pre-programme incentives may be especially beneficial for newly released offenders to offset costs from programme participation (e.g. transport). Aside from national incentives, attaching programme completion to employment progression or incentives can strengthen commitment and motivation to learning. This can be in the form of post-training bonuses, employment confirmations, or non-financial incentives such as increased leave, time-off or staff recognitions. However, programmes need to be mindful of the repercussions of such incentives if not communicated appropriately, resulting in misguided reasons for programme participation.

Clarity of information allows participants to find meaning in engaging with the programme, and to make life plans to accommodate the programme schedule. Conducting pre-programme engagements to help participants find meaning and identify goals from programme participation is crucial to complement the introduction of incentives.

## 7. Conclusion

The findings have highlighted some practical considerations that programme developers should be mindful of when designing community-based job-support programmes for ex-offenders. Given the limitations of our pilot study, we intend to expand our study to monitor the intended outcomes and evaluate the impact of the programme on the participants' work efficacy. In the longer term, we hope that similar studies can be conducted on programmes targeted at other profiles of ex-offenders, such as young adults or females.



# Mixed Methods Research: An Introduction

by Lim Wei Loong, Researcher, Fei Yue Community Services

Mixed methods research is “an approach to research in the social, behavioral, and health sciences in which the investigator gathers both quantitative (close-ended) and qualitative (open-ended) data, integrates the two, and draws interpretations based on the combined strengths of both set of data to understand research problems” (Creswell, 2015). The integration of qualitative and quantitative data at some point in the research process distinguishes it from multi-method research which collects quantitative and qualitative data but does not integrate them. [1]

Quantitative methods have been largely associated with a positivistic research paradigm, which believes that there is an objective reality that can be known by employing objective methods. Qualitative methods on the other hand have been largely associated with the constructivist worldview, which posits that reality is socially constructed and therefore subjective, leading to an interpretative mode of inquiry. Mixed methods have been associated with pragmatism, where decisions in the research are selected based on what the researcher believes as most suited to the study (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Mertens, 2010; Weil, 2017). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) argued that epistemology does not dictate methodology. They proposed that a pluralistic use of research methods based on what works for the research topic should be adopted instead of being purist.

Mixed methods research brings together seemingly irreconcilable research paradigms. It draws strengths from, and offset the limitations of, quantitative and qualitative methods to enhance understanding of the research topic when it draws and integrates evidences from multiple sources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

This article introduces different mixed methods designs and highlights some of the challenges in using mixed methods. It shares examples from some of Fei Yue Community Services’ existing research and evaluation projects.

## Mixed Methods Designs

There are four main basic mixed methods designs – convergent, explanatory-sequential, exploratory sequential, and embedded designs. Data integration occurs at different stages of the research in these designs. Each design has its strengths and limitations (see Creswell & Plan Clark, 2018, for more details) and choice of design depends on the intent of the research and other practical considerations (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018).

[1] Mixed methods research can be considered as a type of multi-method research but not all multi-method research are mixed methods research.

## Convergent design

In a convergent design, qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analysed independently, and merged by comparing the results in a single phase. Data in both strands can be collected from the same group or different groups of participants. The convergent design is suitable when the intent is to obtain separate but complementary data for comparison, so as to gain a more complete understanding of a phenomena. This design can also be used to triangulate or validate data (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018; DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2018; Pluye & Hong, 2014; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989).

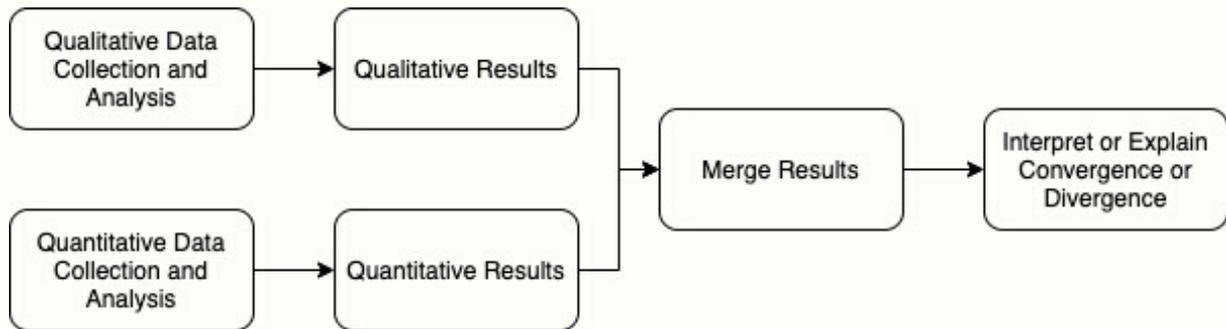


Figure 1: Convergent Design (Source: Creswell, 2015, p. 56)

In social services, the convergent design can be used to study a wide range of issues and to evaluate programmes. An example of a convergent design would be Fei Yue Community Services' evaluation of its home-based parenting education programme "Happy Family". Participants completed a questionnaire that measured the programme's intended outcomes pre- and post- programme. This formed the quantitative strand. After the programme, interviews were conducted with participants on whether and how the programme had impacted them, and a focus group discussion was held with volunteers [2] on how participants responded to the programme and how the volunteers themselves had benefitted, if any, from the programme. These constituted the qualitative strand.

## Explanatory-sequential design

An explanatory-sequential design uses qualitative data to explain or expand on the quantitative results (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018; DeCuir-Gunby & Schutz, 2018; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). Quantitative data is collected and analysed. Results from this phase inform subsequent qualitative sampling and data collection. The qualitative data is dependent on the quantitative data, and data merging occurs at the transition from the quantitative data analysis to qualitative data collection. Data in both strands can be collected from the same group or different groups of participants.

[2] Volunteers were trained to provide parenting education to the participants during the home visits.

Convergent and explanatory-sequential designs can overlap in usage. However, in the explanatory-sequential design the primary intent is to use qualitative data to explain quantitative data. It may be researchers' wish to explain why an intervention worked for one group of participants but not for another, or why a result is significant or not significant. Fei Yue Community Services' evaluation of the Release Preparation Programme (RPP, a programme that supports ex-offenders' reintegration into the community) employed this design. Pre- and post-programme quantitative data was collected and analysed to assess if the programme had achieved its intended outcomes of reducing stress and increasing resilience. Participants were then interviewed based on their survey responses in order to explain the quantitative results.

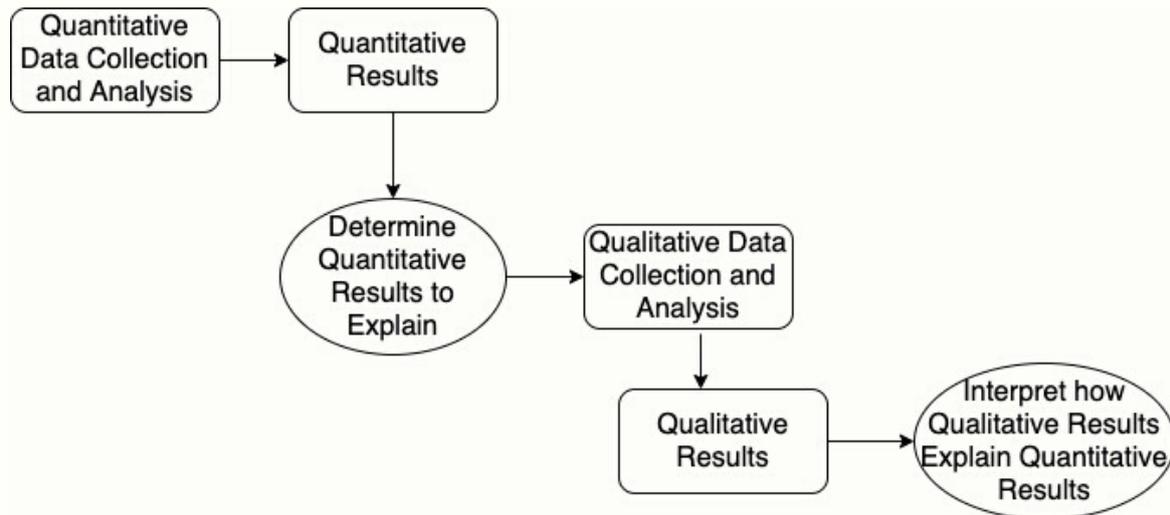


Figure 2: Explanatory-Sequential Design (Source: Creswell, 2015, p. 56)

Besides intent, practicalities should also be considered when deciding on a design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The convergent design is less time-consuming than the explanatory-sequential design, hence it is preferred when there is limited time. In the two examples given above, there was less time to evaluate Happy Family compared to the RPP, therefore a convergent design was adopted.

## Exploratory-sequential design

In an exploratory-sequential design, qualitative data is first collected and analysed to explore a problem. The result is then used to construct an instrument or an intervention. Subsequently, the instrument is applied to collect data or the intervention is implemented in a trial. This constitutes the quantitative strand. In this way, the quantitative data is dependent on the qualitative data and data integration occurs during the transition from qualitative data analysis to the construction of an instrument or intervention. With this design, the tool or intervention that is developed is grounded on qualitative data. Hence in social service it is particularly useful for developing tools or interventions that fit the cultural context of the intended users.

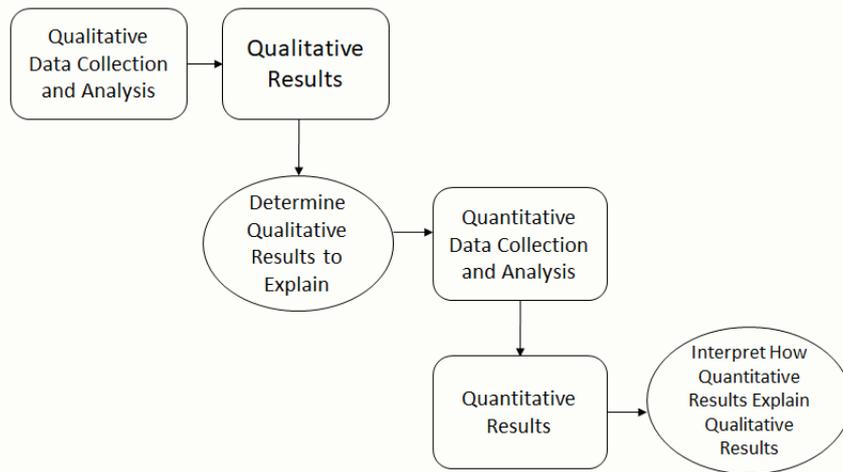


Figure 3: Exploratory-Sequential Design (Source: Creswell, 2015, p. 56)

## Embedded design

In an embedded design, either the qualitative or quantitative strands forms the main design and the other is embedded in it. Data integration can occur before, during or after the main design, depending on the research purpose. For instance, a supporting qualitative strand is embedded in a quantitative design when an interview component is inserted in a large randomised trial. There can be many reasons for doing this, such as to determine the outcomes to be measured in the trial, to understand how participants experienced the trials, to check for fidelity, to understand the mechanisms of change, to gather participant feedback, or to explain trial results, just to name a few. Conversely, a quantitative strand can also be embedded in a traditionally qualitative design such as when a questionnaire is administered in a case study research.

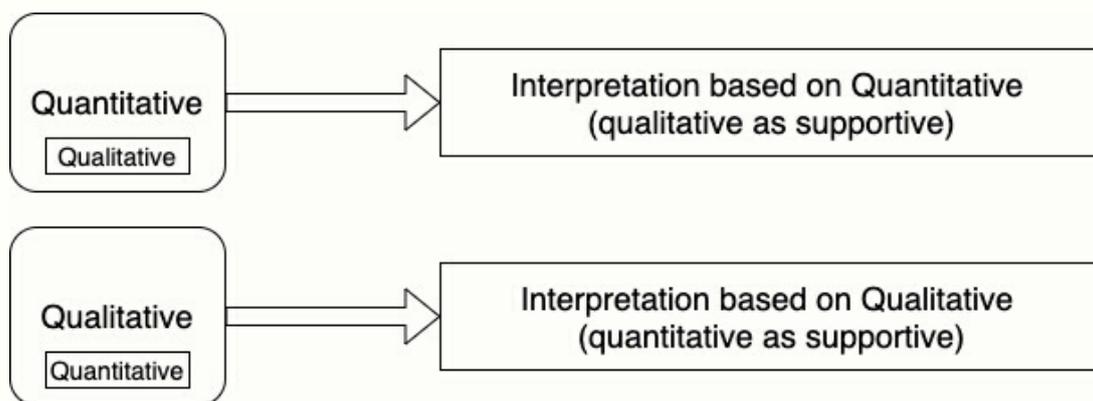


Figure 4: Embedded Design (Source: Bishop & Holmes, 2013, p. 56)

## Representing Data Integration

A joint display in the form of a table, chart or diagram is commonly used to merge data in mixed methods research. Tables 1 and 2 (see Appendices) are examples of joint displays of the evaluation results from Happy Family programme and the Release Preparation programme respectively.

From Table 1, one could see that although there was no statistically significant change in communication for the Happy Family programme, interviewees reported better parent-child communication as they had learnt to apply appropriate non-verbal cues. This discrepancy between the qualitative and quantitative results is an example of divergence.

Creswell and Plano-Clark (2018) suggested several ways to handle divergence. One way is to examine if it is due to methodological problems such as sampling problem in the quantitative strand or theme development problem in the qualitative strand. The second way is to consider collecting additional data to lend insights on what could be causing the discrepancy. The third way is to reexamine the data. In our case, the divergence could be due to the limited validity of the Connection and Autonomy Granting scales used to capture the communication concepts being taught. The relatively high baseline scores could also imply a ceiling effect.

In view of these, more weightage should be given to the qualitative data when interpreting the results.

## **Challenges of mixed methods research**

A challenge in mixed methods research is the potential for interpersonal conflict when researchers with different research paradigms and methodology cannot agree on how best to conduct a mixed method research. This can contribute to a project's failure. Lunde, Heggen, and Strand (2013) shared a case study of how power struggles between qualitative and quantitative researchers on a project led to the eventual failure to integrate the two methods. In such situations, the ability of the team leader to manage conflict is critical (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Mixed methods can, nonetheless, still provide an opportunity for collaboration between researchers with different expertise when managed well (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Another challenge is the time and resources mixed methods research demands. An institution's leadership must be prepared to invest the necessary time and resource to pursue mixed methods studies. Diverse expertise in the form of a multidisciplinary team of researchers is also necessary in order for mixed methods research to take off (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Shorten & Smith, 2017). Over time, this need can perhaps be met by having more researchers trained in mixed methods research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

## **Conclusion**

Mixed methods research adds value to social work research in several ways. It allows for comprehensive understanding of the research problem, enhances the validity of findings, adds participants' voices to the research, and links programme or intervention processes to outcomes (Chaumba, 2013; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018). In conclusion, social work deals with complex human issues. Understanding these complex issues calls for a realist paradigm that considers context and processes. The pluralistic and pragmatic lenses adopted in mixed methods research allow knowledge to be drawn from multiple sources that can be useful in considering context and processes. Mixed methods research is therefore well-suited for studying complexities in social work research.

## Acknowledgement

My colleagues Ivana Ong, Ingrid Halim, and Helen Sim contributed to this article. Ivana gave helpful suggestions for the first draft. Both Ivana and Ingrid helped to fact-check. Helen lent her insights into mixed methods research and its relevance to social service. She also carefully edited the article to make it much more readable. I thank all of them.

## Appendix A

Table 1: Example of a Joint-Display of Data Integration (Partially Represented Here) in the Happy Family Programme Evaluation (n = 27).

Outcome	QUANT		Theme	QUAL	Mixed Methods Comparison
	Mean Difference	Effect size (Cohen's d)		Quote	
Communication-Connection	0.015 (not sig)	0.02	Improvements in communication as participants began to take note of their non-verbal cues.	“In the past, when my son talked to me while I am cooking in the kitchen, I will just acknowledge without really listening. Now I will look at him face-to-face when he talks to me... In the past, he thinks I don't care about him when I simply patronize him in my reply.”	Divergence
Communication-Autonomy granting	0.086 (not sig)	0.10		“Yes. We have to use our ears to listen. Listen with our heart(s). I should not lose focus while listening to them, or say that they are annoying when the other party is speaking.”	
Harsh parenting	-0.193*	0.34	Reduced or stopped harsh behaviours, which could be due to better emotion management	“For example, I care more about his feelings now. I should not use harsh words, and I should not hit or scold him in public whenever he did something wrong.”  “Well, (when) I was throwing anger with my girl, like... I know how to stop it. See her reaction. See her reaction. She, she... uh... When I see her, she sort of look very frustrated or can't take it, I'll stop right away. I will not carry on... Before that, I'll drive her until she's really... lose control. But now I'll stop it.”  “Now? When I get angry, I walk to the room... Unlike the past... I did not manage my anger well.”	Expansion
Parenting efficacy	0.46*	0.48	Improvements in parenting efficacy	“So the lessons help me to be more confident. [In the past] I don't know if what I have done was right or wrong... So with them giving me the affirmation, it was I am doing the right way lah.”	Convergence

\*significant at the 0.05 level.

Note: Connection and Autonomy Granting were Authoritative Parenting subscales of the Parenting Style and Dimension Questionnaire (PSDQ, Robinson, Mandelco, Olsen, & Hart, 2001).

## Appendix B

Table 2: Example of a Joint-Display of Data Integration (Partially Represented Here) in the Release Preparation Programme Evaluation (n = 61).

Outcome	Quantitative Results		Qualitative Results Themes	How Qualitative Results Explain Quantitative results
	Mean Difference	Effect size (Cohen's d)		
Resilience	0.52*	d = 0.82	<p>Needs were met – case managers provided instrumental and emotional support</p> <p>Professionalism of case managers – case managers were responsive, supportive, encouraging and respectful.</p> <p>External factors – age, social support, stable employment, self-discipline.</p>	<p>Case managers' provision of instrumental support and emotional support in a professional manner enabled clients to cope during the initial period of their release.</p> <p>There were external factors that helped some clients to cope better.</p>

\*significant at the 0.05 level

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# The Snippet Team

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## Article Contributors

Goh Wai Fu, Blended Concept Pte Ltd

Lim Wei Loong, Fei Yue Community Services

## Contact Us

### NUS Social Service Research Centre

Faculty of Arts and Social Science

National University of Singapore

The Shaw Foundation Building, Block AS7,

Level 3, 5 Arts Link,

Singapore 117570

Email: [ssr@nus.edu.sg](mailto:ssr@nus.edu.sg)

Phone: 6601-5019

Website: <http://www.fas.nus.edu.sg/ssr/index.html>



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