

Editorial. The Foundation of Research Design: Paradigms, Gaps, and the Hierarchy of Contribution

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In Memoriam: Our close family friend

Professor Victor E. Childers

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With deep affection and gratitude, we honor the memory of Professor Victor E. Childers, a dear family friend and distinguished scholar. His kindness, wisdom, and enduring legacy will always be remembered.

Editorial

These editorial honors the memory of Professor Victor E. Childers: an exceptional scholar, an inspiring teacher, a generous mentor, and a beloved father.

For many of those who had the privilege of knowing him, Professor Childers represented the finest ideals of academia. His legacy extends far beyond his scholarly contributions; it endures through the values he embodied every day, including intellectual curiosity, integrity, humility, kindness, and an unwavering commitment to fostering the growth of others.

Some people leave behind publications. Others leave institutions. The truly extraordinary leave behind people whose lives they have transformed. Professor Childers belonged to that exceptional group. Through his mentorship, friendship, and example, he profoundly influenced generations of students, colleagues, and researchers, inspiring them not only to pursue academic excellence but also to become principled professionals and better human beings.

His deep interest in understanding and contributing to the resolution of the challenges facing Latin America, and Venezuela in particular, led him to promote a truly international vision of education and research. Convinced that knowledge should transcend borders, he fostered collaboration among scholars from different regions and helped consolidate the global character of the Kelley School of Business. True to that philosophy, he often said, “Let’s keep it a small world,” a phrase that captured his conviction that research, cooperation, and friendship could bring people and cultures from around the world closer together.

That conviction extended beyond a personal attitude; it shaped his scholarly work. In “Marketing to the International Housing Industry” (1977), he synthesized the international experience of a group of U.S. housing-industry firms and, through systematic comparison among them, abstracted propositions with broader applicability. The clearest of these propositions remains relevant today: firms should not understand internationalization as a means of using foreign sales to absorb idle capacity during downturns in the domestic market, but rather as a long-term commitment undertaken with the same level of responsibility as the domestic market. Rather than merely describing what he observed, the study advanced a conditional proposition inductively derived from cross-case comparison. This approach shows that multiple-case studies had already informed research practice well before Eisenhardt (1989) systematized case-study theory building in the literature.

Professor Childers did not choose a method because it happened to be fashionable or because it carried a particular name; he chose the only procedure capable of answering the question he had posed. Our ability today to recognize that work as a multiple-case study employing inductive logic reflects our subsequent need to name approaches that had already guided analysis at the time. The coherence among research question, method, and contribution does not depend on the label; it depends on whether the researcher has taken the question seriously.

This issue of GECONTEC pays profound tribute to his memory and to the enduring legacy of a man whose influence will continue to resonate in the work, lives, and values of all those fortunate enough to have learned from him. May his memory continue to inspire present and future generations of researchers, educators, and students.

The Problem: Research Decisions Made in Isolation

A substantial share of the difficulties we encounter in the manuscripts submitted to GECONTEC stems from a disconnect among three decisions that should follow one another in a coherent sequence: the philosophical position from which the research proceeds, the knowledge gap it seeks to address, and the criteria used to select the evidence that will support the argument. Considered separately, each decision may appear reasonable; considered together, they reveal whether the study possesses internal consistency. An interpretive framework that cannot accommodate the chosen method, a research gap that the design cannot adequately address, or a sample selected without appropriate justification and rationalized only retrospectively represent three common forms of such disconnection.

These editorial addresses two aspects. The first concerns the foundation: the philosophical levels, paradigms, and methods that provide coherence to the entire research process (Table 1). The second concerns the point of departure: the typology of research gaps (Table 2).

The complete trajectory moves from the question, “What is real, and how can I know it?” to the question, “Why should this research be published?” The three tables presented in this editorial cover the upper portion of that trajectory: the part that establishes the standpoint from which research proceeds and the contribution it seeks to make.

The Foundation: Paradigms, Philosophical Levels, and Methods

All research rests on assumptions that researchers rarely make explicit. Table 1 organizes these assumptions into five levels: philosophical, epistemological, paradigmatic, logical, and methodological, and connects them with the methods that follow from them. Its practical value operates on two fronts: it enables authors to verify the vertical coherence of their research design, that is, whether the stated ontology supports the chosen method, and allows reviewers to identify breaks in that chain, which constitute the most common source of rejection during editorial review.

The table should be read from top to bottom. The key questions in each row function as successive filters: researchers who cannot answer “What is real?” with respect to their object of study will struggle to justify “How do I know?”; without an answer to the latter, the choice among deductive, inductive, and abductive logic becomes arbitrary.

A study that declares a constructivist ontology and then proposes a structural equation model to test hypotheses must explain why such a combination can withstand methodological scrutiny. Most of the manuscripts we review provide no such explanation, simply because their authors never considered the question.

Table 1. Framework of Research Paradigms, Philosophical Levels, and Methods

Concept	Level	Definition	Key Question	Core Assumptions	Purpose	Associated Methods	Examples	What It Helps Us Understand
Ontology	Philosophical	Examines the nature of being and reality.	What is real?	Reality may be objective or constructed.	Define the nature of the phenomenon.	Not applicable.	Is resilience real or constructed?	What the phenomenon actually is.
Axiology	Philosophical	Examines the values involved in research.	What values come into play?	All research carries values.	Recognize ethical and political influences.	Reflexivity.	Sensitive or ethically challenging studies.	How values influence research.
Epistemology	Epistemological	Examines how knowledge is generated and validated.	How can I know?	Knowledge may be objective or subjective.	Determine validity criteria.	Methods according to paradigm.	Objectivity versus interpretation.	How valid knowledge can be acquired.
Interpretivism	Epistemological / Paradigmatic	Views reality as interpreted by individuals.	How do people interpret their world?	Multiple realities exist.	Understand meanings.	Phenomenology; hermeneutics; ethnography.	Interpretations of crises.	Socially constructed meanings.
Positivism	Paradigmatic	Views reality as objective and measurable.	How can we measure objectively?	A single, independent reality exists.	Explain and predict.	Experiments; SEM.	Causal studies.	The phenomenon through objective measurements.
Postpositivism	Paradigmatic	Views reality as accessible, but only imperfectly.	How can we approach the truth?	Knowledge remains probabilistic.	Reduce bias and improve the evidence.	Triangulation.	Rigorous social science research.	The phenomenon while acknowledging its limitations.
Constructivism	Paradigmatic	Views reality as socially constructed.	How do individuals create their reality?	Multiple realities exist.	Understand symbolic constructions.	Qualitative methods.	Meanings of “crisis” or “success.”	How realities become constructed.
Pragmatism	Paradigmatic	Regards truth as what works.	Which method works best?	Epistemological flexibility.	Solve practical problems.	Mixed methods.	Innovation; public policy.	What proves useful for solving problems.
Deductive Logic	Logical	Proceeds from theory to data.	How can a theory be tested?	Theory guides the analysis.	Confirm theories.	SEM; causal models.	PLS-SEM applied to resilience.	The phenomenon from the general to the particular.
Inductive Logic	Logical	Proceeds from data to theory.	What theory emerges?	Data generate concepts.	Develop theory.	Grounded theory.	Emerging theories of resilience.	The phenomenon from the particular to the general.
Abductive Logic	Logical	Seeks plausible explanations.	What explanation seems reasonable?	Creative and iterative reasoning.	Explain complex phenomena.	Case study; hermeneutics.	Unexpected resilience.	The most plausible explanation.
Methodology	Methodological	Provides a general strategy for conducting research.	What path should I follow?	Coherence across levels.	Design the research.	Quantitative; qualitative; mixed methods.	Case studies; PLS-SEM.	The path for conducting research.
Phenomenology	Method	Examines lived experience.	How is a phenomenon experienced?	Experience reveals essence.	Describe experience.	In-depth interviews.	Experience of technostress.	Lived experience and its essence.
Hermeneutics	Method	Provides an in-depth interpretation of texts and actions.	What do discourses or experiences mean?	Understanding remains situated and contextual.	Interpret meanings.	Textual and narrative analysis.	Crisis narratives.	Deep and contextual meaning.

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

The Point of Departure: A Typology of Research Gaps

Declaring a coherent paradigmatic framework provides the foundation for addressing a research gap. Accordingly, the second stage of the research trajectory involves identifying precisely what remains missing from the current state of knowledge and determining the nature of that absence.

Table 2 distinguishes eleven types of research gaps. For each type, it provides not only a definition but also three aspects that methodological training rarely makes explicit: the signals that enable researchers to detect the gap in the literature, the procedure through which they can identify it, and the type of scholarly contribution that its resolution may generate. The latter point serves a deliberate purpose. A well-identified contextual gap constitutes a legitimate contribution, but it produces a manuscript fundamentally different from one addressing a theoretical gap, with correspondingly different expectations regarding impact.

An example drawn from Professor Childers's own work illustrates this distinction. In his 1977 study, he documented the case of a U.S. manufacturer of asphalt siding whose product had been displaced in the domestic market by aluminum, steel, and vinyl. In Europe, the material did not carry the same unfavorable image; however, sales reached significant levels only after a distributor devised a method for applying it to centuries-old brick and stone walls. The significance of the case does not lie in Europe representing a relatively understudied context, but rather in the fact that the change in context required a modification of the explanation: the product's trajectory ceased to depend on its position in the domestic product life cycle and instead came to depend on the interaction between the material and the building stock of the receiving country. That distinction provides the criterion. A contextual gap makes a contribution when the context alters the theory, not when it merely adds another case to the list.

The two tables in this editorial address two fundamental questions: Where does research begin, and what does it seek to contribute

Keywords

Research paradigms; philosophical levels; research gaps; theoretical contribution; methodological coherence; editorial policy.

Table 2. Typology of Research Gaps

Type of Gap	Definition	Editorial Contribution Criterion	Rationale for Ranking	How to Detect It in the Literature	How It Is Identified
Theoretical	Lack of theory capable of explaining a phenomenon.	Theoretical creation or challenge.	Highest contribution: advances the discipline.	Theories that fail to explain the phenomenon; variables lacking a conceptual framework; unjustified relationships.	– Compare existing theories and their limitations.– Map constructs that lack explanation.– Analyze conceptual inconsistencies.– Ask: <i>What theory is missing here?</i>
Methodological	Weak or repetitive previous methods.	Methodological innovation.	Lasting contribution to how science gets conducted.	Lack of triangulation; absence of experimental designs; excessive reliance on simple surveys.	– Review the limitations sections of previous studies.– Identify methods repeated for more than ten years.– Ask: <i>What method has not yet been applied to this topic?</i>
Contradictory Findings	Opposing results across studies.	Resolution of a debate.	Resolves key tensions within the field.	Differences in findings; opposing effects; conflicting conclusions.	– Develop a matrix of findings.– Compare samples, methods, and contexts.– Ask: <i>What explains why two studies reached different conclusions?</i>
Interdisciplinary	Lack of dialogue between two disciplines.	Conceptual synthesis.	Generates conceptual innovation.	Closed disciplinary domains; absence of hybrid frameworks.	– Analyze how many disciplines cite the topic.– Identify robust concepts from two fields that researchers have not yet integrated.
Normative	Lack of ethical or policy frameworks.	Ethical or policy relevance.	High social impact and moderate theoretical impact.	Absence of regulation, ethical models, or normative analyses.	– Identify unresolved ethical issues.– Review public policy documents.– Ask: <i>What should be done that research has not yet examined?</i>
Contextual	Lack of studies in a particular geographical or cultural context.	Theoretical generalization.	Useful when it challenges the dominant theory.	Concentration of studies in the United States and Europe; contexts with limited evidence.	– Map the geographical distribution of studies.– Consult databases such as Scopus: <i>Which countries scarcely appear?</i> – Ask: <i>How would this theory change in another context?</i>
Population	Neglected populations.	Representativeness.	Adds diversity, with moderate impact.	Nearly all studies rely on the same sample (e.g., university students).	– Review sample profiles: age, gender, role.– Identify invisible or overlooked populations.
Foundational Knowledge	Lack of initial knowledge about an emerging phenomenon.	Early-stage exploration.	Low impact unless linked to a theory.	New topics with limited literature.	– Review emerging trends.– Search for recently emerging keywords.
Evidence	Lack of robust data to support claims.	Empirical corroboration.	Low impact without a strong theoretical foundation.	Limited experimental data; weak evidence.	– Review the absence of robust empirical studies.– Analyze future research sections that call for additional evidence.
Practical	Theory does not align with actual practice.	Practical application.	Useful for applied journals.	Gap between theory and observed reality.	– Conduct interviews and collect field data.– Examine industry reports that contradict the literature.
Temporal	Outdated evidence.	Critical updating.	Valuable only if it demonstrates that a recent change alters the theory.	Older studies that fail to incorporate technological or social changes.	– Review publication dates.– Identify major recent changes, such as artificial intelligence and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Source: Author's own elaboration.

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