Academic Research in Kenya: Where to Begin

Details
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Kiriri toiled on his research project. He framed some questions that he always pondered. While working in banking, he noticed various trends among the managers around him. Inasmuch, Kiriri formed opinions about his observations. He decided to turn his observations into a Ph.D. His main question revolved around if bank managers behave politely to employees, do tellers then perform better in their jobs?

So Kiriri proceeded to pull literature reviews on bank performance. He included many ratios on profitability margins, liquidity ratios, and executive compensation. His literature review highlighted the banking-centric literature. He enjoyed reading about all he found interesting in the financial services sector.

However, when Kiriri submitted his doctoral dissertation at Durham University in the UK, he failed his viva examination. Instead of research, he unwittingly cropped together a fascinating journalistic expose on salient current events in the banking industry. He unfortunately did not understand the basis for rigorous research.

So in follow-up to last week’s Business Talk article on the standards of research in Kenya, we continue and posit how not to follow into Kiriri’s “research confusion trap”. Many would-be researchers look at the world around them and try to answer the questions that they ponder. Unfortunately, casual researchers who do not receive adequate instruction approach investigations without knowing how to pose research frameworks. Often universities teach research methods courses that tell you how many pages, length of margins, and how to quote sources, but not how to set up logical research frameworks.

Do not pose simple yes or no questions seeking answers. You desire the degree to which something impacts something else. Basic examples include, how much radiation exposure leads to which forms of cancer, or how much does an employee’s perceived organisation support that he or she receives impact on his or her job satisfaction? Essentially, throughout the world, something leads to something else that leads to something else. We live in a universe of causes
and effects. You may generically think of causes as independent variables and the effects as the dependent variables.

You must design your research framework into effects and what causes those effects. Thankfully, hundreds of thousands of authors have already explored thousands of topics, theories, causes, and effects. In fact, researchers have pondered Kiriri’s question for over fifty years. So if you desire to understand causes and effects that will help you in your job or industry, then proceed to an academic search. Google different broad theories in your field, such as entrepreneurship theories, finance theories, zoology theories, etc. Read the different lines of thought.

Once you find something of interest among existing ideas, then go on to a search in a credible research database. Google Scholar provides searches for free, but not found as comprehensive as other databases. If you have access through your university or workplace, utilize Web of Science (also known as Web of Knowledge), FirstSearch, Science Direct, EBSCO, Westlaw, Wiley, or JSTOR. The before mentioned services act as repositories that store articles from top journals. Never utilize a book as your main reference point. Books become outdated quickly. Only journal articles from top tier journals really examine research with rigor. If your college or research-oriented workplace does not provide you access to such databases that house the best thinking in the best journals in the world, then you do not attend a credible tertiary institution or work in a serious research organisation.

If Kiriri had investigated different lines of research from others before him, he would have discovered a theory called organisation citizenship behaviour. Polite behaviour in his question is deemed in research as benevolence. Managerial benevolence towards subordinate staff causes the employees to trust in their organisation. Over one-hundred studies confirm the relationship between benevolence and trust. Kiriri blindly confirming what others have solidified since 1995 does not count as research.

What would make his research exciting is if Kiriri tested it in a country never studied before or altered the previous proven frameworks into a new twist that modifies prior thinking. The industry with which the research takes place is usually not relevant. A polite manager in banking or government or scientific firm would all lead to greater organisational trust among employees.

Then, researchers know through another over fifty studies that higher levels of organisational trust lead to something called organisational citizenship behaviour. Organisational citizenship behaviour encompasses employees acting as good company citizens from doing work on-time, assisting new employees, giving advice to coworkers, etc. Research knows multiple causes that lead to the effect of organisational citizenship behaviour. Organisational trust exists as one of the causes or independent variables. So Kiriri should pose a three stage research framework whereas managerial benevolence towards employees acts as an independent variable that causes organisational trust as a moderating variable that causes organisational citizenship behaviour as the dependent variable.

Setting up research frameworks in such a way can revolutionize a nation or an industry by infusing what scientific research already knows into practical scenarios. Research is not useful if it cannot be replicated, re-tested, applied, and yield practical results. If you approach research utilizing the above simple guidelines you can, quite literally, change the world.
Submit your research successes, challenges, and ideas as we continue Business Talk’s research series with other readers through #KenyaResearch on Twitter

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