



Aalto University
School of Arts, Design
and Architecture

Visual Communication Design Research Methods

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Applied Research

Visual Communication Design Research Methods

QUALITATIVE

QUANTITATIVE

APPLIED

VISUAL

What is applied research?

Applied research involves critical self-reflection and evaluation of designer's own work

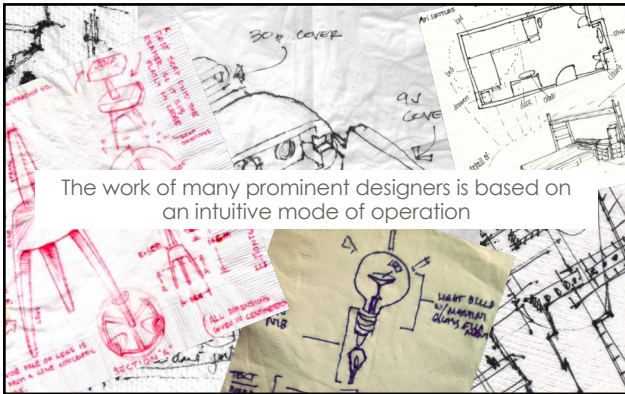
Aim of applied research

...is to answer research questions while addressing a design brief

Applied research in design

...is used to **demystify** design... to provide a logical rationale behind the creative process.

Gjoko Muratovski



The work of many prominent designers is based on an intuitive mode of operation

Design practice

...continues to be intertwined with a great deal of uncertainty, ambiguity, and intuition, as well as inspired guesswork, holistic thinking, and self-expressiveness.

Cal Swann

Design practice

...can be generated without research, and may be performed without the designer being involved in any kind of research.

Cal Swann

Design as a skilled trade, a professional career, or an academic discipline?

www.pbrsk.com

Design practice vs. design research

There is a difference between pure design practice and applied design research

Pure design practice

The aim is to refine and improve design, make it novel, better, etc.

Applied design research

The aim is to add new knowledge to the field of design

Applied design research

There are two main areas of applied design research

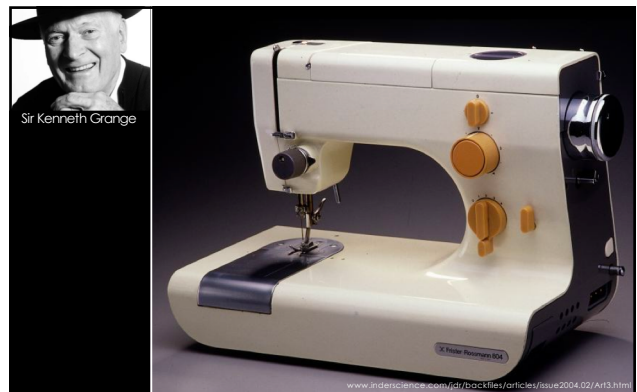
- practice-based: design artefact is the basis of new knowledge
- practice-led: design practice itself is the basis of new knowledge

Linda Candy

Practice-based research

Undertaken to gain new knowledge partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice

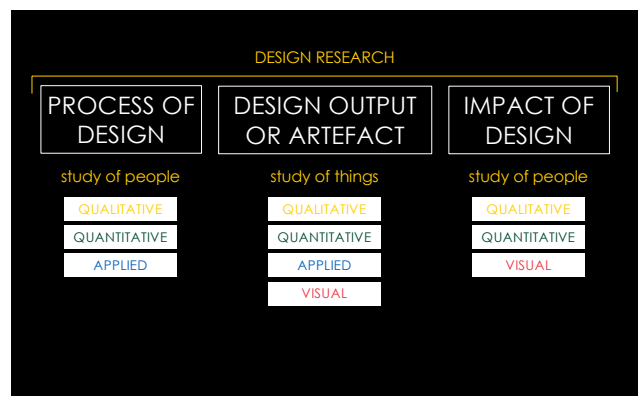
- the creative artefact needs to be contextualized
- requires critical analysis to demonstrate claims of originality



Practice-led research

Undertaken to gain new knowledge about the nature of practice

- the creative artefact is not the focus
- it is not even necessary to include any creative artefacts
- creative artefacts can be used to better exemplify the practice



Action research

...is an inquisitive process that leads to improvement and reform.
Hopkins & Ahtardlou

Action research

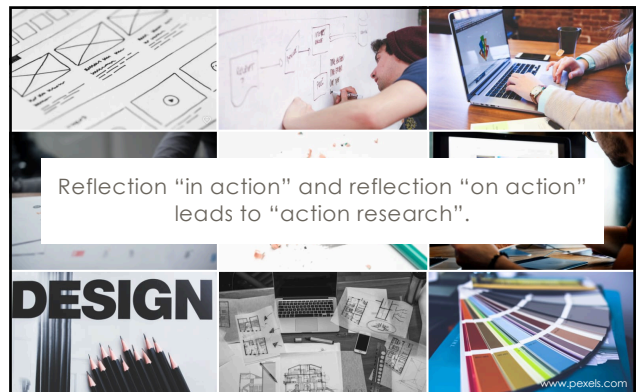
...is research about improving practice.

McNiff & Whitenhead

Action research

Enables practitioners to **investigate** and **evaluate** their own work

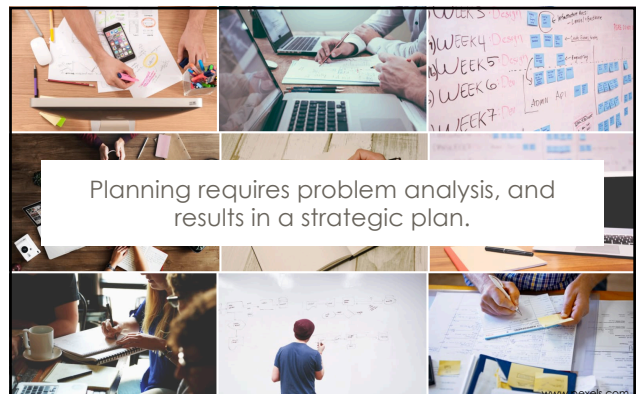
- does not necessarily begin with a clear question or hypothesis
- might start with something that needs to be improved
- arises from a problem, dilemma, or ambiguity in a situation

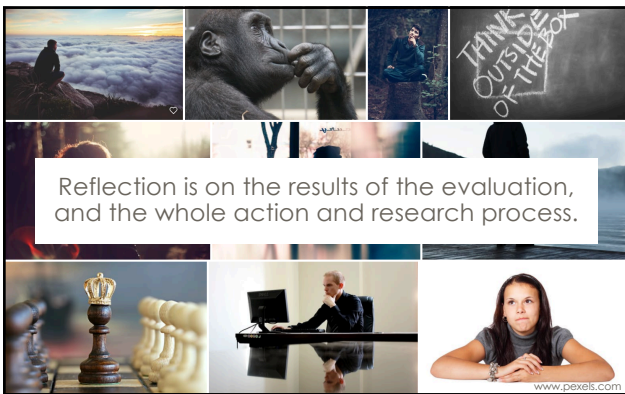
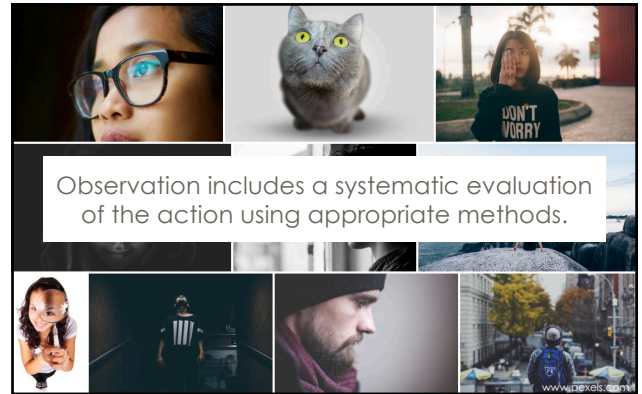
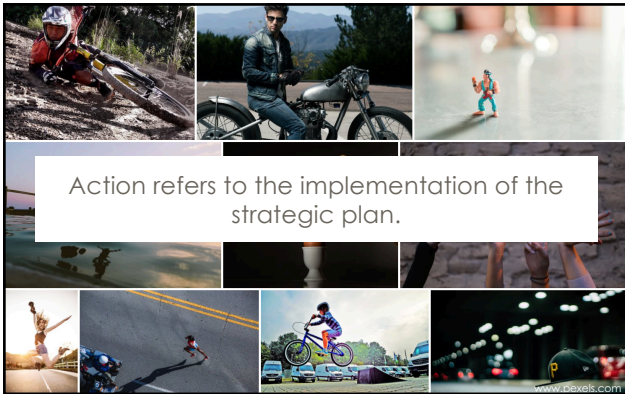


Action research

Three things should be considered in action research

- the subject matter should be **situated** in a social practice that needs to be changed
- researchers should **collaborate** amongst themselves and with relevant stakeholders
- research should proceed through a cyclic spiral of planning, action, observation and reflection
 - in a systematic and documented way





Action research in design

Design seldom takes place as a single flash of inspiration... It usually requires several cycles of **review**, **amend**, **adapt**, and **refine** before the initial concept is worked out...

Col Swann

Action research in design

Action research is collaborative and needs to involve others

- **practice-based**: involvement of others in the design itself (e.g. the core audience)
- **practice-led**: involvement of others in the design practice process (e.g. co-workers)



Complex "wicked" problems cannot be addressed without collaboration with others (co-design).

Action research in design

Action research incorporates three collaborative elements

- **participatory:** everyone is active, and the distinction between researcher and researched is minimised
- **democratic:** everyone is seen as equal, and consultation evolves the research process
- **social contribution:** the aim is to generate findings that are meaningful and useful to the participants
 - reducing the gap between theory and practice

Good applied research

Although applied research is **practice-driven**, it is still research

- needs to ask valid research questions
- needs to seek answers to those questions
- needs to use valid methods in seeking the answers
- needs to communicate its findings, in a form that others can understand

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