



Resource Review

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Review:

For undergraduate, postgraduate and academic researchers alike, organising research *systematically*, reliably *and* innovatively requires frameworks, resources and tools that recognise the contemporary shifts in knowledge creation and the varied perceptions of research in art, design and media.

We may not be short of evidence pointing to the importance of the creative industries to the social, cultural and economic wellbeing of nation states but there is, nevertheless, a very real and constant need for academics in the art, design and media academy to explain the value of creative industries research against a backdrop of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) rhetoric. In his recent book, Sir Alan Wilson, Chair of the AHRC, called for a more interdisciplinary framework to education (and research), positing that “a systems view of the subject matter of...the arts and humanities would lead to a very...fruitful synthesis”.¹ In setting out to review *Creative Research: The theory and practice of research for the creative industries*, I wondered if the book is a valuable resource or tool for systematic and reliable research. Does this title, like few before it, help

creative researchers frame their research in such a way that requires less translation when it is read or understood by researchers in the sciences?

Creative Research sets out to “promote understanding of the role of research in the creative industries and to emphasise the importance of research as a way of validating creativity” (p.7) and it is these aims that I also attempt to critique in this review.

The author, Hilary Collins, begins with an introductory section on the nature of research and the particular nature of research within the creative industries, with its emphasis on cultural production, ‘transdisciplinarity’ and practical application. The author introduces contextual themes likely to drive creative industries research – the impact of digital tools and distribution, collaboration and the outsourcing of relationships, how innovation changes business models and markets, the creative process and organisation, management capabilities and skills and small firms and growth. By identifying these areas, the author has helpfully captured the contemporary concerns of government departments, advocating agencies, creative industries leaders and practitioners themselves.

Following an introduction to the context (nature and importance) of research within the creative industries, *Creative Research* is broken into four parts (chapters): (1) Defining the problem, (2) Managing the research design, (3) Managing the research process and (4) Managing the research. The four parts of research are also described here as ‘creating’, ‘developing’, ‘undertaking’ and ‘analysis’.

Part 1, *Defining the research problem* tackles the often challenging part of research – generating and refining research ideas and subsequently turning these ideas into research projects. The author introduces us to some ideas generation techniques (brainstorming, movement ladder, random word, mind maps, ideas association and de Bono’s ‘six thinking hats’) that many creative practitioners will be familiar with and which tend to be represented, instrumentally as ‘creativity’ in business and management literature. Part 1 also includes a look at research philosophies – epistemology, ontology and axiology – and research paradigms – positivism, interpretivism, constructionism, phenomenology and symbolic interactionism – emergent from the social sciences but likely to inform creative research. Given these philosophical foundations, the author discusses different research approaches (inductive or deductive) and methods (primarily ‘multiple methods’) and concludes with an abbreviated case study taken from the author’s own PhD showing the

research framework in action and an interview with Professor Gerry Johnson highlighting how research in 'adjacent fields' can help researchers construct their own research framework.

Part 2, *Managing the research design* focuses the mind of the researcher on how to decide on a problem, create a research framework, develop a research design, and make a research project credible, feasible and ethical. As you'd expect with such practical help, this section of the book covers the basics: literature reviews, managing learning, methodological clarity, writing research proposals and writing project reports. It includes an abbreviated MA dissertation as an example of a well-structured research project. It concludes with an interview with Pradeep Sharma on creativity and the creative influence, reminding us of the long history of the study of creativity and the different ways that we can understand creativity – looking at systems approaches, the idea of the 'design process' and the 'four-fold division into self, others, things and systems' (p.102).

Part 3, *Managing the research process* delves us into the messy work of doing the research, from the literature review to the process of analysis; from example methods to emerging tools. The author's inclusion of structural analytical tools – examples like the 'relationship diagram', 'affinity diagrams' and the 'cause-and-effect' diagram - are particularly welcome, not least because the author uses the research question 'how do digital technologies affect the protection of intellectual property and the design rights of creative SMEs?' to demonstrate how these tools can be used to help highlight factors, areas, processes (or even concepts) emergent from the research enquiry.

The final chapter, Part 4, *Managing the research* focuses on the management and analysis of data, critical reading and writing, drawing conclusions and making recommendations. The critical writing section helps researchers to orient their research towards relevance and authoritativeness and gives helpful guidelines on structuring conclusions and recommendations. A case study highlighting 'photographic ethnography' as method seems out of sequence with the main focus of this chapter, but the interviews with Sapsed et alⁱⁱ on 'the economic value of research' suggests areas of interest for further research and serve as an example of recommendations in action.

The distinctions between chapters, (through their respective chapter headings), are blurred - as you may have gathered in reading this review. What distinguishes

Managing the research process from the following chapter *Managing the research* is not at first evident and the reader would be helped by improved titling.

The case studies and practitioner vignettes (contributions) at the end of each chapter help to contextualise the tools and frameworks that the author presents and for academics supporting students in the research process, these case studies and practitioner contributions could usefully be used as exemplars to complement workshop or seminar activity – indeed my impression is that the book has itself drawn on the author's own practical teaching sessions.

It would be helpful to aggregate the bibliographic references at each chapter end into one full bibliography at the back of the book. Indeed, some references to texts have been omitted during editing – Geertz, Boyatzis, Burgoyne or - as in the instance of Csikszentmihalyi – inconsistencies (is it 1999 or 1996?).

The book draws on a number of literatures from the social sciences, (sociology, psychology, anthropology), disciplines well served by 'how-to' and 'self-help' research guides that research supervisors will be familiar with (e.g. Hart, C. 1998ⁱⁱⁱ). Collins has carefully selected those that have relevance to creative research and given us a much-needed edited and compact version of a vast literature on *doing research*.

Personally, I enjoy using visual models or tools when conducting research and the book is full of diagrams that explain frameworks, concepts, models and theories that researchers or research supervisors can refer to. As a textbook for doing research, the design of the page layouts lends itself to 'dipping in' or referring back. It is a well-structured and typographically spatial book although I would not recommend you sit down and read it in one session like some of its contemporaries in the social sciences. Indeed, as with many AVA publications, it is a little oversized and might have benefited from a more pocketbook format.

It is an ambitious textbook – covering the methodological, theoretical and analytical concerns of framing research whilst tackling the very real issue of how researchers manage their work, collaborate and get the most out of supervisory or project review meetings. Through its case studies and interviews with creative researchers it helps to emphasise both the value of creative industries research and of creativity and, if it inspires researchers to engage in creative industries research enthusiastically with the robustness and rigour required of outward-oriented public research, it will have

done its job well. For this reason, I would suggest that it *can* become a resource or tool of choice for emerging researchers. More experienced researchers may find its order and (occasionally repetitive) sequencing of sections and sub-sections frustrating, but can nonetheless consider it a valuable resource for 'classroom' consumption. We might finally have found a bookshelf 'must-have' of our own in the creative disciplines to replace the ones we've borrowed from the social sciences.

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ⁱ Wilson, A (2010) *Knowledge Power: Interdisciplinary education for a complex world*, Abingdon, Routledge, p.28-29.

ⁱⁱ Dr Jonathan Sapsed, Juan Mateos-Garcia, Dr Richard Adams and Professor Andy Neely

ⁱⁱⁱ Hart, C., (1998) *Doing a Literature Review*. London, Sage