Field Research

F. Roscioli[1]

[1] *University of Rome Tor Vergata*

29th April 2023

Outline

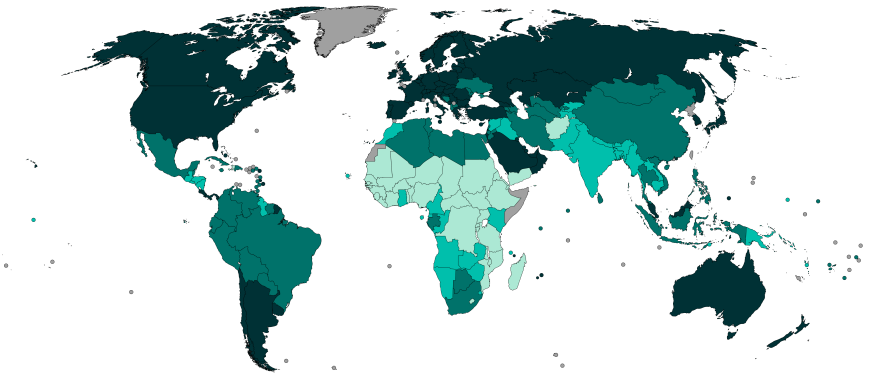
Field Research

Credit: *The Geek Anthropologist*

Why?

- Overcoming the lack of data.
- Better understanding of the context.
- Controlling data quality.
- Opening new frontiers of knowledge.

Human Development Index



Credit: *UNDP*

- In developing countries, field research can **reveal new or related problems** that the researcher was unaware of. It can also serve as a vehicle for **local people to comprehend and address a problem they are facing**, thus making it possible to work towards a solution. Finally, it can be directed not only at understanding a problem but also at **monitoring and/or evaluating government policies and programs** that might have been put in place to address the problem.

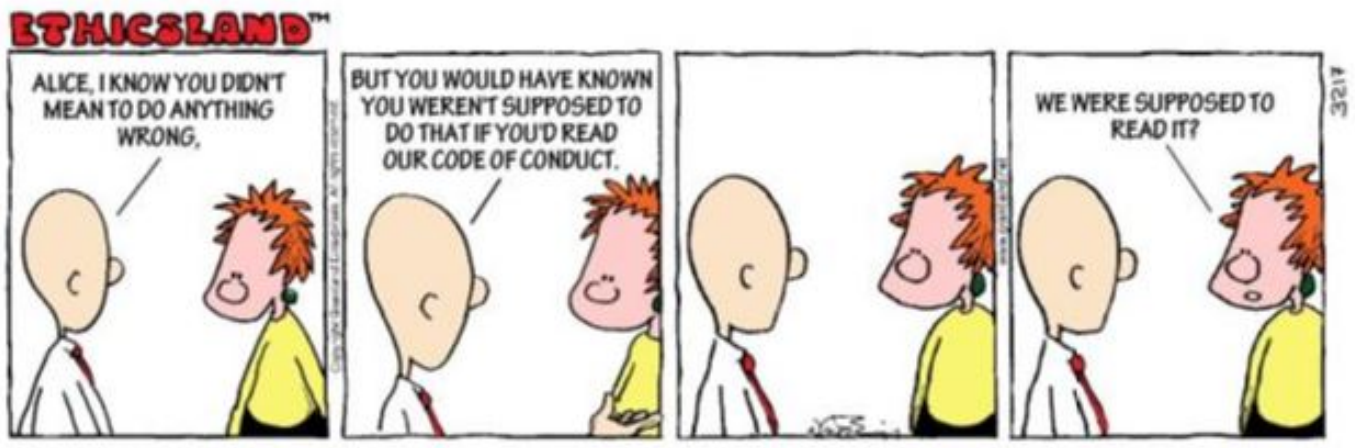
(Reyes-García & Sunderlin, n.d.)

Who has interest in it?

- The interests of **society at large**, by increasing our scientific understanding. All institutional parties that manage research are on the same page about the importance of research.
- The interests of **the community being researched**. Ideally, this would be the outcome; however, bad field research can cause or aggravate problems in the community being studied. Field research can at least provide an indirect benefit to a community by, for example, serving as the information base for development projects or policy reforms which eventually benefit the community.
- The interests of **the researcher**. There is often a pedagogical component in social science curricula that gives attention to "learning by doing" and learning by having first-hand contact with and knowledge of the day-to-day realities experienced by the people being studied. Field research provides the opportunity for a unique personal experience.

(Reyes-García & Sunderlin, n.d.)

The challenges



Credit: *EthicsLand Cartoon*

- **Ethical challenges**
  - Perpetuating unequal power relations.
  - Release of sensitive information.
  - Issues related to data ownership.
  - Unexpected outcomes.
- **Psychological challenges**
  - The interviewed might not be willing to cooperate.
  - The interviewed should not be exploited.
  - The interviewed are human beings like us: they get bored, tired, angry, and they have other things to do.

(Reyes-García & Sunderlin, n.d.)

Overcoming the challenges (I)

- Consider **participatory research approaches**, but only if they are feasible, practical, and consistent with the topic being investigated.
- **Make sure that target communities are adequately consulted prior to doing research**, and engage in these consultations considering the unequal power relations mentioned above.
- If the research project involves indirect rather than direct benefits to the community, **explain this candidly to community members**.
- **Guarantee anonymity** in the processing and publication of data (e.g. the names of respondents should not appear in publications) and then rigorously uphold the promise.

(Reyes-García & Sunderlin, n.d.)

Overcoming the challenges (II)

- **Tell members of the community that you will give them a full accounting of what has been found through the research, and then come through on this promise.** Returning information to communities can be done in simple and inexpensive ways (such as community workshops), even for graduate students with small budgets.
- **Carry out activities and questionnaires that are short, funny, and interesting** for both you and the interviewed. You will get a much more reliable response the more you can involve the people.
- **Prepare yourself for the field**. Minimize culture shock by getting a great start learning the local language and informing yourself about local customs and traditions. The more prepared you are, the more pleasant your field experience will be.

(Reyes-García & Sunderlin, n.d.)

Prepare yourself for the field (I)




Credit: *Freepik, LeggoCassino.it, Robert Neubecker, TrainingZone*

"A good portion of the design of a research is not spent in the field, but preparing for the field and dealing with the aftermath of returning from the field. But what does "being in the field" really mean?"
Lauren Purkhiser, Design Research Specialist

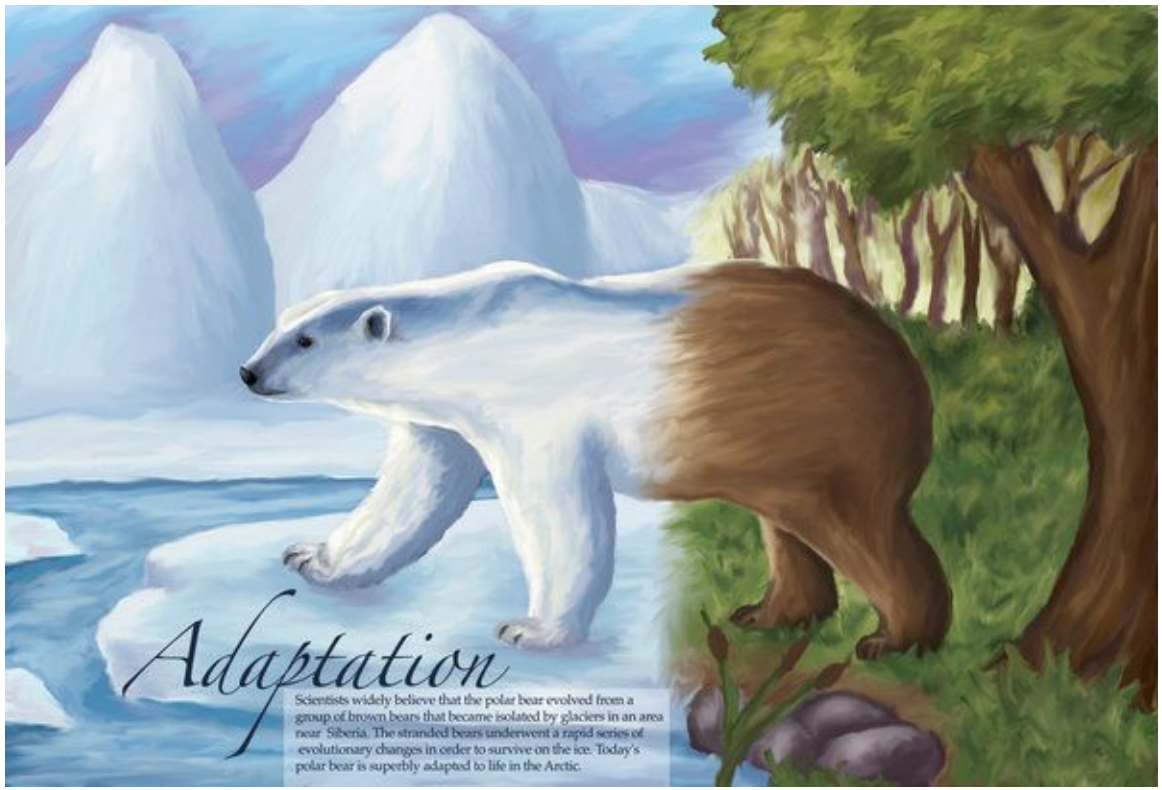
- You need to develop your understanding about the local context in which you conduct your research. **Before going to the field!!**

(Purkhiser, 2018)

Prepare yourself for the field (II)

- Establish your own network while in the field. **Being a "yes man" always helps**.
- **Be very organized.** You should develop a good contact management system, use to-do lists, take notes, and **always backup your data.** After spending some time in the field, you will be overwhelmed by the amount of work you have to do or the number of people you have to meet. If you are not organized, it is very easy to get lost while doing fieldwork.
- **Write regularly.** You can take a field diary or write down your thoughts when you have time. Do not forget that unwritten thoughts are bound to get lost.
- **Be patient.** Field research has a non-linear development curve. **The best always comes last.**

Prepare yourself for the field (III)



Credit: *Education in Action*

- You should not forget that you will live in that foreign environment, so you should adapt to that life as much as possible to understand it.

Project Risk Management

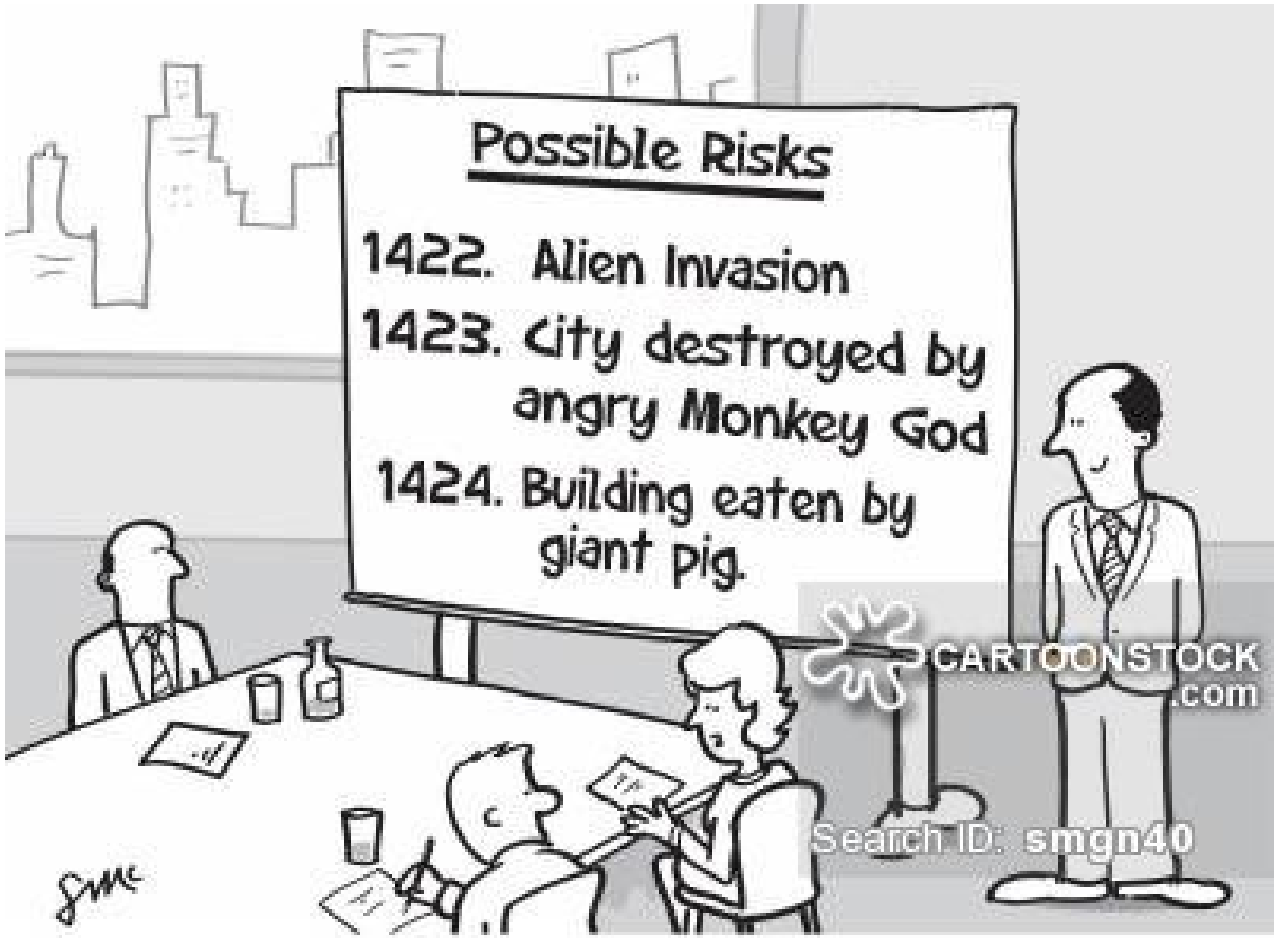
Credit: *Alamy*

Project Risk Management

- Have you ever looked at some of your colleagues and thought that nothing ever goes wrong for them, they must be lucky!
- They may be lucky, but most probably **they use risk management**. They are thus prepared in case something ever goes wrong. Understanding the process of risk management entails understanding the underlying factors that contribute to project risks.
- The aim of risk management is:
  - **Minimize the impact of negative events.**
  - **Increase the likelihood or impact of positive events or opportunities.**
- **The most common risk factors are remarkably consistent across projects**: lack of top management commitment to the project; failure to gain user commitment; misunderstanding the requirements; lack of adequate user involvement; and failure to manage end user expectations. Many, but not all, of these factors are caused or exacerbated by inadequate evaluation of the various categories of risk that are inherent in every project.

(Cervone, 2006)

Identification and Analysis



"Well he certainly does a very thorough risk analysis."

Credit: *Risk Management Cartoons*

Identification and Analysis

- In risk identification, the team looks at all of the items and events within the project from the perspective of the various risk categories and identifies those that could potentially have a significant negative impact on the project. Then, the team considers the potential consequences if the risk should occur.
- **How can you identify the risks?**
  - Brainstorm with your team.
  - Looking at similar projects/literature.
  - Confront yourself with local experts or your local contact.
- **Risks are never too many**, they just have different probabilities to occur and different impacts on the project. All of the project risk factors can then be ranked by severity of risk and, therefore, overall potential impact on the project.

(Cervone, 2006)

Risk Management

"This came in from somewhere. Could you send it somewhere else?"

"Leave the car keys just in case something grabs you out there."

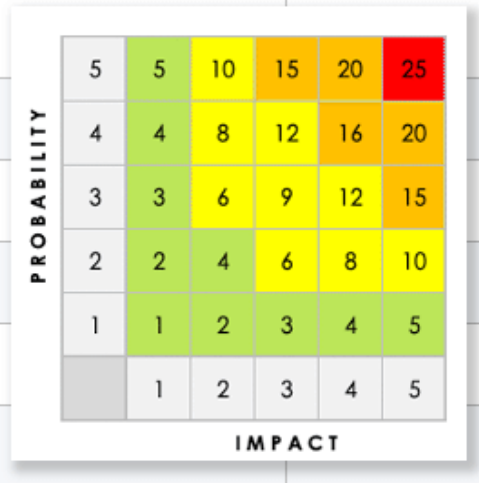
Credit: *Alex Norris, CartoonStock, Brett J. Fox, Herman*

- **Accept the risk**. Having a plan but not taking action to prevent the risk.
- **Avoid the risk**. Changing the plan in order to eliminate the risk.
- **Transfer the risk**. Making another party responsible.
- **Mitigate the risk**. Taking action to make the risk less likely or impactful.

Risk Register

SIMPLE SAFETY RISK REGISTER TEMPLATE

RISK DESCRIPTION	IMPACT DESCRIPTION	IMPACT LEVEL	PROBABILITY LEVEL	PRIORITY LEVEL	MITIGATION NOTES	OWNER
Brief summary of the risk.	What will happen if the risk is not mitigated or eliminated.	Rate 1 (LOW) to 5 (HIGH)	Rate 1 (LOW) to 5 (HIGH)	(IMPACT X PROBABILITY) Address highest first.	What can be done to lower or eliminate the impact or probability.	Who's responsible?
Leaks from roof during rain make the floor slippery	Slips and falls	3	5	**15**	– Order "slippery when wet" signs – Have mops on hand – Fix roof	Allen
Shortage of eye protection	Increase in injuries Production delayed Increased insurance premiums	5	1	**5**	– Increase supply – Low inventory warnings – Find alternative suppliers	Linda
		4	5	**20**		
		5	5	**25**		
		2	1	**2**		
		3	4	**12**		
		1	1	**1**		
		2	4	**8**		
		4	4	**16**		



Credit: *Smartsheet*

Risk Response

- **Ranking the risks according to their likelihood and impact** is necessary because it would be difficult, if not impossible, to provide a plan for dealing with every possible risk in every step of the project. With each risk assigned a risk factor value, the team now has a roadmap for mitigating project risk by developing contingency plans only for the tasks that have the highest risk factor.
- Although it is a cliche´, it is true that the most effective risk avoidance strategy is to **ensure communication** throughout the project team and organization. Too often, project managers fail to keep all of the necessary people "in the loop" about the project.
- **Flexible planning** is the cornerstone on which continual risk assessment is built. Although the project manager does not want to be continually changing course in response to every event, it is crucial to adapt and change plans as new information becomes available. **Keep track of previous projects** allow to learn from the past. The project manager should record the results of risk assessments as well as the mitigation strategies for each of the risks pursued. Frequently, this information is invaluable either later on in the project or in subsequent projects.

(Cervone, 2006)

References

Aven, T., & Renn, O. (2010). Risk management. 121–158. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-13926-0_8

Cervone, H. F. (2006). Project risk management. *OCLC Systems & Services: International digital library perspectives*, *22*(4), 256–262. https://doi.org/10.1108/10650750610706970

Covello, V. T., & Mumpower, J. (1985). Risk analysis and risk management: An historical perspective. *Risk Analysis*, *5*(2), 103–120. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1539-6924.1985.tb00159.x

Purkhiser, L. (2018). *How to set up for success in field research*. https://blog.prototypr.io/how-to-set-up-for-success-in-field-research-93fa0796ea81

Reyes-García, V., & Sunderlin, W. D. (n.d.). *Why do field research?, ch.2.*. http://icta.uab.cat/etnoecologia/Docs/[312]-Why%20do.pdf

University of California, I. (n.d.). *Managing project risks and changes*. Coursera. https://www.coursera.org/learn/project-risk-management/home/week/3