

Interdisciplinary research

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Interdisciplinary or cross disciplinary – we basically mean the same thing!

I will use the word interdisciplinary research throughout the presentation today.



Why does everyone talk about interdisciplinary nowadays?

The societal problems that we aim to tackle are increasingly complex. Think about their social, environmental, economic and technological interactions.

Working with such problems requires collaboration across disciplinary borders and systems perspectives to avoid sub-optimal suggestions and solutions.



Research related sustainability is a great example. It cannot be handled from individual scientific disciplines alone! To develop knowledge about how society can become more sustainable we need to collaborate, across scientific fields!



What is interdisciplinary research?

“Interdisciplinary research is any study or group of studies undertaken by scholars from two or more **distinct** scientific disciplines. The research is based upon a **conceptual model that links or integrates** theoretical frameworks from those disciplines, uses study design and methodology that is **not limited to any one field**, and requires the use of perspectives and skills of the involved disciplines **throughout multiple phases** of the research process.” (Aboelela et al. 2007, emphasis added)





Related concepts

- Multidisciplinary: Collaboration between two or more disciplines, but no integration or common synthesis occurs: “parallel play” (Aboelela et al. 2007).
- Transdisciplinary: A collaboration between two disciplines that has developed to the point that they are fully integrated into a new field (e.g. Aboelela et al. 2007; Siedlok & Hibbert 2014 for details)



Transdisciplinary can also be used to describe developed collaboration across different types of organisations and actors, e.g. researchers, industry and public authorities.



The degree of interdisciplinary

Från Huutoniemi et al. (2010):

- The scope of interdisciplinary: narrow or broad?
- Type of interdisciplinary interaction: cumulative/additive or interactive?
- Type of components used to bridge boundaries: sub-projects which are linked through a common focus or shared contextualizing/problematising or working together to generate new knowledge?
- Type of integration: Empirics/data, methods or theories?



To discuss/think about

When can a collaboration be considered multi- or interdisciplinary?

Scope?

- How different must the collaborating disciplines be?
- What type of synthesis can be achieved between the disciplines?
- How are disciplines integrated?
- What components are used to integrate disciplines in the collaborations?
- How far is the integration of disciplines reaching – from empirical fields to integration of theories?



- How can we in the best way achieve organisation learning through ongoing collaborations between disciplines?

