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## **Introduction**

Jac Vennix, a career in the light of methods, model building and management

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Students who start their bachelor study in Business Administration at Radboud University gain their first understanding of methodology through Jac Vennix' book 'Theory and practice of empirical research methods'. At present this book is in its umpteenth edition, exemplifying both Jac's life-long interest in methodology as well as his continuous strive for better understanding and better explanation of the topic. Methodology for management has a practical side in the sense that many management issues point to a lack of knowledge: to which extent do our customers value feature X of product Y? How satisfied are employees in different departments of our organisation? To answer these questions a thorough understanding of research designs, data gathering techniques and analysis methods is needed, as well as skills in working with these designs and methods. Although knowledge and skills on empirical research methods are necessary, they are not sufficient for an academically trained management researcher. Jac has sought to expand the repertoire of a management researcher in two directions. First of all he supports management students to become reflexive researchers by embedding research methodology in discussions about philosophy of science. Second, he supports the implementation of research results by equipping students with skills to intervene in organisations. This brings us to three interwoven fields that can be recognized in Jac's work: methods, model building and management.

## **Methods**

The topics discussed under the header of research methodology and their development over time can be illustrated by looking at Jac's seminal book 'Theory and practice of empirical research methods'. The first edition was published in 2006 and the last edition sent to the publisher in April 2016. The book provides a foundation for methodology by describing science and knowledge, theory and hypotheses and scientific paradigms. This book deals with fundamental questions, for instance on what constitutes true knowledge and how it can be created. The introduction in the theory of empirical research methods is completed with chapters on quantitative, qualitative and applied research. All chapters are illustrated by examples from practice, following the empirical cycle and illustrating research goals and questions, operationalisation, data gathering, data construction, analysis of quantitative and

qualitative research and the practice of applied research. The final chapter on the logic of doing research is where the largest development has taken place over the years. Different than other methodology books that excel in checklists and flowcharts, Jac's book - and in particular the final chapter - emphasizes the coherence between choices in the research process. A particular research question makes the choice for some research designs more logical than others, but designs also need to fit to the data available and accessible.

Jac's insights were gained in teaching students at Utrecht University, the Faculty of Social Sciences and Nijmegen School of Management at Radboud University. Several contributions to the current book address the challenges of guiding students through the world of methodology, ensuring that they learn to recognize dilemmas and pitfalls, understand which options are available, and are equipped to make an informed choice in each phase of the empirical cycle.

### **Model building**

In one particular version of applied methodology, Jac has spent much of his time and energy: group model building. His 1996 book 'Group model building; facilitating team learning using system dynamics' to a great extent shaped the field of facilitated modeling in system dynamics. To the present day, group model building is one of the only simulation approaches that combines formal modeling with direct client involvement. (Discrete Event Simulation is following suit.) Many applications in real life organisations have been published and were instrumental in building the expertise of colleagues in facilitating group model building sessions. With the consortium partners in the European Master in System Dynamics Jac has developed a curriculum to teach master students in group model building at Radboud University. Over the years Jac has supervised a long list of PhD students looking at the effectiveness of group model building. Many of the PhDs involved have contributed a chapter to this book.

### **Management**

In his career Jac had the role of chair of Business Administration twice and was chair of Research and Intervention Methodology for a long period. In the first role he had a major role in a reorganization process of the Business Administration department. Despite the complexities of the organizational change process and the personal strains involved most people that were part of the process describe it as constructive and fair. With regard to the

Research and Intervention Methodology chair Jac managed to create a team that shares responsibilities in research, teaching as well as administrative tasks in an open and communicative atmosphere. His exemplary behavior in creating commitment and managing by walking around was key to this process. Moreover, he was a strong supporter of integrating elements of responsibility and sustainability in the research program of business administration, which was illustrated by his support for the research program 'responsible organizations' His specific management style and research interest inspired several contributors to this book.

Drawing the three field of Jac's work together, there is one conclusion that stands out. Jac has been a model to many that he has met in professional and personal life. This is not easy as actions speak louder than words. In Jac's work these two sides seem to merge effortlessly. It was a pleasure for the editorial team to compile this book for him and we are grateful to all who contributed.