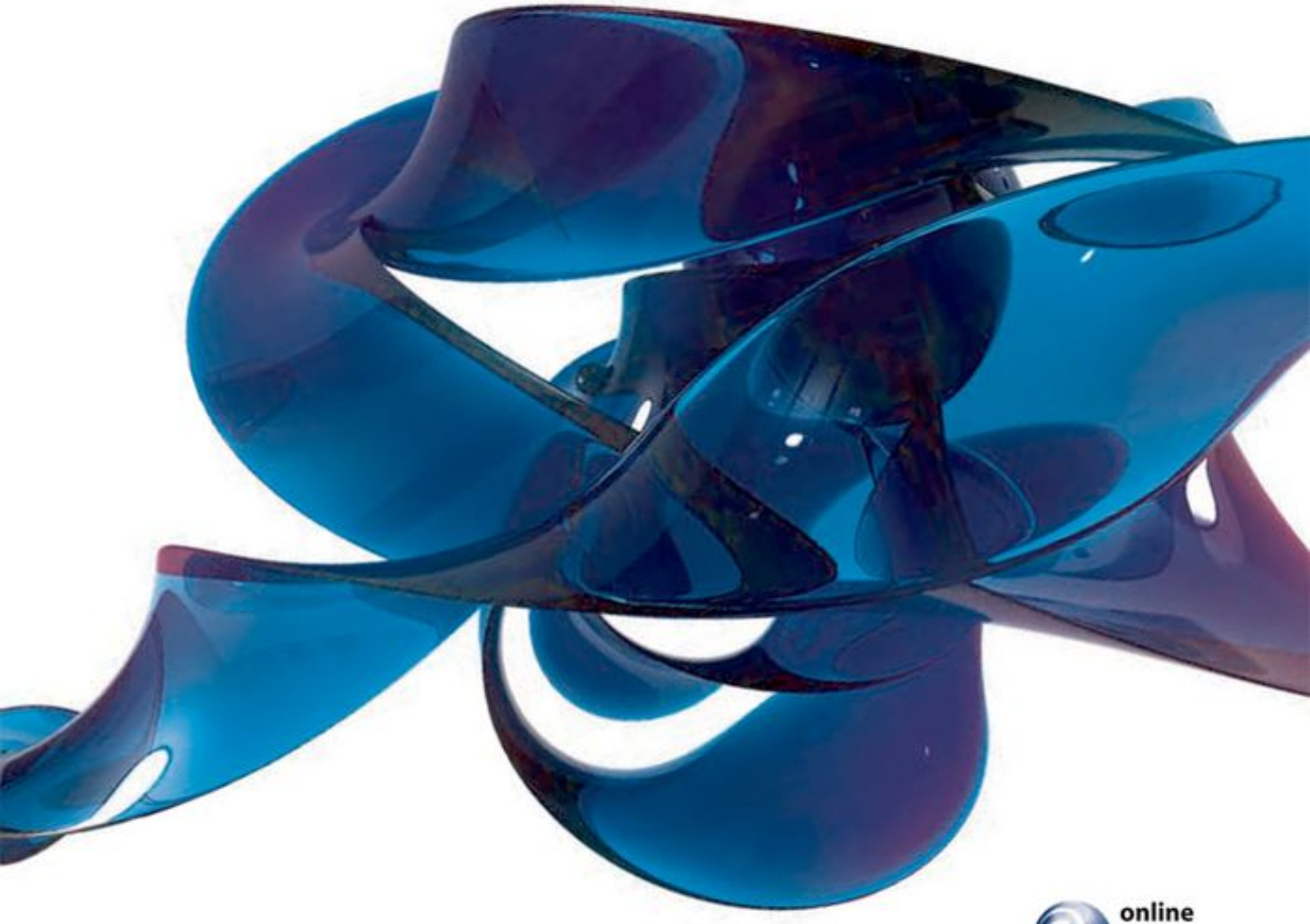
OXFORD

# Business Research Methods

ALAN BRYMAN | EMMA BELL

3rd Edition



online resource centre

# Business Research Methods

*This page intentionally left blank*



# Business Research Methods

**Alan Bryman**
**Emma Bell**

*Third edition*

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS
Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide in
Oxford New York
Auckland Cape Town Dar es Salaam Hong Kong Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madrid Melbourne Mexico City Nairobi
New Delhi Shanghai Taipei Toronto
With offices in
Argentina Austria Brazil Chile Czech Republic France Greece
Guatemala Hungary Italy Japan Poland Portugal Singapore
South Korea Switzerland Thailand Turkey Ukraine Vietnam
Oxford is a registered trade mark of Oxford University Press
in the UK and in certain other countries
Published in the United States
by Oxford University Press Inc., New York
© Alan Bryman and Emma Bell 2011
The moral rights of the authors have been asserted
Database right Oxford University Press (maker)
First edition 2003
Second edition 2007
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press,
or as expressly permitted by law, or under terms agreed with the appropriate
reprographics rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction
outside the scope of the above should be sent to the Rights Department,
Oxford University Press, at the address above
You must not circulate this book in any other binding or cover
and you must impose the same condition on any acquirer
British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available
Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Data available
Typeset by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong
Printed in Italy on acid-free paper
by L.E.G.O. S.p.A. – Lavis TN
ISBN 978–0–19–958340–9
1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

# Brief contents


**Part One** 1

1 Business research strategies 3
2 Research designs 39
3 Planning a research project and formulating research questions 71
4 Getting started: reviewing the literature 90
5 Ethics in business research 121

**Part Two** 147

6 The nature of quantitative research 149
7 Sampling 172
8 Structured interviewing 200
9 Self-completion questionnaires 230
10 Asking questions 247
11 Structured observation 269
12 Content analysis 288
13 Secondary analysis and official statistics 311
14 Quantitative data analysis 333
15 Using SPSS for Windows 359

**Part Three** 383

16 The nature of qualitative research 385
17 Ethnography and participant observation 423
18 Interviewing in qualitative research 464
19 Focus groups 501
20 Language in qualitative research 519
21 Documents as sources of data 543
22 Qualitative data analysis 570
23 Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis: using NVivo 592

**Part Four** 611

24 Breaking down the quantitative/qualitative divide 613
25 Mixed methods research: combining quantitative and qualitative research 627
26 E-research: Internet research methods 646
27 Writing up business research 675

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Detailed contents


Abbreviations xx
About the authors xxii
About the students and supervisors xxiv
Guided tour of textbook features xxviii
Guided tour of the Online Resource Centre xxx
About the book xxxii
Acknowledgements xxxviii
Reviewers xxxix

**Part One** 1

**Chapter 1 Business research strategies** 3

Introduction 4
The nature of business research 5
Theory and research 7
What type of theory? 7
Deductive and inductive theory 11
Epistemological considerations 15
A natural science epistemology: positivism 15
Interpretivism 16
Ontological considerations 20
Objectivism 21
Constructionism 21
Relationship of epistemology and ontology to business research 23
Competing paradigms 24
Research strategy: quantitative and qualitative 26
Influences on the conduct of business research 29
Personal values 29
The politics of business research 32
Practical considerations 35
*Key points* 36
*Questions for review* 37

**Chapter 2 Research designs** 39

Introduction 40
Criteria in business research 41
Reliability 41
Replication 41
Validity 42

Research designs 45
Experimental design 45
Cross-sectional design 53
Longitudinal design(s) 57
Case study design 59
Comparative design 63
Level of analysis 67
Bringing research strategy and research design together 68
*Key points* 69
*Questions for review* 69

**Chapter 3 Planning a research project and formulating research questions** 71

Introduction 72
Get to know what is expected of you by your institution 72
Thinking about your research area 73
Using your supervisor 74
Managing time and resources 76
Formulating suitable research questions 79
Writing your research proposal 84
Preparing for your research 85
Doing your research and analysing your results 86
*Checklist* 88
*Key points* 88
*Questions for review* 88

**Chapter 4 Getting started: reviewing the literature** 90

Introduction 91
Reviewing the existing literature and engaging with what others have written 91
Getting the most from your reading 94
Systematic review 94
Narrative review 101
Searching the existing literature and looking for business information 103
Electronic databases 104
Keywords and defining search parameters 108
Referencing your work 111
The role of the bibliography 115
Avoiding plagiarism 116
*Checklist* 119
*Key points* 119
*Questions for review* 119

**Chapter 5 Ethics in business research** 121

Introduction 122
Ethical principles 128
Harm to participants 128
Lack of informed consent 132
Invasion of privacy 136
Deception 136

Other ethical and legal considerations 138
Data management 139
Copyright 140
Reciprocity and trust 141
Affiliation and conflicts of interest 142
The difficulties of ethical decision-making 143
*Checklist* 144
*Key points* 145
*Questions for review* 145

**Part Two** 147

**Chapter 6 The nature of quantitative research** 149
Introduction 150
The main steps in quantitative research 150
Concepts and their measurement 153
What is a concept? 153
Why measure? 154
Indicators 154
Using multiple-indicator measures 156
Dimensions of concepts 157
Reliability and validity 157
Reliability 157
Stability 157
Internal reliability 158
Inter-observer consistency 159
Validity 159
Face validity 160
Concurrent validity 160
Predictive validity 160
Construct validity 160
Convergent validity 160
Reflections on reliability and validity 160
The main preoccupations of quantitative researchers 163
Measurement 163
Causality 163
Generalization 163
Replication 165
The critique of quantitative research 167
Criticisms of quantitative research 167
Is it always like this? 169
Reverse operationism 169
Reliability and validity testing 169
Sampling 170
*Key points* 170
*Questions for review* 171

**Chapter 7 Sampling** 172
Introduction 173
Introduction to sampling 175
Sampling error 177

Types of probability sample 179
Simple random sample 179
Systematic sample 180
Stratified random sampling 181
Multi-stage cluster sampling 181
The qualities of a probability sample 185
Sample size 187
Absolute and relative sample size 187
Time and cost 188
Non-response 188
Heterogeneity of the population 189
Kind of analysis 189
Types of non-probability sampling 190
Convenience sampling 190
Snowball sampling 192
Quota sampling 193
Limits to generalization 195
Error in survey research 196
*Key points* 198
*Questions for review* 198

**Chapter 8 Structured interviewing** 200

Introduction 201
The structured interview 202
Reducing error due to interviewer variability 202
Accuracy and ease of data processing 203
Other types of interview 204
Interview contexts 205
More than one interviewee 205
More than one interviewer 206
In person or by telephone? 206
Computer-assisted interviewing 209
Conducting interviews 210
Know the schedule 210
Introducing the research 210
Rapport 211
Asking questions 211
Recording answers 212
Clear instructions 213
Question order 213
Probing 215
Prompting 216
Leaving the interview 217
Training and supervision 217
Other approaches to structured interviewing 218
Critical incident method 219
Projective methods, pictorial and photo elicitation 220
Verbal protocol approach 221
Repertory grid technique 223
Problems with structured interviewing 225
Characteristics of interviewers 225
Response sets 226

The problem of meaning 227
The feminist critique 227
*Key points* 228
*Questions for review* 228

**Chapter 9 Self-completion questionnaires** 230
Introduction 231
Self-completion questionnaire or postal questionnaire? 231
Evaluating the self-completion questionnaire in relation to the structured interview 232
Advantages of the self-completion questionnaire over the structured interview 232
Disadvantages of the self-completion questionnaire in comparison to the structured interview 233
Steps to improve response rates to postal questionnaires 234
Designing the self-completion questionnaire 238
Do not cramp the presentation 238
Clear presentation 238
Vertical or horizontal closed answers? 238
Identifying response sets in a Likert scale 240
Clear instructions about how to respond 240
Keep question and answers together 240
Diaries as a form of self-completion questionnaire 240
Advantages and disadvantages of the diary as a method of data collection 243
*Key points* 245
*Questions for review* 246

**Chapter 10 Asking questions** 247
Introduction 248
Open or closed questions? 248
Open questions 248
Closed questions 250
Types of question 253
Rules for designing questions 255
General rules of thumb 255
Specific rules when designing questions 255
Vignette questions 261
Piloting and pre-testing questions 262
Using existing questions 263
*Checklist* 265
*Key points* 266
*Questions for review* 267

**Chapter 11 Structured observation** 269
Introduction 270
Problems with survey research on behaviour 270
So why not observe behaviour? 271
The observation schedule 275
Strategies for observing behaviour 276
Sampling 277
Sampling people 277
Sampling in terms of time 277

Further sampling considerations 277
Issues of reliability and validity 279
Reliability 279
Validity 280
Other forms of structured observation 281
Field stimulation 281
Organizational simulation 283
Criticisms of structured observation 285
On the other hand . . . 285
*Checklist* 286
*Key points* 286
*Questions for review* 286

**Chapter 12 Content analysis** 288

Introduction 289
What are the research questions? 292
Selecting a sample 292
Sampling media 292
Sampling dates 293
What is to be counted? 295
Significant actors 295
Words 296
Subjects and themes 297
Dispositions 298
Images 298
Coding 299
Coding schedule 299
Coding manual 300
Potential pitfalls in devising coding schemes 300
Advantages of content analysis 305
Disadvantages of content analysis 308
*Checklist* 309
*Key points* 309
*Questions for review* 309

**Chapter 13 Secondary analysis and official statistics** 311

Introduction 312
Other researchers' data 313
Advantages of secondary analysis 313
Limitations of secondary analysis 320
Accessing the UK Data Archive 323
Official statistics 327
Reliability and validity 328
Condemning and resurrecting official statistics 329
Official statistics as a form of unobtrusive measure 330
*Key points* 331
*Questions for review* 332

**Chapter 14 Quantitative data analysis** 333

Introduction 334
A small research project 335
Missing data 338

Types of variable 340
Univariate analysis 342
Frequency tables 342
Diagrams 343
Measures of central tendency 344
Measures of dispersion 344
Bivariate analysis 346
Relationships not causality 346
Contingency tables 347
Pearson's *r* 347
Spearman's rho 349
Phi and Cramér's *V* 350
Comparing means and eta 350
Multivariate analysis 350
Could the relationship be spurious? 351
Could there be an intervening variable? 351
Could a third variable moderate the relationship? 352
Statistical significance 352
The chi-square test 355
Correlation and statistical significance 355
Comparing means and statistical significance 356
*Checklist* 356
*Key points* 356
*Questions for review* 357

**Chapter 15 Using SPSS for Windows** 359

Introduction 360
Getting started in SPSS 362
Beginning SPSS 362
Entering data in the Data Viewer 362
Defining variables: variable names, missing values, variable labels, and value labels 363
Recoding variables 364
Computing a new variable 367
Data analysis with SPSS 368
Generating a frequency table 368
Generating a bar chart 368
Generating a pie chart 371
Generating a histogram 371
Generating the arithmetic mean, median, standard deviation, the range, and boxplots 372
Generating a contingency table, chi-square, and Cramér's *V* 372
Generating Pearson's *r* and Spearman's rho 374
Generating scatter diagrams 374
Comparing means and eta 377
Generating a contingency table with three variables 380
Further operations in SPSS 381
Saving your data 381
Retrieving your data 381
Printing output 381
*Key points* 381
*Questions for review* 382

**Part Three** 383

**Chapter 16 The nature of qualitative research** 385

Introduction 386
The main steps in qualitative research 389
Theory and research 392
Concepts in qualitative research 393
Reliability and validity in qualitative research 394
Adapting reliability and validity for qualitative research 395
Alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research 395
Recent discussions about quality criteria for qualitative research 399
The main preoccupations of qualitative researchers 401
Seeing through the eyes of the people being studied 402
Description and the emphasis on context 403
Emphasis on process 404
Flexibility and limited structure 405
Concepts and theory grounded in data 406
The critique of qualitative research 408
Qualitative research is too subjective 408
Difficult to replicate 408
Problems of generalization 408
Lack of transparency 409
Is it always like this? 409
Some contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research 410
Some similarities between quantitative and qualitative research 412
Researcher–subject relationships 413
Action research 413
Cognitive mapping 415
Feminism and qualitative research 417
Collaborative and participatory research 419
*Key points* 421
*Questions for review* 421

**Chapter 17 Ethnography and participant observation** 423

Introduction 424
Organizational ethnography 425
Access 427
Overt versus covert? 433
Ongoing access 435
Key informants 436
Roles for ethnographers 436
Active or passive? 440
Sampling 441
Purposive sampling 441
Theoretical sampling 441
Not just people 443
Field notes 444
Types of field notes 447

Bringing ethnographic fieldwork to an end 448
Can there be a feminist ethnography? 449
Visual ethnography 451
*Key points* 462
*Questions for review* 462

**Chapter 18 Interviewing in qualitative research** 464

Introduction 465
Differences between the structured interview and the qualitative interview 466
Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing 467
Preparing an interview guide 473
Kinds of questions 477
Using an interview guide: an example 480
Recording and transcription 482
Telephone interviewing 488
Sampling 489
Feminist research and interviewing in qualitative research 493
Qualitative interviewing versus participant observation 494
Advantages of participant observation in comparison to qualitative interviewing 495
Advantages of qualitative interviewing in comparison to participant observation 496
Overview 498
*Checklist* 498
*Key points* 499
*Questions for review* 499

**Chapter 19 Focus groups** 501

Introduction 502
Uses of focus groups 503
Conducting focus groups 505
Recording and transcription 505
How many groups? 507
Size of groups 508
Level of moderator involvement 510
Selecting participants 511
Asking questions 511
Beginning and finishing 513
Group interaction in focus group sessions 513
The focus group as a feminist method 514
Limitations of focus groups 515
*Checklist* 517
*Key points* 517
*Questions for review* 518

**Chapter 20 Language in qualitative research** 519

Introduction 520
Fine-grained approaches 520
Conversation analysis 521
Discourse analysis 525

Narrative analysis 531
Rhetorical analysis 533
Context-sensitive approaches 537
Critical discourse analysis 538
Overview 540
*Key points* 541
*Questions for review* 541

**Chapter 21 Documents as sources of data** 543

Introduction 544
Personal documents 545
Public documents 548
Organizational documents 550
Mass media outputs 552
Visual documents 553
Virtual documents 557
The world as text 558
Readers and audiences—active or passive? 558
The reality of documents 559
Interpreting documents 560
Qualitative content analysis 560
Semiotics 561
Hermeneutics 563
Historical analysis 564
*Checklist* 567
*Key points* 567
*Questions for review* 568

**Chapter 22 Qualitative data analysis** 570

Introduction 571
General strategies of qualitative data analysis 574
Analytic induction 574
Grounded theory 577
More on coding 584
Steps and considerations in coding 585
Turning data into fragments 587
Problems with coding 588
Secondary analysis of qualitative data 590
*Key points* 591
*Questions for review* 591

**Chapter 23 Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis: using NVivo** 592

Introduction 593
Is CAQDAS like quantitative data analysis software? 594
No industry leader 594
Lack of universal agreement about the utility of CAQDAS 594
Learning NVivo 596
Coding 597
Searching text 603

Memos 606
Saving an NVivo project 607
Opening an existing NVivo project 607
Final thoughts 607
*Key points* 608
*Questions for review* 609

**Part Four** 611

**Chapter 24 Breaking down the quantitative/qualitative divide** 613

Introduction 614
The natural science model and qualitative research 615
Quantitative research and interpretivism 617
Quantitative research and constructionism 618
Epistemological and ontological considerations 619
Problems with the quantitative/qualitative contrast 619
Behaviour versus meaning 619
Theory tested in research versus emergent from data 620
Numbers versus words 621
Artificial versus natural 621
Reciprocal analysis 623
Qualitative analysis of quantitative data 623
Quantitative analysis of qualitative data 623
Quantification in qualitative research 624
Thematic analysis 624
Quasi-quantification in qualitative research 624
Combating anecdotalism through limited quantification 625
*Key points* 625
*Questions for review* 626

**Chapter 25 Mixed methods research: combining quantitative and qualitative research** 627

Introduction 628
The argument against mixed methods research 629
The embedded methods argument 629
The paradigm argument 629
Two versions of the debate about quantitative and qualitative research 630
The rise of mixed methods research 630
Approaches to mixed methods research 631
The logic of triangulation 631
Qualitative research facilitates quantitative research 634
Quantitative research facilitates qualitative research 635
Filling in the gaps 636
Static and processual features 637
Research issues and participants' perspectives 637
The problem of generality 638
Qualitative research may facilitate the interpretation of the relationship between variables 639
Studying different aspects of a phenomenon 640
Solving a puzzle 643

Reflections on mixed methods research 643
*Key points* 645
*Questions for review* 645

**Chapter 26 E-research: Internet research methods** 646

Introduction 647
The Internet as object of analysis 648
Using websites to collect data from individuals 651
Virtual ethnography 652
Qualitative research using online focus groups 655
Qualitative research using online personal interviews 659
Online social surveys 661
Email surveys 661
Web surveys 662
Mixed modes of survey administration 663
Sampling issues 663
Overview 669
Ethical considerations in e-research 669
The state of e-research 673
*Key points* 673
*Questions for review* 674

**Chapter 27 Writing up business research** 675

Introduction 676
Writing up your research 677
Start early 677
Be persuasive 679
Get feedback 679
Avoid sexist, racist, and disablist language 681
Structure your writing 681
Writing up quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research 684
An example of quantitative research 684
Introduction 685
Theory and hypotheses 686
Methods 686
Results 687
Discussion 687
Lessons 687
An example of qualitative research 689
Introduction 690
Review of the literature 690
Methods 691
Presentation of main themes 691
Discussion 691
Implications 691
Lessons 692
An example of mixed methods research 692
Introduction 694
The Russian context 694
Organizational culture and effectiveness 694

Research questions 695
Testing the model: a comparative study 695
Taking a closer look: four case studies 695
Discussion 696
Lessons 697
Postmodernism and reflexivity 697
Writing ethnography 703
Experiential authority 703
Typical forms 704
The native's point of view 705
Interpretative omnipotence 706
Ways of writing differently 706
*Checklist* 708
*Key points* 710
*Questions for review* 710

Glossary 712
References 721
Author index 745
Subject index 751

# Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| ABTA | Association of British Travel Agents |
| AES | Annual Employment Survey |
| ALS | average leadership style |
| AoIR | The Association of Internet Researchers |
| AoM | Academy of Management |
| ASA | American Sociological Association |
| BHPS | British Household Panel Study |
| BMRB | British Market Research Bureau |
| BSA | British Social Attitudes |
| BSA | British Sociological Association |
| CA | conversation analysis |
| CAPI | computer-assisted personal interviewing |
| CAQDAS | computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software |
| CASS | Centre for Applied Social Surveys |
| CATI | computer-assisted telephone interviewing |
| CDA | critical discourse analysis |
| CSR | corporate social responsibility |
| CV | curriculum vitae |
| CWP | Chamgomg Workforce Programme |
| DA | discourse analysis |
| DEFRA | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs |
| DTI | Department for Trade and Industry |
| ECA | ethnographic content analysis |
| EFS | Expenditure and Food Survey |
| ESRC | Economic and Social Research Council |
| FES | Family Expenditure Survey |
| FTSE | Financial Times (London) Stock Exchange |
| GHS | General Household Survey |
| GICS | Global Industry Classifications Standard |
| GM | General Motors |
| GMID | General Market Information Database |
| HISS | hospital information support system |
| HMO | health maintenance organization |
| HRM | Human Resource Management |
| HRT | hormone replacement therapy |
| IBSS | International Bibliography of the Social Sciences |
| ICI | Imperial Chemical Industries |
| IiP | Investors in People |
| ISIC | International Standard Industrial Classification |
| ISO | International Organization for Standardization |
| ISP | Internet Service Provider |
| ISSP | International Social Survey Programme |

| | |
|---|---|
| JDS | Job Diagnostic Survey |
| LFS | Labour Force Survey |
| LPC | least-preferred co-worker |
| MPS | Motivating Potential Score |
| MRS | Market Research Society |
| MUD | multi-user domain |
| *NACE* | *Nomenclature statistique des Activités économiques dans la Communauté Européenne* |
| NAICS | North American Industrial Classification System |
| NFS | National Food Survey |
| NUD*IST | Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing |
| OCS | Organizational Culture Scale |
| OD | organizational development |
| OECD | Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development |
| ONS | Office for National Statistics |
| ORACLE | Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation |
| PAF | Postcode Address File |
| PWC | Price Waterhouse Cranfield |
| *REPONSE* | *Relations Professionnelles et Négociations d'Enterprise* |
| SCELI | Social Change and Economic Life Initiative |
| SIC | Standard Industrial Classification |
| SME | small or medium-sized enterprise |
| SOGI | society, organization, group, and individual |
| SSCI | Social Sciences Citation Index |
| SRA | Social Research Association |
| TDM | Total Design Method |
| TGI | Target Group Index |
| TQM | Total Quality Management |
| TPS | Telephone Preference Service |
| UKDA | UK Data Archive |
| VDL | vertical dyadic linkage |
| WERS | Workplace Employment Relations Survey (previously Workplace Employee Relations Survey) |
| WoS | Web of Science |
| WIRS | Workplace Industrial Relations Survey |
| WOMM | word-of-mouth marketing |

# About the authors



**Alan Bryman** was appointed Professor of Organizational and Social Research at the University of Leicester in August 2005. Prior to this he was Professor of Social Research at Loughborough University for thirty-one years.

His main research interests are in leadership, especially in higher education, research methods (particularly mixed methods research), and the 'Disneyization' and 'McDonaldization' of modern society. In 2003–4 he completed a project on the issue of how quantitative and qualitative research are combined in the social sciences, as part of the Economic and Social Research Council's Research Methods Programme.

He has published widely in the field of Social Research, including: *Quantitative Data Analysis with SPSS 14, 15 and 16: A Guide for Social Scientists* (Routledge, 2009) with Duncan Cramer; *Social Research Methods* (Oxford University Press, 2008); *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods* (Sage, 2004) with Michael Lewis-Beck and Tim Futing Liao; *The Disneyization of Society* (Sage, 2004); *Handbook of Data Analysis* (Sage, 2004) with Melissa Hardy; *Understanding Research for Social Policy and Practice* (Policy Press, 2004) with Saul Becker; and the *SAGE Handbook of Organizational Research Methods* with David Buchanan (Sage, 2009), as well as editing the *Understanding Social Research* series for the Open University Press.

He has contributed articles to a range of academic journals, including *Journal of Management Studies*; *Human Relations*; *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*; *Leadership Quarterly*, and *American Behavioral Scientist*. He is also on the editorial board of *Leadership*; *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, and the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. He was a member of the ESRC's Research Grants Board and has recently completed research into effective leadership in higher education, a project funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education.



**Emma Bell** is Senior Lecturer in Organization Studies at University of Exeter Business School. Prior to this she held senior lecturing posts at the University of Bath School of Management and the School of Business and Management at Queen Mary University of London. She graduated with a Ph.D. from Manchester Metropolitan University in 2000 before becoming a lecturer at Warwick University Business School.

Her main research interests relate to the critical study of managerial discourses and modern organization. A substantial aspect of her work at the moment involves exploration of the relationship between religion, spirituality, and organization and focuses on the role of belief-led business in providing alternatives to globalized capitalism. She has also recently completed a book that analyses how management and organization are represented in film. She is a founding member of *inVISIO* the *International Network of Visual Studies*

*in Organization* and is currently working on an ESRC *Researcher Development Initiative* project that promotes the development of visual analysis among management researchers. Prior to this she conducted research into the social construction of meaning around payment systems and an evaluation of the impact of the 'Investors in People' initiative.

Her research has been published in journals, including the *British Journal of Management*; the *British Journal of Industrial Relations*; *Human Relations*; *Organization*; the *Journal of Management Studies*; *Management Learning*, and *Time & Society*. She has written a number of articles and book chapters relating to management research methods on topics such as research ethics, visual methods, ethnography, and the politics of management research.

Emma is committed to the development of innovative approaches to learning and has been awarded prizes for her teaching at Queen Mary and Bath.

# About the students and supervisors

Six undergraduate and two postgraduate students have provided valuable input that has informed our writing of the **Telling it like it is** feature of the book. We are extremely grateful to them for being willing to share their experiences of doing a research project and we hope that sharing what they have learned from this process with the readers of this book will enable others to benefit from their experience. Video-taped interviews with the students are available to view on the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book: ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

**Angharad Jones**
Angharad did her undergraduate degree in Commerce at the University of Birmingham and completed her final year of study in 2005. Her dissertation project was a qualitative interview study exploring why women are under-represented in senior management. Although it was not a requirement of the dissertation to do a research project, Angharad felt that this was something that would help to give her dissertation a focus. She carried out her research in a department of a county council organization where women constitute over 60 per cent of the workforce.

**Chris Phillips**
Chris did an undergraduate degree in Commerce at Birmingham Business School and graduated in June 2004. His third year involved a final-year dissertation based on a small research project. Chris gained access to study women in management in a global banking organization as a result of his internship during the summer of his second year. He focused on the role of women employed by the bank, asking questions about why they progress, why they don't progress, and what affects their career progression. He was interested in the literature on the 'glass ceiling' and its effects on women's careers and wanted to find out whether or not it existed within the bank. His research design was qualitative and involved semi-structured interviews with women in the organization.

**Karen Moore**
In 2005 Karen was in her last year of study at Lancaster University on a four-year degree programme for the award of a Bachelor's in Business Administration in Management. Her final year research project came about as the result of her third-year placement in a company based in Leeds, where she worked in the Human Resources department. Karen became interested in the concept of person–organizational culture fit, having done courses in human resource management at university. She carried out an audit of the organizational culture in her placement company and explored the way that the recruitment and selection process operated to ensure person–organization fit. Her research design involved a questionnaire and semi-structured interviewing.

**Lisa Mellors**
Lisa studied at Lancaster University Management School for a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration in Management. Her four-year course included a one-year work placement

in industry. In 2004/5 she undertook a dissertation that formed a compulsory part of her final year of study. She based her research on the organization where she undertook her work placement and carried out an action research project involving a team that she was managing. She explained: 'on my work placement I was given a team to manage that were in trouble. The management had found problems in the team in terms of errors, and the morale was very low. There was a high turnover in the team as well, and they asked me if I could solve the problems and go in and kind of find out what was wrong. So I thought it was kind of a useful, real life project to do.' The action research project ran for a period of three months and involved Lisa in making changes to the team and then monitoring the effects of these changes. For more on action research see Chapter 15 or turn to the Glossary.

**Lucie Banham**

At the time we interviewed her, Lucie had just completed an MA in Organization Studies at Warwick Business School. She had also studied psychology as an undergraduate at the University of Warwick. Her dissertation project was about how governments employ action at a distance to encourage people towards identities that are supportive of their policies. Her specific focus was on how governments seek to foster the development of enterprising behaviour amongst students and young people. Her fieldwork was concentrated on the activities of one of the government-funded institutes that is responsible for promoting enterprise. She explained: 'I researched an . . . institute . . . that runs these kind of programmes [including] big events and competitions and courses that students can attend, so they . . . can learn about how to be an entrepreneur or how to be an enterprising subject.' Lucie's research design combined participant observation, unstructured and semi-structured interviews, and documentary data collection.

**Nirwanthi De Vaz**

Nirwanthi was an undergraduate on a three-year course studying for a BA in Management Studies at the University of Leicester. She finished her studies in 2005. In her third year she was required to do a dissertation, and she was encouraged to undertake some primary research as part of the dissertation project. Her research interest was in the role of informal organization, including personal relationships and friendships in affecting how things get done efficiently in organizations outside the formal structure. The company she studied is based in Sri Lanka, and its business involves exporting fresh fish, so the nature of the product meant that efficiency was particularly important to the company. Her research strategy was qualitative and involved semi-structured interviews with managers in the company.

**Tom Easterling**

When he spoke to us, Tom had recently finished studying for an M.Sc. in occupational psychology at Birkbeck College, University of London. where he had been studying part-time over two years, combining this with his full-time job as an NHS manager in London. His dissertation research project focused on the development of well-being in the workplace, focusing on telephone call centres as the research context in which he explored this subject. Having done a project based on quantitative research methods several years previously when he was an undergraduate, this time Tom was keen to develop a research design that was more qualitative in nature. His research was based on a single case study of a public-sector call centre, where he interviewed people at different levels of the organization.

**Tore Opsahl**

Tore was in his final year at Queen Mary, University of London, studying for a B.Sc. in Business Management when he spoke to us about his experiences of doing a dissertation

project. His project emerged from a business plan competition in which he got involved during an exchange visit in his second year at the University of California. For the competition Tore had set up a website for students to enable them to meet and socialize with each other. Upon returning to London in his third year he realized that the website had also generated a large amount of quantitative data, which he could usefully analyse for his research project. Guided by his interest in social network theory, he was able to analyse this existing dataset for his dissertation research project.

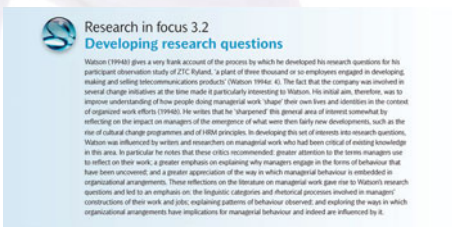
Seven supervisors also provided helpful feedback to inform the **Telling it like it is** feature of the book. They kindly agreed to share their experiences of supervising students doing research projects, and we hope that this will add an interesting new perspective for readers of the book. While they provided their feedback anonymously, we would like to acknowledge their affiliations, which were Coventry University, Uppsala University, the University of Portsmouth, the University of Hull, Southampton Solent University, Edinburgh Napier University, and Queen Mary University of London.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Guided tour of textbook features

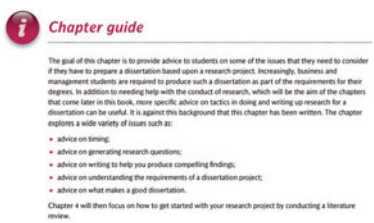
## Research in focus boxes

It is often said that the three most important features to look for when buying a house are location, location, location. A parallel for the teaching of research methods is examples, examples, examples! Research in focus boxes are designed to provide a sense of place for the theories and concepts being discussed in the chapter text, by providing real examples of published research.


Research in focus 3.2

**Developing research questions**

Watson (1994B) gives a very frank account of the process by which he developed his research questions for his participant observation study of ZTC Ryland, 'a plant of three thousand or so employees engaged in developing, making and selling telecommunications products' (Watson 1994a: 4). The fact that the company was involved in several change initiatives at the time made it particularly interesting to Watson. His initial aim, therefore, was to improve understanding of how people doing managerial work 'shape' their own lives and identities in the context of organized work efforts (1994B). He writes that he 'sharpened' this general area of interest somewhat by reflecting on the impact on managers of the emergence of what were then fairly new developments, such as the rise of cultural change programmes and of HRM principles. In developing this set of interests into research questions, Watson was influenced by writers and researchers on managerial work who had been critical of existing knowledge in this area. In particular he notes that these critics recommended: greater attention to the terms managers use to reflect on their work; a greater emphasis on explaining why managers engage in the forms of behaviour that have been uncovered; and a greater appreciation of the way in which managerial behaviour is embedded in organizational arrangements. These reflections on the literature on managerial work gave rise to Watson's research questions and led to an emphasis on: the linguistic categories and rhetorical processes involved in managers' constructions of their work and jobs; explaining patterns of behaviour observed; and exploring the ways in which organizational arrangements have implications for managerial behaviour and indeed are influenced by it.


*Chapter guide*

The goal of this chapter is to provide advice to students on some of the issues that they need to consider if they have to prepare a dissertation based upon a research project. Increasingly, business and management students are required to produce such a dissertation as part of the requirements for their degrees. In addition to needing help with the conduct of research, which will be the aim of the chapters that come later in this book, more specific advice on tactics in doing and writing up research for a dissertation can be useful. It is against this background that this chapter has been written. The chapter explores a wide variety of issues such as:

- advice on timing;
- advice on generating research questions;
- advice on writing to help you produce compelling findings;
- advice on understanding the requirements of a dissertation project;
- advice on what makes a good dissertation.

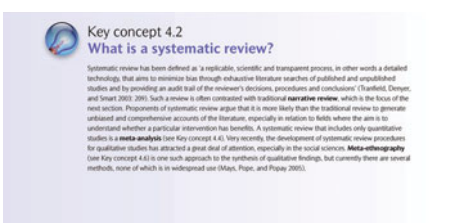
Chapter 4 will then focus on how to get started with your research project by conducting a literature review.

## Chapter guide

Each chapter opens with a chapter guide that provides a route map through the chapter material and summarizes the goals of each chapter, so that you know what you can expect to learn as you move through the text.

## Key concept boxes

The world of research methods has its own language. To help you build your research vocabulary, key terms and ideas have been defined in key concept boxes that are designed to advance your understanding of the field and help you to apply your new learning to new research situations.


Key concept 4.2

**What is a systematic review?**

Systematic review has been defined as 'a replicable, scientific and transparent process, in other words a detailed technology, that aims to minimize bias through exhaustive literature searches of published and unpublished studies and by providing an audit trail of the reviewer's decisions, procedures and conclusions' (Trueblield, Denyer, and Smart 2003: 209). Such a review is often contrasted with traditional **narrative review**, which is the focus of the next section. Proponents of systematic review argue that it is more likely than the traditional review to generate unbiased and comprehensive accounts of the literature, especially in relation to fields where the aim is to understand whether a particular intervention has benefits. A systematic review that includes only quantitative studies is a **meta-analysis** (see Key concept 4.4). Very recently, the development of systematic review procedures for qualitative studies has attracted a great deal of attention, especially in the social sciences. **Meta-ethnography** (see Key concept 4.6) is one such approach to the synthesis of qualitative findings, but currently there are several methods, none of which is in widespread use (Mays, Pope, and Popay 2005).


Telling it like it is

**Finding time to do a research project**

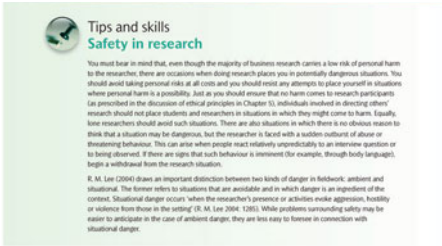
For part-time MBA, undergraduate, and postgraduate students, doing a research project sometimes has to be combined with the intense demands of work and family, which in themselves may constitute more than a full-time job. From our experience of supervising such students, we have observed that they develop many different and creative ways of managing the time pressures associated with doing a dissertation project, but this can often involve an element of personal sacrifice for them. Female MBA students from Warwick Business School interviewed by Emma Bell (2004) described some of the effects of these time pressures—for example, causing them temporarily to give up social activities or family time in order to work on their dissertation at weekends or during holidays. Students also highlighted the importance of partners and other family members in helping to enable them to find time and giving them emotional and practical support in doing their research project.

## Telling it like it is boxes

We have called these boxes 'telling it like it is' because they provide you with insights based on personal experience rather than abstract knowledge. Many of these insights are based on interviews with real research students and business school supervisors and lecturers from business schools around the UK. In this way we hope to represent both sides of the supervision relationship, including the problems faced by students and how they are helped to overcome them and the advice that supervisors can provide. These boxes will help you to anticipate and resolve research challenges as you move through your dissertation or project.

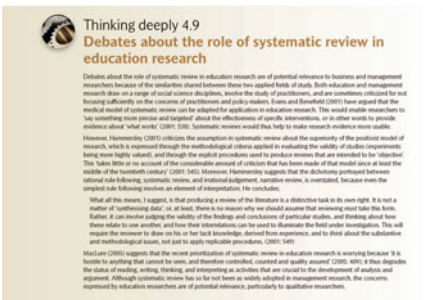
## Tips and skills boxes

Tips and skills boxes provide guidance and advice on key aspects of the research process. They will help you to avoid common research mistakes and equip you with the necessary skills to become a successful business researcher in your life beyond your degree.


Tips and skills
Safety in research

You must bear in mind that, even though the majority of business research carries a low risk of personal harm to the researcher, there are occasions when doing research places you in potentially dangerous situations. You should avoid taking personal risks at all costs and you should resist any attempts to place yourself in situations where personal harm is a possibility. Just as you should ensure that no harm comes to research participants (as prescribed in the discussion of ethical principles in Chapter 1), individuals involved in directing others' research should not place students and researchers in situations in which they might come to harm. Equally, lone researchers should avoid such situations. There are also situations in which there is no obvious reason to think that a situation may be dangerous, but the researcher is faced with a sudden outburst of abuse or threatening behaviour. This can arise when people react relatively unpredictably to an interview question or to being observed. If there are signs that such behaviour is imminent (for example, through body language), begin a withdrawal from the research situation.

R. M. Lee (2004) draws an important distinction between two kinds of danger in fieldwork: ambient and situational. The former refers to situations that are avoidable and in which danger is an ingredient of the context. Situational danger occurs 'when the researcher's presence or activities evoke aggression, hostility or violence from those in the setting' (R. M. Lee 2004: 1285). While problems surrounding safety may be easier to anticipate in the case of ambient danger, they are less easy to foresee in connection with situational danger.


Thinking deeply 4.9
Debates about the role of systematic review in education research

Debates about the role of systematic review in education research are of potential relevance to business and management researchers because of the similarities shared between these two applied fields of study. Both education and management research draw on a range of social science disciplines, involve the study of practitioners, and are sometimes criticized for not focusing sufficiently on the concerns of practitioners and policy-makers. Evans and Benefield (2001) have argued that the medical model of systematic review can be adapted for application in education research. This would enable researchers to 'say something more precise and targeted' about the effectiveness of specific interventions, or in other words to provide evidence about 'what works' (2001: 538). Systematic reviews would thus help to make research evidence more usable.

However, Hammersley (2001) criticizes the assumption in systematic review about the superiority of the positivist model of research, which is expressed through the methodological criteria applied in evaluating the validity of studies (experiments being more highly valued), and through the explicit procedures used to produce reviews that are intended to be 'objective'. This 'takes little or no account of the considerable amount of criticism that has been made of that model since at least the middle of the twentieth century' (2001: 545). Moreover, Hammersley suggests that the dichotomy portrayed between rational rule-following, systematic review, and irrational judgement, narrative review, is overstated, because even the simplest rule following involves an element of interpretation. He concludes:

> What all this means, I suggest, is that producing a review of the literature is a distinctive task in its own right. It is not a matter of 'synthesising data', or, at least, there is no reason why we should assume that reviewing must take this form. Rather, it can involve judging the validity of the findings and conclusions of particular studies, and thinking about how these relate to one another, and how their interrelations can be used to illuminate the field under investigation. This will require the reviewer to draw on his or her tacit knowledge, derived from experience, and to think about the substantive and methodological issues, not just to apply replicable procedures. (2001: 549)

MacLure (2005) suggests that the recent prioritization of systematic review in education research is worrying because 'it is hostile to anything that cannot be seen, and therefore controlled, counted and quality assured' (2005: 409). It thus degrades the status of reading, writing, thinking, and interpreting as activities that are crucial to the development of analysis and argument. Although systematic review has so far not been as widely adopted in management research, the concerns expressed by education researchers are of potential relevance, particularly to qualitative researchers.

## Thinking deeply boxes

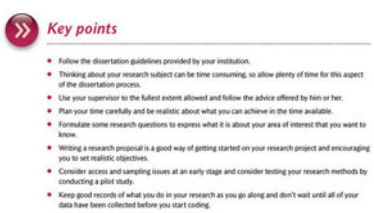
Business research methods can sometimes be complex: to raise your awareness of these complexities, thinking deeply boxes feature further explanation of discussions and debates that have taken place between researchers. These boxes are designed to take you beyond the introductory level and think in greater depth about current research issues.

## Checklists

Many chapters include checklists of issues to be considered when undertaking specific research activities (such as writing a literature review or conducting a focus group), to remind you of key questions and concerns and to help you progress your research project.


Checklist
Planning a research project

- ○ Do you know what the requirements for your dissertation are, as set out by your university or department?
- ○ Have you made contact with your supervisor?
- ○ Have you left enough time for planning, doing, and writing up your research project?
- ○ Do you have a clear timetable for your research project with clearly identifiable milestones for the achievement of specific tasks?
- ○ Have you got sufficient financial and practical resources (for example, money to enable travel to research site, tape recorder) to enable you to carry out your research project?
- ○ Have you formulated some research questions and discussed these with your supervisor?
- ○ Are the research questions you have identified able to be answered through your research project?
- ○ Do you have the access that you require in order to carry out your research?
- ○ Are you familiar with the data analysis software that you will be using to analyse your data?


Key points

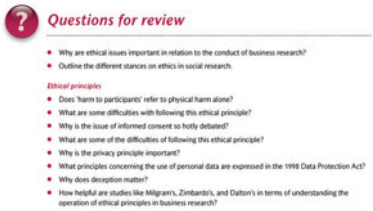
- Follow the dissertation guidelines provided by your institution.
- Thinking about your research subject can be time consuming, so allow plenty of time for this aspect of the dissertation process.
- Use your supervisor to the fullest extent allowed and follow the advice offered by him or her.
- Plan your time carefully and be realistic about what you can achieve in the time available.
- Formulate some research questions to express what it is about your area of interest that you want to know.
- Writing a research proposal is a good way of getting started on your research project and encouraging you to set realistic objectives.
- Consider access and sampling issues at an early stage and consider testing your research methods by conducting a pilot study.
- Keep good records of what you do in your research as you go along and don't wait until all of your data have been collected before you start coding.

## Key points

At the end of each chapter there is a short bulleted summary of crucial themes and arguments explored by that chapter. These are intended to alert you to issues that are especially important and to reinforce the areas that you have covered to date.

## Review questions

Review questions have been included at the end of every chapter to test your grasp of the key concepts and ideas being developed in the text, and help you to reflect on their learning in preparation for coursework and assessment.


Questions for review

- Why are ethical issues important in relation to the conduct of business research?
- Outline the different stances on ethics in social research.

*Ethical principles*

- Does 'harm to participants' refer to physical harm alone?
- What are some difficulties with following this ethical principle?
- Why is the issue of informed consent so hotly debated?
- What are some of the difficulties of following this ethical principle?
- Why is the privacy principle important?
- What principles concerning the use of personal data are expressed in the 1998 Data Protection Act?
- Why does deception matter?
- How helpful are studies like Milgram's, Zimbardo's, and Dalton's in terms of understanding the operation of ethical principles in business research?

# Guided tour of the Online Resource Centre

*www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/*

*For students*

## Research guide

This interactive research guide takes you step-by-step through each of the key research phases, ensuring that you do not overlook any research step, and providing guidance and advice on every aspect of business research. The guide features checklists, web links, research activities, case studies, examples, and templates and is conveniently cross-referenced back to the book.





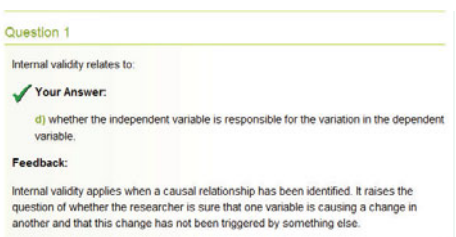


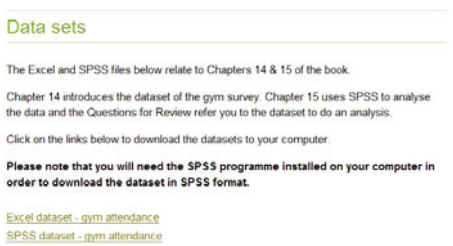
## Interviews with research students

Learn from the real research experiences of students who have recently completed their own research projects! Download video-taped interviews with six undergraduates and two postgraduates from business schools around the UK and hear them describe the research processes they went through and the problems they resolved as they moved through each research phase.

## Multiple-choice questions

The best way to reinforce your understanding of research methods is through frequent and cumulative revision. As such, a bank of self-marking multiple-choice questions is provided for each chapter of the text, and include instant feedback on your answers to help strengthen your knowledge of key research concepts.



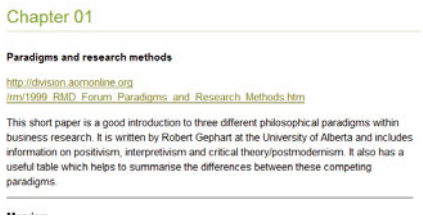




## Dataset

The dataset that relates to the gym survey in Chapters 14 and 15 of the text is available in both Excel and SPSS format for use in coursework and independent self-study.

## Web links

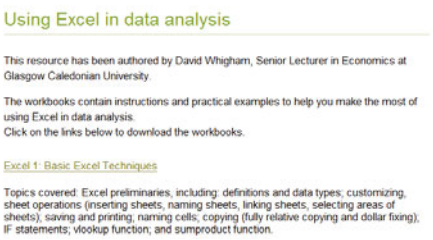
A series of annotated web links organized by chapter are provided to point you in the direction of important articles, reviews, models, and research guides. These links will help keep you informed of the latest issues and developments in business research.


Chapter 01

**Paradigms and research methods**

http://division.aomonline.org/rm/1999_RMD_Forum_Paradigms_and_Research_Methods.htm

This short paper is a good introduction to three different philosophical paradigms within business research. It is written by Robert Gephart at the University of Alberta and includes information on positivism, interpretivism and critical theory/postmodernism. It also has a useful table which helps to summarise the differences between these competing paradigms.


Using Excel in data analysis

This resource has been authored by David Whigham, Senior Lecturer in Economics at Glasgow Caledonian University.

The workbooks contain instructions and practical examples to help you make the most of using Excel in data analysis.
Click on the links below to download the workbooks.

Excel 1: Basic Excel Techniques

Topics covered: Excel preliminaries, including: definitions and data types; customizing, sheet operations (inserting sheets, naming sheets, linking sheets, selecting areas of sheets); saving and printing; naming cells; copying (fully relative copying and dollar fixing); IF statements; vlookup function; and sumproduct function.

## Guide to using Excel in data analysis

This interactive workbook takes you through step-by-step from the very first stages of using Excel to more advanced topics such as charting, regression, and inference, giving guidance and practical examples.

*For registered adopters of the text*

## Lecturer's guide

A comprehensive lecturer's guide is included to assist both new and experienced instructors in their teaching. The guide includes reading guides, lecture outlines, further coverage of difficult concepts, and teaching activities, and is accompanied by instructions on how the guide may be most effectively implemented in the teaching program.


OXFORD Bryman & Bell *Business Research Methods 3rd edition*

**Lecturer's Guide:**
**Chapter 3 – Planning a research project and formulating research questions**


Main Research Methods Associated With Qualitative Research

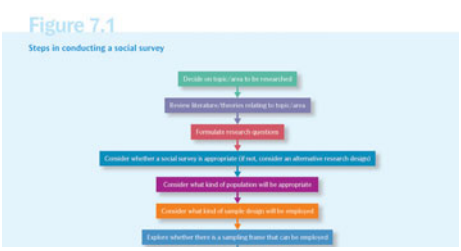
- Ethnography/participant observation
- Qualitative interviewing
- Focus groups
- Language-based approaches: conversation analysis; discourse analysis

## PowerPoint® slides

A suite of customizable PowerPoint slides is included for use in lecture presentations. Arranged by chapter theme and tied specifically to the lecturer's guide, the slides may also be used as hand-outs in class.

## Figures and tables from the text

All figures and tables from the text have been provided in high resolution format for downloading into presentation software or for use in assignments and exam material.


Figure 7.1

Steps in conducting a social survey

# About the book

## The focus of the book

This is a book that will be of use to all students in business schools who have an interest in understanding research methods as they are applied in management and organizational contexts. *Business Research Methods* gives students essential guidance on how to carry out their own research projects and introduces readers to the core concepts, methods, and values involved in doing research. The book provides a valuable learning resource through its comprehensive coverage of methods that are used by experienced researchers investigating the world of business as well as introducing some of the philosophical issues and ethical controversies that these researchers face. So, if you want to learn about business research methods, from how to formulate research questions to the process of writing up your research, *Business Research Methods* will provide a clear, easy to follow, and comprehensive introduction.

The book is based on the first-named author's *Social Research Methods*, which was written for students of the social sciences. The success of this book and the interest that it attracted in business schools led to this book, which has entailed an extensive adaptation for students of business and management studies. This has meant: completely changing the examples that are used in the book; removing the discussion of issues that are not central to the concerns of students of business and management; and including completely new sections on areas that are important to business school students. It has also been comprehensively updated to reflect the growing use of the Internet as a medium for conducting research and also as a source of data, so that there is now a chapter that deals with these newly emerging research opportunities (Chapter 26) and Chapters 3, 4, and 17 on the process of doing a research project. In writing the third edition of the book we have responded to the many helpful comments we have received on the second edition from colleagues and students. These comments have prompted us to revise the discussion of case study methods in Chapter 2 to better reflect their prominence in management research. We have also responded to the growing interest in historical and visual analyses of organizations in the past five years by revising our treatment of these topics in Chapters 12, 17, and 21 and introducing some new examples. Finally, we have reviewed the latest developments in mixed methods research and e-research in Chapters 25 and 26, because these areas of business research are changing quite rapidly.

Because this book is written for a business school audience, it is intended to reflect a diverse range of subject areas, including organizational behaviour, marketing, strategy, organization studies, and HRM. In using the term *Business Research Methods*, we have in mind the kinds of research methods that are employed in these fields, and so we have focused primarily on methods that are used in areas of business and management that have been influenced by the social sciences. Consequently, we do not claim to cover the full gamut of business research methods. Certain areas of business and management research, such as economic research and financial and accounting research, are not included within our purview. Our reason for not including such disciplines is that they are very much self-contained fields with their own traditions and approaches that do not mesh well with the kinds of methods that we deal with in this book.

This book has been written with two groups of readers in mind. First, undergraduates and postgraduates in business and management schools and departments who invariably take at least one module or course in the area of research methods. This book covers a wide range of research methods, approaches to research, and ways of carrying out data analysis, so it is likely to meet the needs of the vast majority of students in this position. Research methods are not tied to a particular nation; many, if not most, of the principles transcend national boundaries.

The second group, which in most cases overlaps with the first, comprises undergraduates and postgraduates who do a research project as part of the requirement for their degree programmes. This can take many forms, but one of the most common is that a research project is carried out and a dissertation based on the investigation is presented. In addition, students are often expected to carry out mini-projects in relation to certain modules.

The chapters in Part One of the book have been written specifically for students who are doing research projects, especially Chapters 3 and 4, which include a discussion of formulating research questions and reviewing the literature, reinforcing topics that we see as key to the whole process of doing research. The accent in the chapters in Parts Two and Three is on the practice of business research and the methods that may be used. These chapters will be extremely useful in helping students make informed decisions about doing their research. In addition, when each research method is examined, its uses and limitations are explored in order to help students to make these decisions. Chapter 27 in Part Four provides advice on writing up business research.

In addition to providing students with practical advice on doing research, the book also explores the nature of business and management research. This means that it attends to issues relating to fundamental concerns about what doing business and management research entails. For example:

- Is a natural science model of the research process applicable to the study of business and management?
- If not, why not?
- Why do some people feel it is inappropriate to employ such a model?
- If we do use a natural science model, does that mean that we are making certain assumptions about the nature of the world of business and management?
- Equally, do those writers and researchers who reject such a model have an alternative set of assumptions about the nature of the world of business and management?
- What is the politics of management research and how does this frame the use of different methods and the kinds of research findings that are regarded as legitimate and acceptable?
- To what extent do researchers' personal values have an impact upon the research process?
- Should we worry about the feelings of people outside the research community concerning what we do to people during our investigations?

These and many other issues impinge on research in a variety of ways and will be confronted at different stages throughout the book. While knowing how to do research—how best to design a questionnaire, how to observe, how to analyse documents, and so on—is crucial to an education in research methods, so too is a broad appreciation of the wider issues that impinge on the practice of business and management research. Thus, so far as we are concerned, the role of an education in research methods is not just to provide the skills that will allow you to do your own research, but also to provide you with the tools for a critical appreciation of how research is done and with what assumptions. One of the most important abilities that an understanding of research methods and methodology provides is an awareness of the need not to take evidence that you come across (in books, journals, and so on) for granted.

## Why use this book?

There are likely to be two main circumstances in which this book is in your hands at the moment. One is that you have to study one or more modules in research methods for a degree in business and management or there are methodological components to one of your taught modules (for example, a course in organizational behaviour). The other is that you have to do some research, perhaps for a dissertation or project report, and you need some guidelines about how to approach your study. You may find yourself reading this book for either or both of these reasons during the course of doing your degree. It may be that you are wondering why you need to study research methods and why people like the authors of this book do business research at all. In the rest of this section, we will try briefly to address these issues and concerns but before that, what do we mean by 'business research'?

## What do we mean by 'business research'?

The term 'business research', as it is used in this book, refers to *academic* research on topics relating to questions that are relevant to the field of business and management and have a social science orientation. We include in this category research in areas such as organizational behaviour, marketing, accounting, HRM, and strategy, which draw on the social sciences for conceptual and theoretical inspiration.

In the previous paragraph, the word 'academic' is emphasized, and there is an important reason for this in setting out this book's approach. Academics carry out research to investigate research questions that arise out of the existing literature on topics (such as 'What are the implications of low levels of job satisfaction in a workforce?'), or that may be influenced by developments in business and management generally (such as 'What is the impact of the introduction of Total Quality Management

in companies?'). We discuss in some detail in Chapter 3 what research questions are and how they arise in the research process, but for the time being the purpose of this discussion is to make it clear that, when we use the term 'business research', we are referring to research conducted for the illumination of issues that arise in the context of academic thinking in the area of business and management. The term 'business research' in this book does not include research conducted by organizations for the investigation of issues of concern to them. For example, commercial organizations conduct market research to explore how their products or services are received or when they want to launch a new product or service. This is not the kind of research that we focus on in this book. This is not because we view such research as unimportant or irrelevant or because we view it as inferior in some way. Rather, it is because the rationales for doing such research and the ways in which it is done are different from academic research. Consequently, it would be difficult to incorporate both approaches to business and management research within the covers of a manageable volume. This is the reason why almost all of our examples in this book are based on academic research. To include commercial business research would make the book unmanageable and potentially confusing.

We do not wish to drive a wedge between academic research and that originating from business and management practitioners. Indeed, there is a great deal of soul-searching among academics in the business and management field concerning this issue (see, in particular, the June 2006 special issue of the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*), and in Chapter 1 we address further some of these issues in the context of a discussion of what is known as Mode 1 and Mode 2 forms of knowledge (the first is more or less synonymous with traditional academic research in this area, the second is research conducted by academics *and* practitioners to address applied organizational issues and problems). The point of this discussion is to highlight our point of departure and our rationale for emphasizing academic research in this field. It is also worth pointing out that there is often considerable cross-fertilization between academic and practitioner-based research in the field. Practitioners often draw on methodological developments in academic fields like sampling to refine their techniques, while a research method like focus groups was largely developed in the applied context of market research before making its way into academic research. Further, the skills from one domain are invariably transferable to the other.

## Why do business research?

The rationale for doing business research has been outlined in the previous subsection to a certain extent. Academics conduct such research because, in the course of reading the literature on a topic or when reflecting on what is going on in modern organizations, questions occur to them. They may notice a gap in the literature or an inconsistency between a number of studies or an unresolved issue in the literature. These provide common circumstances that act as springboards for business research in academic circles. Another is when there is a development in organizations that provides an interesting point of departure for the investigation of a research question. For example, noting the widespread use of email in organizations, a researcher might be interested in studying its introduction in an organization in order to explore whether it is accompanied by changes in the nature and quality of interaction. In exploring this issue, the researcher is likely to draw upon the literature on technology and organizational change to provide insights into how to approach the issue. As we say in Chapter 1, there is no single reason why people do business research of the kind emphasized in this book, but at its core, it is done because there is an aspect of understanding of what goes on in organizations that is to some extent unresolved.

## Why is it important to study methods?

For some students, there does not seem a great deal of point to studying research methods. They might take the view that, if they have to conduct an investigation, why not adopt a 'need to know' approach? In other words, why not just look into how to do your research when you are on the verge of carrying out your investigation? Quite aside from the fact that this is an extremely risky approach to take, it neglects the opportunities that training in research methods offers. In particular, you need to bear in mind the following:

- Training in research methods sensitizes you to the *choices* that are available to business and management researchers. In other words, it makes you aware of the range of research methods that can be employed to collect data and the variety of approaches to the analysis of data. Such awareness will help you to make the most appropriate choices for your project, since you need to be aware of when it is appropriate or inappropriate to employ particular techniques of data collection and analysis.

- Training in research methods provides you with an awareness of the 'dos' and 'don'ts' when employing a particular approach to collecting or analysing data. Thus, once you have made your choice of research method (for example, a questionnaire), you need to be aware of the practices you need to follow in order to implement that method properly. You also need to be aware of the many pitfalls to be avoided.
- Training in research methods provides you with insights into the overall research process. It provides a general vantage point for understanding how research is done. As such, it illuminates the various stages of research, so that you can plan your research and think about such issues as how your research methods will connect with your research questions.
- Training in research methods provides you with an awareness of what constitutes good and poor research. It therefore provides a platform for developing a critical awareness of the limits and limitations of research that you read. This can be helpful in enabling you to evaluate research critically what you read about for modules in fields like organizational behaviour and HRM.
- The skills that training in research methods imparts are transferable ones. How to sample, how to design a questionnaire, how to conduct semi-structured interviewing or focus groups and so on are skills that are relevant to research in other spheres (such as firms, public-sector organizations, and so on).

Thus, we feel that training in research methods has much to offer and that readers of this book will recognize the opportunities and advantages that it provides.

## The structure of the book

Business and management research has many different traditions, one of the most fundamental of which is the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research. This distinction lies behind the structure of the book and the way in which issues and methods are approached.

The book is divided into four parts.

- **Part One** deals with basic ideas about the nature of business and management research and with the considerations in planning and starting a student research project.
  - Chapter 1 examines such issues as the nature of the relationship between theory and research and the degree to which a natural science approach is appropriate for the study of business and management. It is here that the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is first encountered. They are presented as different ***research strategies*** with different ways of conceptualizing how business and management should be studied. It is also shown that there is more to the distinction between them than whether or not an investigation includes the collection of quantitative data.
  - In Chapter 2, the idea of a ***research design*** is introduced. This chapter allows an introduction to the basic frameworks within which social research is carried out, such as social survey research, case study research, and experimental research. These first two chapters provide the basic building blocks for the rest of the book.
  - Chapter 3 takes you through the main steps that are involved in planning and designing a research project and offers advice on how to manage this process. It also includes a discussion of ***research questions***—what they are, why they are important, and how they come to be formulated.
  - Chapter 4 is designed to help you to get started on your research project by introducing the main steps in conducting a critical review of the literature.
  - Chapter 5 considers the ways in which ethical issues impinge on researchers and the kinds of principles that are involved.
- **Part Two** contains ten chapters concerned with quantitative research.
  - Chapter 6 explores the nature of quantitative research and provides a context for the later chapters. The next four chapters are largely concerned with aspects of social survey research.
  - Chapter 7 deals with sampling issues: how to select a sample and the considerations that are involved in assessing what can be inferred from different kinds of sample.
  - Chapter 8 is concerned with the kind of interviewing that takes place in survey research—that is, structured interviewing.
  - Chapter 9 covers the design of questionnaires. This involves a discussion of how to devise self-completion questionnaires, such as postal questionnaires.
  - Chapter 10 examines the issue of how to ask questions for questionnaires and structured interviews.
  - Chapter 11 covers structured observation, which is a method that has been developed for the systematic observation of behaviour. It has been especially

influential in the areas of business and management research.

- Chapter 12 presents content analysis, a method that provides a rigorous framework for the analysis of a wide range of documents.
- Chapter 13 deals with the analysis of data collected by other researchers and by official bodies. The emphasis then switches to the ways in which we can analyse quantitative data.
- Chapter 14 presents a range of basic tools for the analysis of quantitative data. The approach taken is non-technical. The emphasis is upon how to choose a method of analysis and how to interpret the findings. No formulae are presented.
- Chapter 15 shows you how to use computer software —in the form of SPSS, the most widely used software for analysing quantitative data—in order to implement the techniques you learned in Chapter 14.

- **Part Three** contains eight chapters on aspects of qualitative research.
  - Chapter 16 has the same role in relation to Part Three as Chapter 6 has in relation to Part Two. It provides an overview of the nature of qualitative research and as such supplies the context for the other chapters in this part.
  - Chapter 17 is concerned with ethnography and participant observation, which is the source of some of the best-known studies in business and management research. The two terms are often used interchangeably and refer to the immersion of the researcher in a social setting.
  - Chapter 18 deals with the kinds of interview used by qualitative researchers, typically semi-structured interviewing or unstructured interviewing.
  - Chapter 19 explores the focus group method, whereby groups of individuals are interviewed on a specific topic.
  - Chapter 20 examines two ways in which qualitative researchers analyse language: conversation analysis and discourse analysis.
  - Chapter 21 deals with the examination of documents in qualitative research, including historical documents. The emphasis then shifts to the interpretation of documents.
  - Chapter 22 explores some approaches to the analysis of qualitative data.
  - Chapter 23 shows you how to use computer software to assist with your analysis.

It is striking that certain issues recur across Parts Two and Three: interviewing, observation, documents, and data analysis. However, as you will see, quantitative and qualitative research constutite contrasting approaches to these activities.

- **Part Four** contains chapters that go beyond the quantitative/qualitative research contrast.
  - Chapter 24 deals with some of the ways in which the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is less fixed than is sometimes supposed.
  - Chapter 25 presents some ways in which quantitative and qualitative research can be combined to produce what is referred to as mixed methods research.
  - Chapter 26 is concerned with e-research, including the use of the Internet as a context or platform for conducting research.
  - Chapter 27 has been included to help with writing up research, an often neglected area of the research process.

## How to use the book

The book can be used in a number of different ways. However, we would encourage all readers at least to look at the chapter guide at the beginning of each chapter to decide whether or not they need the material covered there and also to gain a sense of the range of issues the book addresses.

- ***Wider philosophical and methodological issues***. If you do not need to gain an appreciation of the wider philosophical context of enquiry in business and management research, Chapter 1 can largely be ignored. If an emphasis on such issues *is* something you are interested in, Chapter 1 along with Chapter 24 should be a particular focus of attention.
- ***Survey research***. Chapters 6 to 15 deal with the kinds of topics that need to be addressed in survey research. In addition, Chapter 14 examines ways of analysing the kinds of data that are generated by survey researchers. Also, sections in Chapter 26 explore issues to do with the conduct of surveys via email or the World Wide Web.
- ***Practical issues concerned with doing quantitative research***. This is the province of the whole of Part Two. In addition, you would be advised to read Chapter 2, which maps out the main research designs employed, such as experimental and cross-sectional designs that are frequently used by quantitative researchers.

- ***Practical issues concerned with doing qualitative research***. This is the province of the whole of Part Three. In addition, you would be advised to read Chapter 2, which maps out the main research designs employed, such as the case study, which is frequently employed in qualitative research.
- ***Analysing data***. Chapters 14 and 22 explore the analysis of quantitative and qualitative research data, respectively, while Chapters 15 and 23 introduce readers to the use of computer software in this connection. It may be that your module on research methods does not get into issues to do with analysis, in which case these chapters may be omitted.
- ***Formulating research questions***. As we have already said in this Guide, we see the asking of research questions as fundamental to the research process. Advice on what research questions are, how they are formulated, where they come from, and so on is provided in Chapter 3.
- ***Doing your own research project***. We hope that the whole of this book will be relevant to students doing their own research projects or mini-projects, but Chapters 3 and 4 are the ones where much of the specific advice relating to this issue is located. In addition, we would alert you to the Tips and skills and Telling it like it is features that have been devised and to the checklists of points to remember.
- ***Writing***. This issue is very much connected with the last point. It is easy to forget that your research has to be ***written up***. This is as much a part of the research process as the collection of data. Chapter 27 discusses a variety of issues to do with writing up business research, including writing up your research as a dissertation or similar product.
- ***Wider responsibilities of researchers***. It is important to bear in mind that as researchers we bear responsibilities to the people and organizations that are the recipients of our research activities. Ethical issues are raised at a number of points in this book and Chapter 5 is devoted to a discussion of them. The fact that we have given over an entire chapter to a discussion of ethics is a measure of the importance of these issues and the need for all researchers to be aware of them. There is also a discussion of the ethical issues involved in Internet research in Chapter 26.
- ***The quantitative/qualitative research contrast***. We use the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research in two ways: as a means of organizing the research methods and methods of analysis available to you; and as a way of introducing some wider philosophical issues about business and management research. Chapter 1 outlines the chief areas of difference between quantitative and qualitative research. These are followed up in Chapter 16. We also draw attention to some of the limitations of adhering to an excessively strict demarcation between the two research strategies in Chapter 24, while Chapter 25 explores ways of integrating them. If you do not find it a helpful distinction, these chapters can be avoided or skimmed.
- ***The Internet***. The Internet plays an increasingly important role in the research process. At various junctures we provide important websites where key information can be gleaned. We also discuss in Chapter 4 the use of the Internet as a route for finding references for your ***literature review***, itself another important phase of the research process. You will find that many of the references that you obtain from an online search will then themselves be accessible to you in electronic form. Finally, Chapter 26 discusses the use of the Internet as a source of material that can be analysed and as a platform for doing research in the form of such research methods as Web surveys, electronic focus groups, and email surveys.

# Acknowledgements

This book has benefited from the large number of students who have shared their ideas about, experiences of, and problems encountered in business and management and social science research. These individuals, many of them unwittingly, have made a significant contribution to the development of the text.

Alan Bryman's teaching of research methods at Loughborough University and the University of Leicester and Emma Bell's experience in business and management schools at the universities of Warwick, London, and Bath have provided major sources of inspiration in this respect, and we would therefore like to express our appreciation for the support provided by all these institutions, as well as by our current institutions, which are respectively the University of Leicester and the University of Exeter.

As this is the third edition of this book, the number of colleagues who have provided advice and suggestions grows ever longer. We would particularly like to acknowledge colleagues Alan Beardsworth, Michael Billig, Dave Buchanan, and Cliff Oswick, for their constructive comments on various parts of the book, as well as Dave McHugh, Steve Carter, and Nick Wylie for their imaginative contribution to the Online Research Guide that accompanies this text. In addition, our thanks go to the referees for their detailed and helpful comments on the second edition of the book; their criticisms and advice, informed by substantial experience of teaching research methods to business and management students, have proved invaluable. We would also like to say a big thank you to Albert Mills and Tony Yue for generously allowing us to use some of their valuable insights into historical research, which they developed in the Canadian adaptation of this book, in the section in Chapter 21 on historical analysis (Bryman, Bell, Mills, and Yue © Oxford University Press Canada 2011. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.) We are also grateful to Samantha Warren and Jonathan Schroeder for their advice on visual methods, to Jane Davison and Samantha Warren for kindly agreeing to let us use photographs from their research, and to Karam Ram and Jaguar Heritage for permission to reproduce images from the Jaguar Archive. We would also like to thank Roland Miller for his technical support in relation to the student interviews, and the students themselves who agreed to be interviewed about their research experiences. In addition, we are grateful to the business and management librarians at Queen Mary, Bath, and Exeter for their invaluable advice and suggestions concerning Chapter 4 of the book. We would also like to thank the business school lecturers who shared their experiences of supervising students through the dissertation research process and agreed for us to share their expertise in the 'Telling it like it is' feature of this book.

We also wish to thank several people at or connected with Oxford University Press: Patrick Brindle and Angela Adams, both formerly of OUP, and Kirsty Reade, Nicki Sneath, and their editorial team, for their support and enthusiasm, their firm handling of the book's production, and their astute and careful copy-editing of the typescript, on this and previous editions.

However, we have reserved our most important acknowledgements until last. Alan would like to thank Sue and Sarah as usual for their support in putting up with him without a murmur and Emma would like to thank Scott for helping her to remember why she does research. Alan would also like to thank Sue for her wonderful work on the proofs for this book. Finally, we take full responsibility for the final text, including its inevitable deficiencies, from which everyone except us must, of course, be absolved.

# Reviewers

This text has benefited from the thoughtful criticisms and valuable insights of a range of research methods experts across the country, and Oxford University Press would like to make special mention of all the reviewers, website contributors, and focus group participants for their contribution to this book:

- Raphaël Akamavi, University of Hull
- David Arnott, University of Warwick
- Deba Bardhan Correia, University of Buckingham
- Helen Batley, University of Westminster
- Peter Campkin, Northampton University
- Steve Carter, University of Derby
- Chris Hammond, University of Hull
- Auður Hermannsdóttir, University of Iceland, School of Business
- Jason Heyes, University of Birmingham
- Jon Hindmarsh, Kings College, London University
- Steve Jackson, Southampton Solent University
- Mike Marinetto, Cardiff University
- David McHugh, University of Central Lancashire
- Carmel de Nahik, Coventry University
- Peter Nicholls, University of the West of England
- Rosare Pagamo, Manchester Metropolitan University
- Savvas Papagiannidis, Newcastle University
- Stephen Perkins, University of Bedfordshire
- Robert Raeside, Napier University
- Kat Riach, University of Essex
- Jennifer Tomlinson, Leeds University
- Peter Urwin, University of Westminster
- Nick Wylie, University of Warwick

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Part One

Part One of this book is concerned with two ideas that will recur again and again during the course of the book—the idea of research strategy and the idea of research design. Chapter 1 outlines a variety of considerations that impinge on the practice of business and management research and relates these to the issue of research strategy. Two research strategies are identified: quantitative and qualitative research. Chapter 2 identifies the different kinds of research design that are employed in business research. Chapters 3 and 4 are concerned with providing advice to students on some of the issues that they need to consider if they have to prepare a dissertation based upon a relatively small-scale research project. Chapter 3 deals with planning and formulating research questions, while Chapter 4 is about how to get started in reviewing the literature. Chapter 5 deals with ethics in business research, including the principles and considerations that need to be taken into account in designing a small-scale research project.

These chapters provide some basic conceptual building blocks that you will return to at many points in the book. Some of the issues in Chapters 1 and 2 may seem remote from the issues of research practice dealt with in Chapters 3, 4, and 5, but they are in fact important and fundamental aspects of how we think about business research.

*This page intentionally left blank*

1

# Business research strategies

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 4
- The nature of business research 5

**Theory and research** 7
- What type of theory? 7
- Deductive and inductive theory 11

**Epistemological considerations** 15
- A natural science epistemology: positivism 15
- Interpretivism 16

**Ontological considerations** 20
- Objectivism 21
- Constructionism 21

**Relationship of epistemology and ontology to business research** 23
- Competing paradigms 24

**Research strategy: quantitative and qualitative** 26

**Influences on the conduct of business research** 29
- Personal values 29
- The politics of business research 32
- Practical considerations 35

***Key points*** 36
***Questions for review*** 37



## Chapter outline

The chief aim of this chapter is to show that a variety of considerations enter into the process of doing business research. The distinction that is commonly drawn among writers on and practitioners of business research between **quantitative research** and **qualitative research** is explored in relation to these considerations. This chapter explores:

- the nature of the relationship between theory and research, in particular whether theory guides research (known as a **deductive** approach) or whether theory is an outcome of research (known as an **inductive** approach);
- *epistemological issues*—that is, ones to do with what is regarded as appropriate knowledge about the social world; one of the most crucial aspects is the question of whether or not a natural science model of the research process is suitable for the study of the social world;
- *ontological issues*—that is, ones to do with whether the social world is regarded as something external to social actors or as something that people are in the process of fashioning;
- the ways in which these issues relate to the widely used distinction in the social sciences between two types of **research strategy**: quantitative and qualitative research; there is also a preliminary discussion, which will be followed up in Chapter 24, that suggests that, while quantitative and qualitative research represent different approaches to business research, we should be wary of driving a wedge between them;
- the ways in which *values* and *practical issues* also impinge on the business research process.

# Introduction

This book is about business research. However, business research does not exist in a vacuum. Not only is it shaped by what is going on in the real world of business and management; it is also shaped by many of the intellectual traditions that shape the social sciences at large. In this chapter we explore some of these intellectual traditions in the form of some of the philosophical ideas that exert an influence on how business research can and should be conducted and how organizations are understood. It is these issues that provide the central focus of this chapter. These are sometimes quite difficult issues, but they are crucial to appreciating the bases of business research.

This book attempts to equip students who have some knowledge about management and business with an appreciation of how research in this area is conducted and what the research process involves. This involves situating business research in the context of the social science disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and economics, which inform the study of business and its specific fields, which include marketing, HRM, strategy, organizational behaviour, accounting and finance, industrial relations, and operational research.

Two points are of particular relevance here. First, the methods of management and business research are closely tied to different visions of how organizational reality should be studied. Methods are not simply neutral tools: they are linked to the ways in which social scientists envision the connection between different viewpoints about the nature of social reality and how it should be examined. However, it is possible to overstate this point. While methods are not neutral, they are not entirely suffused with intellectual inclinations either. Secondly, there is the question of how research methods and practice connect with the wider social scientific enterprise. Research data are invariably collected in relation to something. The 'something' is often a pressing organizational problem, such as the effect of mergers and acquisitions on corporate culture or the impact of the introduction of new technology on employee motivation. Another scenario occurs when research is done on a topic when a specific opportunity arises. For example, the NASA

space shuttle *Challenger* disaster in 1986 stimulated business and management research into the decision-making processes and group dynamics that had led to the decision to launch the shuttle, despite indications that there were significant safety problems (Shrivasta et al. 1988; Vaughan 1990). Yet another stimulus for research can arise out of personal experiences. Lofland and Lofland (1995) note that many research publications emerge out of the researcher's personal biography. Certainly, Bryman traces his interest in Disney theme parks back to a visit to Disney World in Florida in 1991 (Bryman 1995, 1999), while his interest in the representation of social science research in the mass media (Fenton, Bryman, and Deacon 1998) can almost certainly be attributed to a difficult experience with the press reported in Haslam and Bryman (1994). Similarly, the experience of having been involved in the implementation of a quality management initiative in an NHS hospital trust prompted Bell to explore the meaning of badging in an organizational context (Bell, Taylor, and Thorpe 2002). Finally, research data are also collected in relation to social scientific theory, and this raises the issue of the nature of the relationship between theory and research.

## The nature of business research

It would be easy to 'cut to the chase' and explore the nature of methods in business research and provide the reader with advice on how best to choose between and implement them. After all, many people might expect a book with the title of the present one to be concerned mainly with the ways in which the different methods in the business researcher's arsenal can be employed. But the practice of business research does not exist in a bubble, hermetically sealed off from the social sciences and the various intellectual allegiances that their practitioners hold. In particular, the diverse nature of management and business scholarship has led to considerable disagreement about how its research claims ought to be evaluated. Hence, some writers have suggested that management research can be understood only as an applied field because it is concerned not only with understanding the nature of organizations but also with solving problems that are related to managerial practice. An interesting point about the relationship between theory and practice in business and management research is made by Gummesson (2000), who sees academic researchers and management consultants as groups of knowledge workers who each place a different emphasis on theory and practice. 'Backed by bits and pieces of theory, the consultant contributes to practice, whereas the scholar contributes to theory supported by fragments of practice' (2000: 9), but fundamentally their roles are closely related. Gummesson sees researchers and consultants as involved in addressing problems that concern management, thereby reinforcing the view that the value of both groups is determined by their ability to convince the business community that their findings are relevant and useful. Tranfield and Starkey (1998) argue that much management research has lost touch with the concerns and interests of practitioners and that management and business researchers must relearn how to be responsive to them in order for their research to retain a value and a purpose. In recent years, there has been much debate around the concept of evidence-based management (Key concept 1.1). A leading advocate of evidence-based management, Denise Rousseau, argues that managers need to move their 'professional decisions away from personal preference and unsystematic experience toward those based on the best available scientific evidence' (Rousseau 2006: 256). However, other commentators have been more cautious, arguing that the changing and pluralistic nature of organizations makes it difficult to identify generally applicable best practices. Reay, Berta, and Kohn (2009) carried out a review of articles that used evidence-based management and found that none of them demonstrated a link between the adoption of evidence-based management and improved organizational performance. They conclude that it is unreasonable to expect managers to adopt evidence-based management 'in advance of evidence demonstrating its impact on organizational performance' (Reay, Berta, and Kohn 2009: 13). Still other commentators are concerned that evidence-based management privileges certain kinds of research evidence, in particular those based on positivistic, quantitative studies. For example, Learmonth (2008) argues that evidence-based management constitutes a backlash against methodological pluralism by limiting what counts as legitimate research. He further argues that evidence-based management obscures the fact that management research is not a neutral science, but rather is constructed in line with the interests of those who hold and seek to maintain power. In other words, '"evidence" is never just there, waiting for the researcher to find. Rather it is always necessary to construct it in some way—a process that is inherently ideological and always contestable—not merely a technical, "scientific" task' (Learmonth 2009: 95). Finally, he argues that, because management research operates from within conflicting paradigms (see Key concept 1.16), it is not possible to develop a consensus-based notion of evidence that transcends these fundamental differences.



## Key concept 1.1
## What is evidence-based management?

Evidence-based management is 'the systematic use of the best available evidence to improve management practice' (Reay, Berta, and Kohn 2009). The concept has been developed since the 1990s in the medical and health research fields to try to reduce variation in clinical practice and to ensure that diagnostic and therapeutic procedures are based on the best research evidence. It was later expanded into other fields such as education (Sebba 2004; Petticrew and Roberts 2006). There are four sources of information that contribute to evidence-based management:

1. practitioner expertise and judgement;
2. evidence from the local context;
3. critical evaluation of the best available research evidence;
4. perspectives of those who may be affected by the decision (Briner, Denyer, and Rousseau 2009: 19).

Point 3 is based on the practice of systematic review (see Chapter 4), which is a cornerstone of evidence-based management practice. The success of evidence-based management depends in part on the transfer and translation of research findings into practice, a practice referred to as 'knowledge translation'. While responsibility for knowledge translation rests partly on management researchers, who need to make sure they highlight the practical implications of their research findings, it also depends on managers being engaged with research. Reay, Berta, and Kohn (2009) argue that 'it is crucial to teach students how to evaluate research evidence so that when they become practicing managers they will be able to understand and appropriately apply new research evidence in practice' (Reay, Berta, and Kohn 2009: 16).

However, other writers would suggest that management and business research is too concerned with lengthy 'fact-finding' exercises and is insufficiently guided by theoretical concerns. They would argue that application is not a primary purpose to which management research should be directed (Burrell 1997). For these scholars, making research relevant to managerial practice ought not to be the main aim of academic study (Clegg 2002; Hinings and Greenwood 2002). They believe that research should not be dictated by non-academic interests, such as professional associations and government agencies, who may seek to influence its focus and guide its development in a way that is 'useful' to current practice but susceptible to the whim of current management fads and fashions. Others suggest that the applied nature of management and business research has influenced the development of the field in a way that makes it overly pragmatic and susceptible to users' agendas.

A further debate that influences understandings of the role of management and business research stems from the thesis developed by Gibbons et al. (1994) concerning how scientific knowledge is produced. These writers suggest that the process of knowledge production in contemporary society falls into two contrasting categories or types, which they describe as 'mode 1' and 'mode 2' knowledge production, which may be summarized as follows:

- *Mode 1*. Within this traditional, university-based model, knowledge production is driven primarily by an academic agenda. Discoveries tend to build upon existing knowledge in a linear fashion. The model makes a distinction between theoretically pure and applied knowledge, the latter being where theoretical insights are translated into practice. Only limited emphasis is placed on the practical dissemination of knowledge, because the academic community is defined as the most important audience or consumer of knowledge.
- *Mode 2*. This model draws attention to the role of *trans-disciplinarity* in research, which it assumes is driven by a process that causes the boundaries of single contributing disciplines to be exceeded. Findings are closely related to context and may not easily be replicated, so knowledge production is less of a linear process. Moreover, the production of knowledge is not confined to academic institutions. Instead, it involves academics, policy-makers, and practitioners, who apply a broad set of skills and experiences in order to tackle a shared problem. This means knowledge is disseminated more rapidly and findings are more readily exploited in order to achieve practical advantage.

Although mode 2 research is intended to exist alongside mode 1, rather than to replace it, some have suggested that management and business research is more suited to mode 2 knowledge production (Tranfield and Starkey 1998).

These debates frame a series of questions about the nature and purpose of management and business research that any new researcher needs to be aware of. For example:

- What is the aim or function of business research?
- Is it conducted primarily in order to find ways of improving organizational performance through increased effectiveness and efficiency?
- Or is it mainly about increasing our understanding of how organizations work, and their impact on individuals and on society?
- Who are the audiences of business research?
- Is business research conducted primarily for managers and, if not, for whom else in organizations is it conducted?
- Or is it done in order to further the academic development of business and management as a field or even as a discipline?

These questions are the subject of considerable ongoing academic debate about the nature and status of business research. Being aware of them is important in understanding what influences your choice of research topic and how you address it. Another way of understanding this issue is by thinking about the practices of scholars who do business and management research. There are four points that can be made in relation to this.

1. In order to evaluate the quality of management and business research it is necessary to know as much as possible about researchers' *own* role in this process—including how they collected and analysed the data and the theoretical perspective that informed their interpretation of it. This understanding relies on examination of methods used by business researchers, which is why, throughout this book, we have used real examples of published research to illustrate how researchers deal with and justify these methodological choices.
2. This leads to a second point in relation to the use of examples. Business research methods tend on the whole to be more eclectic and explained in less detail than in some other social sciences such as sociology. Perhaps this is due to the emergent nature of the field or because it draws from such a diverse range of disciplines. In practice, it means that novice researchers can sometimes find it difficult to identify examples of existing research to inform their own practice. One of the reasons we use so many examples in this book is to draw attention to the range of methods that business researchers use in a way that can be understood by those who are new to this field of study.
3. The third point relates to the kinds of methods used in business research. In some instances, it is hard to identify examples of particular research methods, while in others, such as the **case study** method, there are numerous studies to choose from. We believe, however, that this creates opportunities for new researchers to make use of less popular or less commonly used methods to gain insight into a research problem. In other words, we hope that, through reading this book, students will possibly be encouraged to use research methods that are less common, as well as those that are well established in the field.
4. Finally, despite the sometimes limited availability of examples that illustrate the use of various research methods, we have tried to confine our choice of examples to business and management. This is because by getting to know how other researchers in the field have approached its study we can build up an understanding of how research methods might be improved and developed.



# Theory and research

Characterizing the nature of the link between theory and research is by no means a straightforward matter. There are several issues at stake here, but two stand out in particular. First, there is the question of what form of theory one is talking about. Secondly, there is the matter of whether data are collected to test or to build theories.

## What type of theory?

The term 'theory' is used in a variety of ways, but its most common meaning is as an explanation of observed regularities, to explain, for example, why women and ethnic minorities are under-represented in higher-paid

managerial positions, or why the degree of alienation caused by the introduction of new technology varies according to the methods of production that are involved. However, such theories do not in themselves constitute a theoretical *perspective*, which is characterized by a higher level of abstraction in relation to research findings. Examples of this kind of theory include structural-functionalism, **symbolic interactionism**, critical theory, poststructuralism, structuration theory, and so on. What we see here is a distinction between theories of the former type, which are often called *theories of the middle range* (Merton 1967), and *grand theories*, which operate at a more abstract and general level.

According to Merton, grand theories offer few indications to researchers as to how they might guide or influence the collection of empirical evidence. So, if someone wanted to test a theory or to draw an inference from it that could be tested, the level of abstractness is likely to be so great that the researcher would find it difficult to make the necessary links with the real world. For research purposes, then, Merton argued that grand theories are of limited use in connection with social research, although, as the example in Research in focus 1.2 suggests, an abstract theory like structuration theory (Giddens 1984) can have some pay-off in research terms. Instead, middle-range theories are 'intermediate to general theories of social systems which are too remote from particular classes of social behavior, organization and change to account for what is observed and to those detailed orderly descriptions of particulars that are not generalized at all' (Merton 1967: 39).

By and large, then, it is not grand theory that typically guides management and business research. Middle-range theories are much more likely to be the focus of empirical enquiry. In fact, Merton formulated the idea as a means of bridging what he saw as a growing gulf between theory (in the sense of grand theory) and empirical findings. This is not to say that there were no middle-range theories before he wrote: there definitely were, but what Merton did was to seek to clarify what is meant by 'theory' when social scientists write about the relationship between theory and research.



## Research in focus 1.2
## Grand theory and researching project-based organizations

Giddens's (1984) structuration theory represents an attempt to bridge the gulf between notions of structure and agency in social life and is suggested to have the potential to overcome the dichotomy within organizational studies between the 'structural' perspectives of traditional theories of bureaucracy and the 'interactional' perspectives that emphasize informal processes of talk and action (Ranson, Hinings, and Greenwood 1980). The theory has substantially informed a number of empirical studies of managerial control, agency, and strategy, including Pettigrew's (1985) study of strategic change at ICI, which portrays environmental structures as both enabling and constraining human action. By combining a focus on the role of executive leadership and managerial action with a concern for the contexts in which managers work, Pettigrew suggests that the actions of managers are framed by the business and economic environment encountered by the organization.

Bresnen, Goussevskaia, and Swan (2004) use structuration theory in their analysis of project-based organization by applying it to a longitudinal case study of a construction firm involved in implementing a new managerial initiative to understand how the **relationship** between structural form and individual agency influences the diffusion and enactment of managerial knowledge. They argue that 'project management practices can be seen as the outcome of a complex, recursive relationship between structural attributes and individual agency, in which actors (in this case project managers and project team members) draw upon, enact, and hence reproduce (and, under certain circumstances modify) the structural properties of the system in which they are embedded' (2004: 1540). Their analysis highlights the influence of the structural conditions of decentralization that created circumstances in which individual actors could act upon the new managerial initiative by drawing on shared local perspectives. They conclude that 'the rules of signification and legitimization . . . gave project managers considerable latitude in being able to choose how to respond to the introduction of the new practices . . . project managers were able to transform the initiative and the implementation process with responses like "playing the scoring game"' (2004: 1549). Their analysis suggests that the diffusion of new managerial knowledge in project-based organizations is shaped by a complex interplay between structural conditions and actors' social practices.

Middle-range theories, unlike grand ones, operate in a limited domain. Whether it is a perspective on strategic choice or labour process theory (see Research in focus 1.3), they vary in the purpose of their application. In other words, they fall somewhere between grand theories and empirical findings. They represent attempts to understand and explain a limited aspect of social life. For example, contingency theory has been used widely in management and business research to explain the interrelationships among subsystems, as well as the relationship between the organization and its environment. The theory relies on a number of assumptions that guide research: first, there is no one best way to organize; second, one particular way of organizing is not equally effective under all conditions; and, third, in order to be most effective, organizational structures should be appropriate to the type of work and the environmental conditions faced by the organization (Schoonhoven 1981). However, contingency theory has been applied in different ways and for different purposes. Some researchers, such as Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), have used it descriptively to show that factors within the environment must be taken into account. Others, such as in the field of leadership, have applied the theory in a normative sense, adopting a solution-seeking focus and providing a guide to managerial action based on 'best fit' in a particular situation (e.g. Fiedler 1967). A normative stance suggests that, although factors within the environment should be taken into account, it is up to managers to make decisions about how they respond to these in order to achieve the impact on organizational performance that they want.

However, even the grand/middle-range distinction does not entirely clarify the issues involved in asking the deceptively simple question of 'What is theory?' This is



## Research in focus 1.3

## Labour process theory: an example of a contested middle-range theory

In the sociology of work, labour process theory can be regarded as a middle-range theory. The publication of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (Braverman 1974) inaugurated a stream of thinking and research around the idea of the labour process and on the degree to which there has been an inexorable trend towards greater and greater control over the manual worker and the deskilling of manual labour. A conference volume of much of this work was published as *Labour Process Theory* (Knights and Willmott 1990). P. Thompson (1989) described the theory as having four elements: the principle that the labour process entails the extraction of surplus value; the need for capitalist enterprises constantly to transform production processes; the quest for control over labour; and the essential conflict between capital and labour. Labour process theory has been the focus of considerable empirical research (e.g. Knights and Collinson 1985) and the focus of considerable ongoing debate within business and management studies, most recently about whether or not labour process theory can account for the conditions of greater autonomy and discretion associated with 'knowledge work' (Sewell 2005).

Sewell believes that the central problem of labour process theory relates to the 'indeterminacy of labour', which he describes as the gap between an employee's capacity to labour and what they actually end up doing—the job of management control being to reduce this gap. He argues that under conditions of knowledge work the focus has changed from a struggle over the indeterminacy of labour to a struggle over the indeterminacy of knowledge. 'The vision of workers being trusted to devise their own work tasks is . . . at odds with the traditional conception of the dynamics of control' (2005: 691). Thus the fear that drives management under conditions of knowledge work is that employees are holding back their knowledge, rather than their labour, from the organization. By going beyond the traditional preoccupation of labour process theorists with the control of physical effort, Sewell argues that we are able to subject the managerial notion of empowerment to critique. However, in a response to Sewell, Thompson and Ackroyd (2005) argue that Sewell's representation of labour process theory is a 'shallow misrepresentation of this "classical" canon' (2005: 705). They argue that nowhere in this literature has there been a view that physical labour is the focus of managerial control. They go on to suggest that the distinction between mind and body, or hand and head, made by Sewell reproduces a crude dualism that labour process theorists have long since abandoned. This debate illustrates the extent of contestation that has arisen in recent years between the different academic groups involved in the sociology of work regarding labour process theory.

because the term 'theory' is frequently used in a manner that means little more than the background literature in an area of social enquiry. To a certain extent, this point can be taken to apply to contingency theory mentioned above. For example, Schoonhoven (1981) suggests that it is not a theory at all, in the sense of being a well-developed set of interrelated propositions. Willmott (1990) suggests that contingency theory is based on empirical evidence without any acknowledgement of the social theories that affect the political realities of organizations, and so it is unable to deal with complex organizational problems.

In many cases, the relevant background literature relating to a topic fuels the focus of an article or book and thereby acts as the equivalent of a theory. In Ghobadian and Gallear's (1997) article on Total Quality Management (TQM) and the competitive position of small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), there are no, or virtually no, allusions to theories. Instead, the literature informs the generation of research questions in relation to what the authors perceive to be a neglected topic, as the majority of TQM literature tends to focus on large companies. The researchers are then able to seek to resolve inconsistencies between different findings in relation to small and large companies in terms of the impact of TQM on competitive position. Other ways in which background literature influences the focus of research include: the researcher may spot a neglected aspect of a topic; certain ideas may not previously have been tested; the researcher may feel that existing approaches being used for research on a topic are deficient; and so on.

Social scientists are sometimes prone to being dismissive of research that has no obvious connections with theory—in either the grand or middle-range senses of the term. Such research is often dismissed as naive **empiricism** (see Key concept 1.4). It would be harsh, not to say inaccurate, to brand as naive empiricism the numerous studies in which the publications-as-theory strategy is employed, simply because their authors have not been preoccupied with theory. Such research is conditioned by and directed towards research questions that arise out of an interrogation of the literature. The data collection and analysis are subsequently geared to the illumination or resolution of the research issue or problem that has been identified at the outset. The literature acts as a proxy for theory. In many instances, theory is latent or implicit in the literature.



## Key concept 1.4
## What is empiricism?

The term 'empiricism' is used in a number of ways, but two stand out. First, it is used to denote a general approach to the study of reality that suggests that only knowledge gained through experience and the senses is acceptable. In other words, this position means that ideas must be subjected to the rigours of testing before they can be considered knowledge. The second meaning of the term is related to this and refers to a belief that the accumulation of 'facts' is a legitimate goal in its own right. It is this second meaning that is sometimes referred to as 'naive empiricism'.

Indeed, research that appears to have the characteristics of the 'fact-finding exercise' should not be prematurely dismissed as naive empiricism either. For example, research in the field of industrial relations that focuses on the detail of current employment practices in a variety of sectors or cultural contexts has sometimes been criticized for its attention to facts, which is suggested to be accompanied by a lack of theoretical development (Marsden 1982; Godard 1994). The problem with this, according to Marsden (1982), is that 'empiricists tend to assume that theory will somehow arise from the facts "like steam from a kettle". But facts are never given, they are selected or produced by theory' (Marsden 1982: 234) and consequently industrial relations has not managed to develop sufficient theory to establish its status as a discipline distinct from economics and sociology. To explore the accuracy of such claims in a contemporary context, Frege (2005) looked at patterns of publication within the field of industrial relations in leading American, German, and British journals between 1970 and 1973 and 1994 and 2000. She found that empirical publications were much more common in the USA (72 per cent in the 1970s and 91 per cent in the 1990s) than in Germany (41 per cent over both time periods), with Britain in between (72 per cent over both periods). However, looking more closely at the nature of these empirical papers reveals differences in the type of empirical work that was carried out in different countries. Specifically, Frege detects a shift away from empirical-descriptive articles towards empirical-deductive and empirical-inductive

papers in the US journals. She concludes, 'the notion of what is empirical research shifted over time away from purely descriptive towards more sophisticated analytical work' (Frege 2005: 194).

Raising the question of what empiricism is invites consideration of another question: in so far as any piece of research is linked to theory, what was the role of that theory? Up to this point, we have tended to write as though theory is something that guides and influences the collection and analysis of data. In other words, research is done in order to answer questions posed by theoretical considerations. But an alternative position is to view theory as something that occurs after the collection and analysis of some or all of the data associated with a project. We begin to see here the significance of a second factor in considering the relationship between theory and research—whether we are referring to deductive or inductive theory.

## Deductive and inductive theory

*Deductive theory* represents the most common view of the nature of the relationship between theory and research. The researcher, on the basis of what is known about a particular domain and of theoretical considerations in relation to that domain, deduces a **hypothesis** (or hypotheses) that must then be subjected to empirical scrutiny. Embedded within the hypothesis will be concepts that will need to be translated into researchable entities. The social scientist must both skilfully deduce a hypothesis and then translate it into operational terms. This means that the social scientist needs to specify how data can be collected in relation to the concepts that make up the hypothesis.

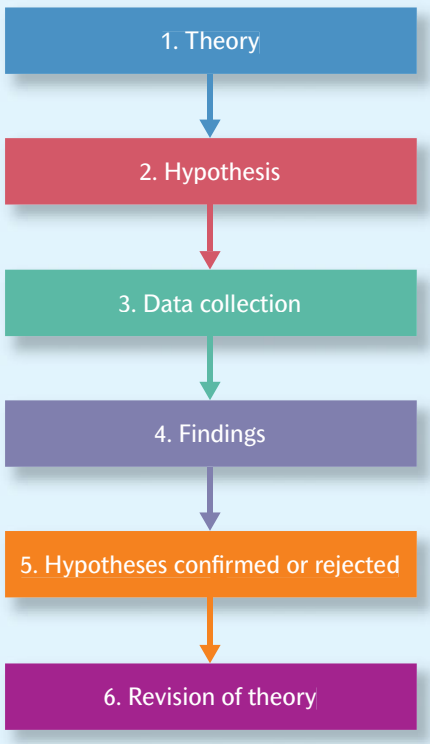
This view of the role of theory in relation to research is very much the kind of role that Merton had in mind in connection with middle-range theory, which, he argued, 'is principally used in sociology to guide empirical inquiry' (Merton 1967: 39). Theory and the hypothesis deduced from it come first and drive the process of gathering data (see Research in focus 1.5 for an example of a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and data). The sequence can be depicted as one in which the steps outlined in Figure 1.1 take place.

The last step involves a movement that is in the opposite direction from deduction—it involves *induction*, as the researcher infers the implications of his or her findings for the theory that prompted the whole exercise. The findings are fed back into the stock of theory and the research findings associated with a certain domain of enquiry. This can be seen in the case of Whittington's (1989) case study research into strategic choice within the domestic appliance and office furniture industries. Whittington's approach is primarily deductive, since it is based on the contention that a critical realist approach to strategic choice enables recognition of the importance of plural and contradictory social structures for human agency and thus avoids determinism. However, as he points out towards the end of his book, 'after the empirical interlude of the last four chapters, it is time now to return to the theoretical fray' (1989: 244) to assess how well deterministic and realist approaches to strategic choice account for the behaviour within the eight case study firms. At this stage he claims that, although dominant actors within the firms 'began from their structural positions within the capitalist enterprise, this starting point was neither unambiguous or exhaustive' (1989: 282). This finding thus confirms his central proposition that these organizational structures were able to be converted into 'the effective instruments of private agency'.

A further point to bear in mind is that the deductive process appears very linear—one step follows the other in a clear, logical sequence. However, there are many

Figure 1.1

**The process of deduction**





## Research in focus 1.5
## An example of a deductive study

Parboteeah, Hoegl, and Cullen's (2009) study tests the influence of religious values on individuals' work obligation norms. They argue that, 'given the prominent role of religion in societies, it is imperative that international management research acknowledges its potential influences on how organizations and people within them operate' (2009: 121). Based on a review of the literature on how major religions around the world view work, the researchers suggest that 'all major religions prescribe work as an individual's obligation' (2009: 123). This leads them to propose that, 'if an individual is raised and educated in a country with a stronger religious environment, that individual is more likely to get exposed to values consistent with stronger work obligation than a similar individual residing in a country with a weaker religious environment. Individuals in stronger religious environments are thus more likely to see work as an obligation' (2009: 124). The researchers use the 'country institutional profile', a theoretical model developed by Kostova (1999) to explain how a country's government policies, shared knowledge, and values affect domestic business activity. This enabled them to specify the contextual determinants of work obligation in different countries and to propose the following five hypotheses:

- *Hypothesis 1.* There is a **positive relationship** between the cognitive aspect of religious institutions and work obligation.
- *Hypothesis 2.* There is a positive relationship between the normative aspect of religious institutions and work obligation.
- *Hypothesis 3.* There is a **negative relationship** between the regulative aspect of religion and work obligation.
- *Hypothesis 4.* Religious pluralism moderates the relationship between the cognitive aspect of religion and work obligations, such that the effect of the cognitive component decreases with more religious pluralism.
- *Hypothesis 5.* Religious pluralism moderates the relationship between the normative aspect of religion and work obligations, such that the effect of the cognitive component decreases with more religious pluralism.

The researchers used data from the World Values Survey conducted in 2000, which involves a consortium of universities from around the world working together to conduct political and social research. The **sample** comprised 62,218 individuals in 45 different countries. The researchers designed a **questionnaire** that was translated into different languages and used as the basis for **secondary analysis** of the existing dataset. The results revealed that hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 were supported. However, the effects of religious pluralism were found to be mixed, and hypothesis 4 was not supported. The researchers conclude that religious institutions do have a significant influence on the work-related attitudes of individuals, regardless of the individual's personal religiosity. They note that this finding is consistent with Max Weber's (1930) thesis on the importance of religious values in shaping the development of modern capitalism.

instances where this is not the case. There are several reasons why a researcher's view of the theory or literature may change as a result of the analysis of the collected data:

- new theoretical ideas or findings may be published by others before the researcher has generated his or her findings;
- the relevance of a set of data for a theory may become apparent only *after* the data have been collected;
- the data may not fit with the original hypotheses.

The Hawthorne studies (see Research in focus 2.8), undertaken at the Western Electric Company's Hawthorne plant between 1927 and 1932, aptly illustrate how deductive research can sometimes produce unexpected findings. In the early stages of this research, which explored the human effects of work and working conditions (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939), the aim was to explore the relationship between conditions of work and the incidence of fatigue and monotony among employees. In order to test this relationship, a series of experiments were undertaken to establish the effects of variables such as lighting, temperature, humidity, and hours of sleep that could be isolated and measured separately. These early experiments involved adjusting the level of artificial illumination in departments at stated intervals in order to see if this had any effect on efficiency of production. However, researchers were not able to make sense of the changes in productivity of workers, which increased and remained high despite manipulation of a **range** of variables such as temperature

and lighting. This led researchers to move away from the 'test room method' and to adopt a more qualitative strategy based on interview and observation. By modifying their approach towards this more inductive position, researchers were able to make sense of the data through generation of an alternative hypothesis that focused on the importance of informal social relationships. Eventually, this led to the development of an alternative method for the study of the informal work group. In the Bank Wiring Observation Room investigators spent a total of six months observing informal social relationships within a group of male operators. The Hawthorne research thus made an important methodological contribution to the study of work organizations by allowing research questions and methods to evolve and change during the course of the investigation (Schwartzman 1993).

Similarly, in a study of the impact of Total Quality Management (TQM) on the competitive position of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Ghobadian and Gallear (1997) examine the differences between SMEs and large organizations and explore the relationship between organizational size and the implementation of TQM. A series of research questions about this relationship were developed through analysis of the TQM literature. Although Ghobadian and Gallear describe their research as deductive, they also point out that classic hypotheses were not easily formulated, because the variables and issues identified were mainly contextual and therefore did not translate into simple constructs. They therefore shift towards a more inductive approach in the later stage of the study, using four case studies to explore the relevance of the research questions and to develop a ten-step framework for the implementation of TQM in SMEs.

This may all seem rather surprising and confusing. There is a certain logic to the idea of developing theories and then testing them. In everyday contexts, we commonly think of theories as things that are quite illuminating but that need to be tested before they can be considered valid or useful. In point of fact, however, while the process of deduction outlined in Figure 1.1 does undoubtedly occur, it is better considered as a general orientation to the link between theory and research. As a general orientation, its broad contours may frequently be discernible in business research, but it is also the case that we often find departures from it.

However, in some research *no* attempt is made to follow the sequence outlined in Figure 1.1. Some researchers prefer an approach to the relationship between theory and research that is primarily *inductive*. With an inductive stance, theory is the *outcome* of research. In other words, the process of induction involves drawing generalizable inferences out of observations. To put it crudely, whereas deduction entails a process in which:

theory → observations/findings,

with induction the connection is reversed:

observations/findings → theory.

However, just as deduction entails an element of induction, the inductive process is likely to entail a modicum of deduction. Once the phase of theoretical reflection on a set of data has been carried out, the researcher may want to collect further data in order to establish the conditions in which a theory will and will not hold. Such a general strategy is often called *iterative*: it involves a weaving back and forth between data and theory. It is particularly evident in **grounded theory**, which will be examined in Chapter 22, but in the meantime the basic point is to note that induction represents an alternative strategy for linking theory and research, although it contains a deductive element too.

However, as with 'theory' in connection with the deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, we have to be cautious about the use of the term in the context of the inductive strategy too. While some researchers undoubtedly develop theories, it is equally necessary to be aware that very often what one ends up with can be little more than empirical generalizations of the kind Merton (1967) wrote about. Inductive researchers often use a grounded theory approach to the analysis of data and to the generation of theory. This approach, which was first outlined by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is frequently regarded as especially strong in terms of generating theories out of data. This contrasts with the nature of many supposedly inductive studies, which generate interesting and illuminating findings but whose theoretical significance is not entirely clear. They provide insightful empirical generalizations, but little theory. Secondly, in much the same way that the deductive strategy is associated with a quantitative research approach, an inductive strategy of linking data and theory is typically associated with a qualitative research approach. Research in focus 1.6 is an example of research that can be classified as inductive in the sense that it uses a grounded analysis of focus groups, interview data, and participants' drawings to develop a theoretical understanding of the metaphors that workers use to describe their emotional experience of bullying. However, as will be shown below, this characterization of the inductive strategy as associated with qualitative research is not entirely straightforward: not only does much qualitative research *not* generate theory, but also theory is often used as a background to qualitative investigations.



## Research in focus 1.6
## An example of an inductive study

Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, and Alberts (2006) were interested in understanding what bullying feels like to those who are the target of it. They suggest that workplace bullying encompasses a range of persistent abusive workplace behaviours that are subsumed under a number of labels including harassment and mobbing, which involves a group of co-workers ganging up on an employee. However, they argue that previous research has tended to overlook the emotional experience of bullied workers. Using focus groups, in-depth interviews, and methods of creative drawing, they asked participants to tell their stories about workplace bullying. As they explain, through early interpretation of the data 'we found that participants often spoke metaphorically' (2006: 157). This led them to focus on the metaphors that bullied workers used to articulate and explore the emotional pain associated with these experiences. This in turn led them to revise their research question to: 'What types of metaphorical language do participants use to describe the emotional experience of bullying?' The authors suggest the complexity and diversity of workplace bullying meant 'an inductive approach is especially worthwhile for making sense of messy interactive processes, such as bullying, that have no definite "face"' (2006: 174). Through this they identified a series of metaphorical themes in the data that reflected bullied workers' emotional experiences, including the bullying process as noxious substance, the bully as demon, and the target of bullying as a slave or animal. Importantly, the researchers did not commence their study with a view that metaphors were the key to understanding the emotional experience of workplace bullying, but rather came to this conclusion through the collection and analysis of the data. Importantly, by focusing on metaphorical images of bullying, they shift the focus 'from how researchers label workplace abuse to how those targeted perceive and make sense of abuse and its impacts' (2006: 173).

It is useful to think of the relationship between theory and research in terms of deductive and inductive strategies. However, as the previous discussion has implied, the issues are not as clear-cut as they are sometimes presented. To a large extent, deductive and inductive strategies are possibly better thought of as tendencies rather than as a hard-and-fast distinction. But these are not the only issues that impinge on the conduct of business research.



## Telling it like it is
## An inductive research project

Nirwanthi's approach was highly inductive in that she was guided by themes that emerged from her data to determine her eventual focus on informal organization as her chosen research subject: 'My interviewees kept stressing the importance of their personal contacts within the firm and also externally with other organizations like airlines that the company uses to export the fish. They have to rely very, very strongly on these contacts. I found out that they didn't need formal structures or solutions and that they were doing fine with the informal methods that they were using already.'

Nirwanthi's case is somewhat unusual in that her research questions (see Chapter 4) were quite loosely formed during the early stages of her research project. It was not until she had collected the data that, with the help of her supervisor, she was able to theorize her findings. As we shall discuss in Chapter 4, there are risks associated with taking such an approach, but Nirwanthi's experience does illustrate the potential for adopting a highly inductive approach in designing a small-scale research project.



*To find out more about Nirwanthi's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# Epistemological considerations

An epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline. A particularly central issue in this context is the question of whether or not the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures, and ethos as the natural sciences. The position that affirms the importance of imitating the natural sciences is invariably associated with an epistemological position known as **positivism** (see Key concept 1.7).



## Key concept 1.7
## What is positivism?

Positivism is an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond. But the term stretches beyond this principle, though the constituent elements vary between authors. However, positivism is also taken to entail the following principles:

1. Only phenomena and hence knowledge confirmed by the senses can genuinely be warranted as knowledge (the principle of phenomenalism).
2. The purpose of theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested and that will thereby allow explanations of laws to be assessed (the principle of deductivism).
3. Knowledge is arrived at through the gathering of facts that provide the basis for laws (the principle of inductivism).
4. Science must (and presumably can) be conducted in a way that is value free (that is, objective).
5. There is a clear distinction between scientific statements and normative statements and a belief that the former are the true domain of the scientist.

This last principle is implied by the first because the truth or otherwise of normative statements cannot be confirmed by the senses.

## A natural science epistemology: positivism

The doctrine of positivism is extremely difficult to pin down and therefore to outline in a precise manner, because it is used in a number of ways by authors. For some writers, it is a descriptive category—one that describes a philosophical position that can be discerned in research—though there are still disagreements about what it comprises; for others, it is a pejorative term used to describe crude and often superficial data collection.

It is possible to see in the five principles in Key concept 1.7 a link with some of the points that have already been raised about the relationship between theory and research. For example, positivism entails elements of both a deductive approach (2) and an inductive strategy (3). Also, a fairly sharp distinction is drawn between theory and research. The role of research is to test theories and to provide material for the development of laws. Pugh (1983), for example, describes the research task as entailing the collection of data upon which to base generalizable propositions that can be tested (see Research in focus 1.8). But both of these connections between theory and research carry with them the implication that it is possible to collect observations in a manner that is not influenced by pre-existing theories. Moreover, theoretical terms that are not directly amenable to observation are not considered genuinely scientific; they must be susceptible to the rigours of observation. All this carries with it the implication of greater epistemological status being given to observation than to theory.



## Research in focus 1.8
## Positivism in action

In his reflections upon the Aston Programme, Pugh (1983: 45) describes himself as an 'unreconstructed positivist' guided by the belief that organizations exist as concrete entities about which data can be collected. This 'appeal to data' is underpinned by a distinction between facts and values, the former being the goal towards which data collection is directed, leading to the development of a 'conceptual framework' made up of 'analytical constructs' that can be used to analyse the regularities of the data. As a result, conclusions can be drawn about the 'structure and functioning of organizations' and the 'behaviour of groups and individuals within them' (1983: 48), thereby contributing to what Pugh describes as the 'subdiscipline' of organizational behaviour. This results in the generation of scientific knowledge, based on generalizable propositions that can be tested against the facts, from which it is possible to discover 'how to organize better'. The main purpose of the Aston studies was therefore to make systematic comparisons across organizations that would enable generalizations about the relationship between organizational size, technology, and structure to be made. The early research was thus an early demonstration of structural contingency theory.

It should be noted that it is a mistake to treat positivism as synonymous with science and the scientific. In fact, philosophers of science and of the social sciences differ quite sharply over how best to characterize scientific practice, and, since the early 1960s, there has been a drift away from viewing it in positivist terms. Thus, when writers complain about the limitations of positivism, it is not entirely clear whether they mean the philosophical term or a scientific approach more generally. **Realism** (in particular, **critical realism**), for example, is another philosophical position that purports to provide an account of the nature of scientific practice (see Key concept 1.9).

The crux of the epistemological considerations that form the central thrust of this section is the rejection by some writers and traditions of the application of the canons of the natural sciences to the study of social reality. A difficulty here is that it is not easy to disentangle the natural science model from positivism as the butt of their criticisms. In other words, it is not always clear whether they are inveighing against the application of a general natural scientific approach or of positivism in particular. There is a long-standing debate about the appropriateness of the natural science model for the study of society, but, since the account that is offered of that model tends to have largely positivist overtones, it would seem that it is positivism that is the focus of attention rather than other accounts of scientific practice (such as critical realism—see Key concept 1.9).

## Interpretivism

**Interpretivism** is a term given to a contrasting **epistemology** to positivism (see Key concept 1.10). The term subsumes the views of writers who have been critical of the application of the scientific model to the study of the social world and who have been influenced by different intellectual traditions, which are outlined below. They share a view that the subject matter of the social sciences—people and their institutions—is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. The study of the social world therefore requires a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order. Wright (1971) has depicted the epistemological clash as being between positivism and **hermeneutics** (a term that is drawn from theology and that, when imported into the social sciences, is concerned with the theory and method of the interpretation of human action). This clash reflects a division between an emphasis on the *explanation* of human behaviour that is the chief ingredient of the positivist approach to the social sciences and the *understanding* of human behaviour. The latter is concerned with the empathic understanding of human action rather than with the forces that are deemed to act on it. This contrast reflects long-standing debates that precede the emergence of the modern social sciences but find their expression in such notions as the advocacy by Max Weber (1864–1920) of a *Verstehen* approach. Weber described sociology as a 'science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects' (1947: 88). Weber's definition seems to embrace both explanation *and* understanding here, but the crucial point is that the task of 'causal explanation' is undertaken with reference to the 'interpretive understanding of social action' rather than to external forces that have no meaning for those involved in that social action. An example of



## Key concept 1.9
## What is realism?

Realism shares two features with positivism: a belief that the natural and the social sciences can and should apply the same kinds of approach to the collection of data and to explanation, and a commitment to the view that there is an external reality to which scientists direct their attention (in other words, there is a reality that is separate from our descriptions of it). There are two major forms of realism:

- *Empirical realism* simply asserts that, through the use of appropriate methods, reality can be understood. As such, it 'fails to recognise that there are enduring structures and generative mechanisms underlying and producing observable phenomena and events' and is therefore 'superficial' (Bhaskar 1989: 2). This is perhaps the most common meaning of the term. When writers employ the term 'realism' in a general way, it is invariably this meaning to which they are referring.
- *Critical realism* is a specific form of realism whose manifesto is to recognize the reality of the natural order and the events and discourses of the social world and holds that 'we will only be able to understand—and so change—the social world if we identify the structures at work that generate those events and discourses . . . These structures are not spontaneously apparent in the observable pattern of events; they can only be identified through the practical and theoretical work of the social sciences' (Bhaskar 1989: 2).

Critical realism implies two things. First, it implies that, whereas positivists take the view that the scientist's conceptualization of reality actually directly reflects that reality, realists argue that the scientist's conceptualization is simply a way of knowing that reality. As Bhaskar (1975: 250) has put it: 'Science, then, is the systematic attempt to express in thought the structures and ways of acting of things that exist and act independently of thought.' Critical realists acknowledge and accept that the categories they employ to understand reality are likely to be provisional. Thus, unlike naive realists, critical realists recognize that there is a distinction between the objects that are the focus of their enquiries and the terms they use to describe, account for, and understand them. Secondly, by implication, critical realists, unlike positivists, are perfectly content to admit into their explanations theoretical terms that are not directly amenable to observation. As a result, hypothetical entities to account for regularities in the natural or social orders (the 'generative mechanisms' to which Bhaskar refers) are perfectly admissible for realists, but not for positivists. What makes critical realism *critical* is that the identification of generative mechanisms offers the prospect of introducing changes that can transform the status quo.



## Key concept 1.10
## What is interpretivism?

*Interpretivism* is taken to denote an alternative to the positivist orthodoxy that has held sway for decades. It is predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action. Its intellectual heritage includes: Weber's notion of *Verstehen*; the hermeneutic–phenomenological tradition; and symbolic interactionism.

an interpretative understanding of leadership is given in Research in focus 1.11. Grint (2000) claims that the concept of leadership can be understood only through understanding the meaning of the concept for those involved in this form of social action. His approach to this subject is thus broadly interpretative.

One of the main intellectual traditions that has been responsible for the anti-positivist position has been



## Research in focus 1.11
## Interpretivism in action

Grint (2000) challenges much of the positivist thinking that has tended to characterize other studies of leadership by arguing that effective leadership relies on the management of subjective meaning. Grint claims that the skills of leadership involve shaping the way that organizational problems are defined and persuading others that this definition is correct.

Using the example of Richard Branson, Grint analyses media coverage and biographical accounts of events that are associated with Branson's business ventures. Grint shows how Branson has instilled ideological commitment to a goal, through building a vision of a company where fun rather than rewards is seen as a reason to be associated with the Virgin brand. Branson has also created an image of himself as a plucky daredevil, attacking the establishment in order to protect the interests of the consumer. Much of Branson's success as a leader, Grint claims, relies on persuasive communication, involving high-profile publicity stunts that help to cement a vision of his leadership in the eyes of employees and consumers. Grint concludes that there is no such thing as 'good' leadership, which can be defined, identified, and measured in terms of the characteristics of the leader. Instead, leadership is primarily a social phenomenon that relies on the subjective interpretations of followers, more than the specific actions of individual leaders. The task of leaders is, therefore, to construct an imaginary community that followers can feel a part of. This relies on the construction of an identity and a narrative that can be used to make sense of organizational events—past, present, and future. Grint's argument is thus founded on an essentially interpretivist epistemological position. This enables him to investigate leadership as a construct that is used to make sense of social action.

**phenomenology**, a philosophy that is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them and how, in particular, the philosopher should bracket out preconceptions in his or her grasp of that world. The initial application of phenomenological ideas to the social sciences is attributed to the work of Alfred Schutz (1899–1959), whose work did not come to the notice of most English-speaking social scientists until the translation from German of his major writings in the 1960s, some twenty or more years after they had been written. His work was profoundly influenced by Weber's concept of *Verstehen*, as well as by phenomenological philosophers, like Husserl. Schutz's position is well captured in the following passage, which has been quoted on numerous occasions:

> The world of nature as explored by the natural scientist does not 'mean' anything to molecules, atoms, and electrons. But the observational field of the social scientist—social reality—has a specific meaning and relevance structure for the beings living, acting, and thinking within it. By a series of common-sense constructs they have pre-selected and pre-interpreted this world which they experience as the reality of their daily lives. It is these thought objects of theirs which determine their behaviour by motivating it. The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men [and women!], living their daily life within the social world. (Schutz 1962: 59)

Two points are particularly noteworthy in this quotation. First, it asserts that there is a fundamental difference between the subject matter of the natural sciences and the social sciences and that an epistemology is required that will reflect and capitalize upon that difference. The fundamental difference resides in the fact that social reality has a meaning for human beings and therefore human action is meaningful—that is, it has a meaning for them and they act on the basis of the meanings that they attribute to their acts and to the acts of others. This leads to the second point—namely, that it is the job of the social scientist to gain access to people's 'common-sense thinking' and hence to interpret their actions and their social world from their point of view. It is this particular

feature that social scientists claiming allegiance to phenomenology have typically emphasized. In the words of the authors of a research methods **text** whose approach is described as phenomenological: 'The phenomenologist views human behavior . . . as a product of how people interpret the world. . . . In order to grasp the meanings of a person's behavior, *the phenomenologist attempts to see things from that person's point of view*' (Bogdan and Taylor 1975: 13–14, emphasis in original).

In this exposition of *Verstehen* and phenomenology, it has been necessary to skate over some complex issues. In particular, Weber's examination of *Verstehen* is far more complex than the above commentary suggests, because the empathetic understanding that seems to be implied above was not the way in which he applied it (Bauman 1978), while the question of what is and is not a genuinely phenomenological approach to the social sciences is a matter of some dispute (Heap and Roth 1973). However, the similarity in the writings of the hermeneutic–phenomenological tradition and of the *Verstehen* approach, with their emphasis upon social action as being meaningful to actors and therefore needing to be interpreted from their point of view, coupled with the rejection of positivism, contributed to a stream of thought often referred to as interpretivism (e.g. Hughes 1990).

*Verstehen* and the hermeneutic–phenomenological tradition do not exhaust the intellectual influences on interpretivism. The theoretical tradition in sociology known as *symbolic interactionism* has also been regarded by many writers as a further influence. Again, the case is not clear-cut. The implications for empirical research of the ideas of the founders of symbolic interactionism, in particular George Herbert Mead (1863–1931), whose discussion of the way in which our notion of self emerges through an appreciation of how others see us, have been hotly debated. There was a school of research, known as the Iowa school, that has drawn heavily on Mead's concepts and ideas, but has proceeded in a direction that most people would prefer to depict as largely positivist in tone (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds 1975). Moreover, some writers have argued that Mead's approach is far more consistent with a natural science approach than has typically been recognized (McPhail and Rexroat 1979). However, the general tendency has been to view symbolic interactionism as occupying similar intellectual space to the hermeneutic–phenomenological tradition and so broadly interpretative in approach. This tendency is largely the product of the writings of Herbert Blumer, a student of Mead's who acted as his mentor's spokesman and interpreter, and his followers (Hammersley 1989; R. Collins 1994). Not only did Blumer coin the term 'symbolic interaction'; he also provided a gloss on Mead's writings that has decidedly interpretative overtones. Symbolic interactionists argue that interaction takes place in such a way that the individual is continually interpreting the symbolic meaning of his or her environment (which includes the actions of others) and acts on the basis of this imputed meaning. In research terms, according to Blumer (1962: 188), 'the position of symbolic interaction requires the student to catch the process of interpretation through which [actors] construct their actions', a statement that brings out clearly his views of the research implications of symbolic interactionism and of Mead's thought.

It should be appreciated that the parallelism between symbolic interactionism and the hermeneutic–phenomenological tradition should not be exaggerated. The two are united in their antipathy for positivism and have in common an interpretative stance. However, symbolic interactionism is, at least in the hands of Blumer and the many writers and researchers who have followed in his wake, a type of social theory that has distinctive epistemological implications; the hermeneutic–phenomenological tradition, by contrast, is best thought of as a general epistemological approach in its own right. Blumer may have been influenced by the hermeneutic–phenomenological tradition, but there is no concrete evidence of this. There are other intellectual currents that have affinities with the interpretative stance, such as the working-through of the ramifications of the works of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (Winch 1958), but the hermeneutic–phenomenological, *Verstehen*, and symbolic interactionist traditions can be considered major influences.

Taking an interpretative stance can mean that the researcher may come up with surprising findings, or at least findings that appear surprising if a largely external stance is taken—that is, a position from outside the particular social context being studied. The Hawthorne studies, referred to earlier in this chapter (see also Research in focus 2.8), provide an interesting example of this, particularly as it was the failure of the investigation to come up with answers that related to the original research questions that stimulated the researchers to change their approach and methods and to adopt a more interpretative epistemological position. Of course, when the social scientist adopts an interpretative stance, he or she is not simply laying bare how members of a social group interpret the world around them. The social scientist will almost certainly be aiming to place the interpretations that have been elicited into a social scientific frame. As the example in Research in focus 1.11 illustrates, there

is a double interpretation going on, whereby the researcher is providing an interpretation of others' interpretations of effective leadership. Indeed, there is a third level of interpretation going on, because the researcher's interpretations have to be further interpreted in terms of the concepts, theories, and literature of a discipline.

The aim of this section has been to outline how epistemological considerations—especially those relating to the question of whether a natural science, and in particular a positivist approach, can supply legitimate knowledge of the social world—are related to research practice. There is a link with the earlier discussion in this chapter about the relationship between theory and research, in that a deductive approach is typically associated with a positivist position. Key concept 1.7 does try to suggest that inductivism is also a feature of positivism (third principle), but, in the working-through of its implementation in the practice of research, it is the deductive element (second principle) that tends to be emphasized. Similarly, the third level of interpretation that a researcher engaged in interpretative research must bring into operation is very much part of the kind of inductive strategy described in the previous section. However, while such interconnections between epistemological issues and research practice exist, it is important not to overstate them, since they represent tendencies rather than definitive points of correspondence. Thus, particular epistemological principles and research practices do not necessarily go hand in hand in a neat, unambiguous manner. For example, although inductive approaches tend to rely on qualitative methods, Hofstede's research study of cultural differences (see Research in focus 1.12) provides an example where this is not the case. This point will be made again on several occasions and will be a special focus of Chapter 24.



## Research in focus 1.12
## An example of an inductive study using quantitative data

Hofstede's (1984) large-scale study of cultural differences between members of a large multinational business organization, which he refers to as the HERMES Corporation but is generally known to be IBM, provides an interesting example of inductive investigation based primarily on the analysis of quantitative data. The survey data were collected between 1967 and 1973, from employees in over forty different countries where HERMES had subsidiaries, producing a total of 116,000 self-completion questionnaires. Statistical analysis based on **factor analysis** formed the basis for Hofstede's development of a theoretical framework consisting of four main **dimensions** on which country cultures differ. He labelled these as power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity. Each dimension was suggested to be statistically independent—that is, a high score on one did not necessarily imply either a high or a low score on the other dimensions. These dimensions were not developed as hypotheses prior to data collection but instead were suggested to have emerged through the process of analysis.



# Ontological considerations

Questions of social **ontology** are concerned with the nature of social entities. The central point of orientation here is the question of whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors. These positions are frequently referred to respectively as **objectivism** and **constructionism**. Their differences can be illustrated by reference to two of the most common and central terms in social science—organization and culture.

## Objectivism

Objectivism is an ontological position that implies that social phenomena confront us as external facts that are beyond our reach or influence (see Key concept 1.13). We can discuss organization or *an* organization as a tangible object. It has rules and regulations. It adopts standardized procedures for getting things done. People are appointed to different jobs within a division of labour. There is a hierarchy. It has a mission statement. And so on. The degree to which these features exist from organization to organization is variable, but in thinking in these terms we are tending to the view that an organization has a reality that is external to the individuals who inhabit it. Moreover, the organization represents a social order in that it exerts pressure on individuals to conform to the requirements of the organization. People learn and apply the rules and regulations. They follow the standardized procedures. They do the jobs to which they are appointed. People tell them what to do and they tell others what to do. They learn and apply the values in the mission statement. If they do not do these things, they may be reprimanded or even fired. The organization is therefore a constraining force that acts on and inhibits its members.



### Key concept 1.13
### What is objectivism?

Objectivism is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors. It implies that social phenomena and the categories that we use in everyday discourse have an existence that is independent or separate from actors.

The same can be said of culture. Cultures and subcultures can be viewed as repositories of widely shared values and customs into which people are socialized so that they can function as good citizens or as full participants. Cultures and subcultures constrain us because we internalize their beliefs and values. In the case of both organization and culture, the social entity in question comes across as something external to the actor and as having an almost tangible reality of its own. It has the characteristics of an object and hence of having an objective reality. To a very large extent, these are the 'classic' ways of conceptualizing organization and culture.

## Constructionism

However, we can consider an alternative ontological position—*constructionism* (see Key concept 1.14). This position challenges the suggestion that categories such as organization and culture are pre-given and therefore confront social actors as external realities that they have no role in fashioning.

Let us take organization first. Strauss et al. (1973), drawing on insights from symbolic interactionism, carried out research in a psychiatric hospital and proposed that it was best conceptualized as a 'negotiated order'. Instead of taking the view that order in organizations is a pre-existing characteristic, they argue that it is worked at. Rules were far less extensive and less rigorously imposed than might be supposed from the classic account of organization. Indeed, Strauss et al. prefer to refer to them as 'much less like commands, and much more like general understandings' (1973: 308). Precisely because relatively little of the spheres of action of doctors, nurses, and other personnel was prescribed, the social order of the hospital was an outcome of agreed-upon patterns of action that were themselves the products of negotiations between the different parties involved. The social order is in a constant state of change because the hospital is 'a place where numerous agreements are continually being terminated or forgotten, but also as continually being established, renewed, reviewed, revoked, revised. . . . In any pragmatic sense, this is the hospital at the moment: this is its social order' (Strauss et al. 1973: 316–17). The authors argue that a preoccupation with the formal properties of organizations (rules, organizational charts, regulations, roles) tends to neglect the degree to which order in organizations has to be accomplished in everyday interaction, though this is not to say that the formal properties have *no* element of constraint on individual action.

Much the same kind of point can be made about the idea of culture. Instead of culture being seen as an external reality that acts on and constrains people, it can be



## Key concept 1.14
## What is constructionism?

*Constructionism* is an ontological position (often also referred to as constructivism) which asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision.

In recent years, the term has also come to include the notion that researchers' own accounts of the social world are constructions. In other words, the researcher always presents a specific version of social reality, rather than one that can be regarded as definitive. Knowledge is viewed as indeterminate. The discussion of **postmodernism** in Chapter 27 further examines this viewpoint. This sense of constructionism is usually allied to the ontological version of the term. In other words, these are linked meanings. Both meanings are antithetical to *objectivism* (see Key concept 1.13), but the second meaning is also antithetical to *realism* (see Key concept 1.9). The first meaning might be thought of usefully as constructionism in relation to the social world; the second as constructionism in relation to the nature of knowledge of the social world (and indeed the natural world).

Increasingly, the notion of constructionism in relation to the nature of knowledge of the social world is being incorporated into notions of constructionism, but in this book we will be using the term in relation to the first meaning, whereby constructionism is presented as an ontological position in relating to social objects and categories—that is, one that views them as socially constructed.

taken to be an emergent reality in a continuous state of construction and reconstruction. Becker (1982: 521), for example, has suggested that 'people create culture continuously. . . . No set of cultural understandings . . . provides a perfectly applicable solution to any problem people have to solve in the course of their day, and they therefore must remake those solutions, adapt their understandings to the new situation in the light of what is different about it.' Like Strauss et al., Becker recognizes that the constructionist position cannot be pushed to the extreme: it is necessary to appreciate that culture has a reality that 'persists and antedates the participation of particular people' and shapes their perspectives, but it is not an inert objective reality that possesses only a sense of constraint: it acts as a point of reference but is always in the process of being formed.

Neither the work of Strauss et al. nor that of Becker pushes the constructionist argument to the extreme. Each admits to the pre-existence of their objects of interest (organization and culture, respectively). However, in each case we see an intellectual predilection for stressing the active role of individuals in the social construction of social reality. Not all writers adopting a constructionist position are similarly prepared to acknowledge the existence or at least importance of an objective reality. Walsh, for example, has written that 'we cannot take for granted, as the natural scientist does, the availability of a preconstituted world of phenomena for investigation' and must instead 'examine the processes by which the social world is constructed' (1972: 19). It is precisely this apparent split between viewing the social world as an objective reality and as a subjective reality in a continuous state of flux that Giddens sought to straddle in formulating his idea of structuration (see Research in focus 1.2).

Constructionism also suggests that the categories that people employ in helping them to understand the natural and social world are in fact social products. The categories do not have built-in essences; instead, their meaning is constructed in and through interaction. Thus, a category like 'masculinity' might be treated as a social construction. This notion implies that, rather than being treated as a distinct inert entity, masculinity is construed as something whose meaning is built up during interaction. That meaning is likely to be a highly ephemeral one, in that it will vary according to both time and place. This kind of stance frequently displays a concern with the language that is employed to present categories in particular ways. It suggests that the social world and its categories are not external to us, but are built up and constituted in and through interaction. This tendency can be seen particularly in **discourse analysis**, which is examined in Chapter 20. As Potter (1996: 98) observes: 'The world . . . is *constituted* in one way or another as people talk it, write it and argue it.' This sense of constructionism

is highly antithetical to realism (see Key concept 1.9). Constructionism frequently results in an interest in the representation of social phenomena. Research in focus 1.15 provides an illustration of this idea in relation to the representation of the position of middle managers during the late 1990s.



## Research in focus 1.15
## Constructionism in action

Much research attention has been devoted in recent years to considering the impact of delayering and downsizing on middle management. Some studies have drawn attention to increased job insecurity experienced by middle managers in the late 1990s and the rising levels of stress experienced by those who remain in employment. Others have struck a more optimistic tone, suggesting that managerial work can be transformed through delayering into a more strategic, intrinsically motivating form. These pessimistic and optimistic predictions of the future of middle management have formed the basis for much empirical testing and debate.

However, adopting a social constructionist framework, Thomas and Linstead (2002) suggest an alternative way of thinking about the 'reality' of middle management based on the assumption that the term itself is a social construct. This leads them to a focus on the ways in which middle managers' identity is continually being created and contested through prevailing discourses. In other words, they are interested in understanding how managers make sense of the language and practice that is associated with their changing work roles.

Through the analysis of individual managers' subjective accounts of their work, Thomas and Linstead illustrate how they construct their identity and deal with feelings of insecurity, ambiguity, and confusion that cause them to 'feel that they are losing the plot in their organizations' (2002: 88). Constant changes in terms of their roles and status make it difficult for middle managers to retain a sense of identity. The authors conclude: 'What is apparent . . . is that these middle managers, for a range of reasons, are searching for stability and sense in their reflections on their lives' (2002: 88).

In sum, the social constructionist perspective enables the question of 'What has become of middle management?' to be recast. Instead it asks: 'How are middle managers becoming?'

Constructionism is also frequently used as a term that reflects the indeterminacy of our knowledge of the social world (see Key concept 1.14 and the idea of constructionism in relation to the nature of knowledge of the social world). However, in this book we will be using the term in connection with the notion that social phenomena and categories are social constructions.



# Relationship of epistemology and ontology to business research

Questions of social ontology cannot be divorced from issues concerning the conduct of business research. Ontological assumptions and commitments will feed into the ways in which research questions are formulated and research is carried out. If a research question is formulated in such a way as to suggest that organizations and cultures are objective social entities that act on individuals, the researcher is likely to emphasize the formal properties of organizations or the beliefs and values of members of the culture. Alternatively, if the researcher formulates a research problem so that the tenuousness of organization and culture as objective categories is stressed, it is likely that an emphasis will be placed on the active involvement of people in reality construction. In either case, it might be supposed that different approaches to the design of research and the collection of data will be required.

## Competing paradigms

A key influence on understanding the epistemological and ontological foundations of business research has been Burrell and Morgan's (1979) four paradigms, which they suggest reflect the assumptions researchers make about the nature of organizations and how we find out about them. Their use of the notion of **paradigm** draws on the work of Kuhn (1970; see Key concept 1.16). Burrell and Morgan suggest that each paradigm contains assumptions that can be represented as either:

- *objectivist*—there is an external viewpoint from which it is possible to view the organization, which is comprised of consistently real processes and structures; or
- *subjectivist*—an organization is a socially constructed product, a label used by individuals to make sense of their social experience, so it can be understood only from the point of view of individuals who are directly involved in its activities.



### Key concept 1.16
### What is a paradigm?

Kuhn's (1970) highly influential use of the term 'paradigm' derives from his analysis of revolutions in science. A paradigm is 'a cluster of beliefs and dictates which for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, [and] how results should be interpreted' (Bryman 1988*a*: 4). Kuhn depicted the natural sciences as going through periods of revolution, whereby normal science (science carried out in terms of the prevailing paradigm) is increasingly challenged by anomalies that are inconsistent with the assumptions and established findings in the discipline at that time. The growth in anomalies eventually gives way to a crisis in the discipline, which in turn occasions a revolution. The period of revolution is resolved when a new paradigm emerges as the ascendant one and a new period of normal science sets in. An important feature of paradigms is that they are *incommensurable*—that is, they are inconsistent with each other because of their divergent assumptions and methods. Disciplines in which no paradigm has emerged as pre-eminent, such as the social sciences, are deemed pre-paradigmatic, in that they feature competing paradigms. One of the problems with the term is that it is not very specific: Masterman (1970) was able to discern twenty-one different uses of it by Kuhn. Nonetheless, its use is widespread in the social sciences (e.g. Ritzer 1975; Guba 1985).

Each paradigm also makes assumptions about the function and purpose of scientific research in investigating the world of business as either:

- *regulatory*—the purpose of business research is to describe what goes on in organizations, possibly to suggest minor changes that might improve it, but not to make any judgement of it; or
- *radical*—the point of management and business research is to make judgements about the way that organizations ought to be and to make suggestions about how this could be achieved.

Plotting the assumptions of researchers along these two axes provides a framework for the identification of four possible paradigmatic positions for the study of organizations:

- *functionalist*—the dominant framework for the study of organizations, based on problem-solving orientation which leads to rational explanation;
- *interpretative*—questions whether organizations exist in any real sense beyond the conceptions of social actors, so understanding must be based on the experience of those who work within them;
- *radical humanist*—sees an organization as a social arrangement from which individuals need to be emancipated and research as guided by the need for change;
- *radical structuralist*—views an organization as a product of structural power relationships, which result in conflict.

Each paradigm results in the generation of a quite different type of organizational analysis as each seeks to address specific organizational 'problems' in a different way. Research in focus 1.17 illustrates the different organizational insights produced by each paradigm.

One of the most significant areas of controversy to have arisen in relation to this model relates to the issue of



## Research in focus 1.17
## An illustration of multiple paradigms

Hassard (1991) uses the multiple paradigm model, developed by Burrell and Morgan (1979), in order to conduct an empirical analysis of work behaviour in the British Fire Service. He shows how different insights into the organization can be gained through using each paradigm as a distinct frame of reference. Because each paradigm community defines its research problems differently, the study was adapted in order to focus on issues of work organization that each paradigm community would consider legitimate. The four main subjects were:

- job motivation (functionalist paradigm);
- work routines (interpretative paradigm);
- management training (radical humanist paradigm);
- employment relations (radical structuralist paradigm).

Although there is no necessary connection between, for example, the study of job motivation and the functionalist paradigm, Hassard states that it was logically and practically difficult to focus on a single issue examined from each of the four perspectives, because each paradigm considers particular research problems to be important and not others.

For the functionalist investigation, the aim was to assess how full-time firemen evaluate the motivating potential of their jobs using the Job Diagnostic Survey developed by Hackman and Oldham (1980; see Research in focus 6.4). Questionnaires were distributed to a stratified sample of 110 firemen, differentiated by age and length of service, and an 85 per cent response rate was achieved. Analysis of the results using statistical tests showed that, although the fireman's job possesses modest levels of motivation potential, 'this is not in fact a problem for employees whose needs for psychological growth at work are also modest' (Hassard 1991: 285).

For the interpretative part of the study, firemen were asked to describe and explain their daily tasks in order to enable an ethnomethodological study of Fire Service work routines and activities (see Key concept 16.1 on **ethnomethodology**). Analysis of conversational data collected over a three-month period highlighted how routine events in the Fire Service are accomplished in a context of uncertainty, which stems from the constant threat of emergency calls. The research suggests that the Fire Service organization 'is a cultural phenomenon which is subject to a continuous process of enactment' (Hassard 1991: 288).

The radical humanist investigation was conducted in the style of critical theory; it describes how management training in the Fire Service contributes towards the reproduction of an ideology that supports and reinforces capitalist values. Data were collected on the training practices used to prepare firemen for promotion to first-line supervision. Analysis of tape recordings of formal classroom sessions and discussions between participants showed how the in-house training programmes allow the organization to retain tight control over the messages delivered, selectively using theories that reinforced the existing authority structure.

Finally, the radical structuralist paradigm was represented through the application of labour process theory, focusing on the development of employment relations and conflicts over working time. Historical analysis of contractual negotiations and strike action showed how, as firemen's working hours were reduced to a level comparable with other manual occupations, 'measures have been taken which at once enhance management's control over the work process whilst yielding greater productivity from the working period' (Hassard 1991: 294).

Hassard thus challenges the notion of paradigm incommensurability, suggesting instead that multiple paradigm research can be used to develop greater variety in organizational research, to challenge the kind of absolutist analysis typical within such journals as *Administrative Science Quarterly*. Yet, according to Johnson and Duberley (2000), the diversity in subject focus between the four investigations merely confirms the fundamental differences between the paradigms and hence their incommensurability. In conclusion, rather than showing how paradigms can be combined, Hassard's study demonstrates how they can be displayed side by side, as competing versions of reality.

commensurability or otherwise of the four paradigms. Burrell and Morgan were quite specific in arguing that 'a synthesis between paradigms cannot be achieved' (Jackson and Carter 1991: 110) because they are founded upon a commitment to fundamentally opposing beliefs; in other words they are incommensurate with one another. Each paradigm must therefore develop independently of the others. Jackson and Carter argue that paradigm incommensurability is important because it protects the diversity of scientific thought, resisting the hegemony of functionalist approaches, which have tended to dominate business research, particularly in North American-based journals. Reed (1985), on the other hand, suggests that the boundaries between paradigms are not as clear as Burrell and Morgan suggest and that overstatement of the differences between them leads to isolationism and reduces 'the potential for creative theoretical development' (1985: 205). Willmott (1993) takes a different tack. He suggests that, although the four-paradigm model challenges the intellectual hegemony of functionalism and opens up possibilities for alternative forms of analysis within management, its central thesis is distinctly double-edged. For Willmott, the division between subjectivist and objectivist forms of analysis leads to a polarization of methodological approaches. Instead he suggests that paradigms arise through critical reflection upon the limitations of competing approaches. For example, labour process theory has sought to incorporate an appreciation of the subjective dimension of work while at the same time retaining a commitment to structural analysis of the dynamics involved in capitalist production. Willmott argues that this example draws attention to the 'practical indivisibility' of subjective and objective dimensions of organization. More recently, Buchanan and Bryman (2007) argue that the 'paradigm wars' of the 1980s have turned to 'paradigm soup', as a consequence of increased epistemological diversity within business and organizational research.

Whatever view is held in relation to the relative commensurability of the four paradigms, it is clear that this model has significantly influenced business researchers by encouraging them to explore the assumptions that they make about the nature of the social world and how it can be studied. The paradigm debate thereby draws attention to the relationship between epistemology and ontology in business and management research. The choice of which paradigm to adopt also has implications for the design of the research and the data collection approach that will be taken; it is to this question that we will now turn in the following section.



## Research strategy: quantitative and qualitative

Many writers on methodological issues find it helpful to distinguish between quantitative and qualitative research. The status of the distinction is ambiguous, because it is almost simultaneously regarded by some writers as a fundamental contrast and by others as no longer useful or even simply as 'false' (Layder 1993: 110). However, there is little evidence to suggest that the use of the distinction is abating and even considerable evidence of its continued, even growing, currency. The quantitative/qualitative distinction will be employed a great deal in this book, because it represents a useful means of classifying different methods of business research and because it is a helpful umbrella for a range of issues concerned with the practice of business research.

On the face of it, there would seem to be little to the quantitative/qualitative distinction other than the fact that quantitative researchers employ measurement and qualitative researchers do not. It is certainly the case that there is a predisposition among researchers along these lines, but many writers have suggested that the differences are deeper than the superficial issue of the presence or absence of quantification. Many writers see quantitative and qualitative research as having different epistemological foundations and as differing in other respects too. Indeed, if we take the areas that have been the focus of the last three sections—the connection between theory and research, epistemological considerations, and ontological considerations—quantitative and qualitative research can be taken to form two distinctive clusters of *research strategy*. By a research strategy, we simply mean a general orientation to the conduct of business research. Table 1.1 outlines the differences between quantitative and qualitative research in terms of the three areas.

Thus, quantitative research can be construed as a research strategy that emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data and that:

Table 1.1

**Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies**

| | Quantitative | Qualitative |
|---|---|---|
| Principal orientation to the role of theory in relation to research | Deductive; testing of theory | Inductive; generation of theory |
| Epistemological orientation | Natural science model, in particular positivism | Interpretivism |
| Ontological orientation | Objectivism | Constructionism |

- entails a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the accent is placed on the testing of theories;
- has incorporated the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular; and
- embodies a view of social reality as an external, objective reality.

By contrast, qualitative research can be construed as a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data and that:

- predominantly emphasizes an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research, in which the emphasis is placed on the generation of theories;
- has rejected the practices and norms of the natural scientific model and of positivism in particular in preference for an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world; and
- embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation.

There is, in fact, considerably more to the quantitative/qualitative distinction than this contrast. In Chapters 6 and 16 the nature of quantitative and then qualitative research, respectively, will be outlined in much greater detail, while in Chapters 24 and 25 the contrasting features will be further explored. In particular, a number of distinguishing features flow from the commitment of the quantitative research strategy to a positivist epistemology and from the rejection of that epistemology by practitioners of the qualitative research strategy. In other words, the three contrasts in Table 1.1 are basic, though fundamental, ones.

However, the interconnections between the different features of quantitative and qualitative research are not as straightforward as Table 1.1 and the previous paragraph imply. While it is useful to contrast the two research strategies, it is necessary to be careful about hammering a wedge between them too deeply. It may seem perverse to introduce a basic set of distinctions and then suggest that they are problematic. A recurring theme of this book is that discussing the nature of business research is just as complex as conducting research in the real world. You may discover general tendencies, but they are precisely that—tendencies. In reality, the picture becomes more complicated the more you delve.

For example, it is common to describe qualitative research as concerned with the generation rather than the testing of theories. However, there are examples of studies in which qualitative research has been employed to test rather than to generate theories. For example, Hochschild's (1983) theory of emotion work (see Research in focus 16.4) emerged from a questionnaire study of university students. The theory was subsequently tested to establish its wider significance in employment using two occupational groups, where a wider range of qualitative methods, including interviews and **participant observation**, were used. This enabled development of the theory to incorporate the idea of emotional labour, which is emotion work that forms part of paid employment. This study shows how, although qualitative research is typically associated with generating theories, it can also be employed for testing them. Moreover, it is striking that, although Hochschild's study is broadly interpretivist in epistemological orientation, with its emphasis on how flight attendants view their work role identity, the findings have objectivist, rather than constructionist, overtones. For example, when Hochschild describes the marketing and advertising strategies used by Delta Airlines, she explains how, by creating a discrepancy between promise and fact, flight attendants are forced to cope with the disappointed expectations of customers through

their emotional labour. She relates the demand for emotional labour to the structural conditions of the airline industry market, thus positing a social world that is 'out there' and as having a formal, objective quality. It is an example of qualitative research in the sense that there is no quantification or very little of it, but it does not have *all* the other features outlined in Table 1.1. As such, it has interpretivist overtones in spite of its use of quantitative research methods.

The point that is being made in this section is that quantitative and qualitative research represent different research strategies and that each carries with it striking differences in terms of the role of theory, epistemological issues, and ontological concerns. However, the distinction is not a hard-and-fast one: studies that have the broad characteristics of one research strategy may have a characteristic of the other. Not only this, but many writers argue that the two can be combined within an overall research project, and Chapter 25 examines precisely this possibility. In Chapter 25 we will explore the various ways in which management researchers combine these two strategies.

In Research in focus 1.18, there is an example of a mixed methods study. It is partly presented here to provide an early insight into the possibility of doing **mixed methods research**, but also to show how a wedge need not and should not be driven between quantitative and qualitative research. By contrasting the two approaches, it is easy to see them as incompatible. As the example in Research in focus 1.18 shows, they can be fruitfully combined within a single project. This point will be amplified further throughout Chapter 25.



## Research in focus 1.18
## Mixed methods research—an example

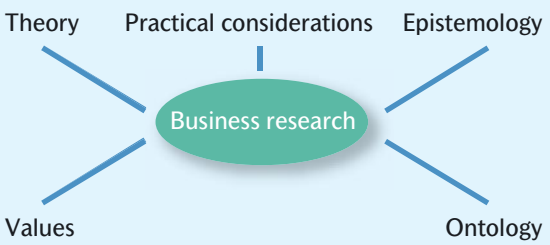
Holmberg et al. (2008) conducted an investigation of the role of leadership in the implementation of evidence-based treatment practices for drug abuse and criminal behaviour in Sweden. The chief method of data collection—a **self-completion questionnaire** administered by mail to treatment personnel involved in the implementation of treatment programmes—resulted in largely quantitative data that allowed the researchers to examine hypotheses relating to the factors that are likely to enhance or inhibit the implementation of evidence-based programmes. These quantitative data showed that the leadership behaviour of those charged with leading such programmes was related to the job satisfaction, work output, and perceptions of the organization by those members of staff who had to implement the programmes on a day-to-day basis. The questionnaire data therefore allowed the authors to demonstrate the ways in which leadership behaviour had implications for the everyday work lives of staff working on the implementation of the programmes. The success or failure of the programmes could depend critically on the organizational setting that leaders created for the process of implementation. Qualitative data were drawn from in-depth interviews, which were conducted with sixty-five individuals who worked for organizations associated with the programmes. Over half were treatment staff and the rest were managers and others. Further qualitative data were obtained from observation of meetings where the programmes were discussed and from participation in training workshops. The interviews revealed the importance of managers taking an active interest in what staff were doing to implement the programmes and that they were available for support. Where staff had difficulties with implementation, a key factor was that managers were uninterested and failed to provide support and resources that were important to success. The authors write in the discussion of their findings: 'Methods that focus on subordinates' perceptions and reports about leader behaviour through questionnaires may be insufficient for capturing the dynamics of managers' impact on processes of implementation and a combination of methods will probably give a more balanced understanding of leadership. . . . In this study we conducted interviews and observations in order to be able to make a more context-sensitive interpretation of the implantation process. This study can be seen as a step towards more elaborated studies that capture a little bit more of the complexities involved in implementing new practices in human service organisations' (Holmberg et al. 2008: 168). The point that the authors are making is that the use of a mixed methods approach that combined quantitative and qualitative research enabled a more rounded and complete picture to be drawn. At the same time, the study draws out the complexity of the notion of evidence-based management (see Key concept 1.1), as it points to the significance and the complexity of the implementation of evidence-based practices.

# Influences on the conduct of business research

We are beginning to get a picture now that business research is influenced by a variety of factors. Figure 1.2 summarizes the influences that have been examined so far, but adds three more—the impact of *personal values*, *the politics of business research*, and *practical considerations*.

## Figure 1.2

**Influences on business research**




## Personal values

Values reflect either the personal beliefs or the feelings of a researcher. On the face of it, we would expect that social scientists should be value free and objective in their research. After all, one might argue that research that simply reflected the personal biases of its practitioners could not be considered valid and scientific because it was bound up with the subjectivities of its practitioners. Such a view is held with less and less frequency among social scientists nowadays. Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) wrote that one of the corollaries of his injunction to treat social facts as things was that all 'preconceptions must be eradicated' (1938: 31). Since values are a form of preconception, his exhortation was at least implicitly to do with suppressing them when conducting research. His position is unlikely to be regarded as credible nowadays, because there is a growing recognition that it is not feasible to keep the values that a researcher holds totally in check.

## Thinking deeply 1.19
## Factors that influence methods choice in organizational research

Buchanan and Bryman (2007) identify six types of factor that influence researchers' choice of methods in organizational research:

- *Organizational*: this includes factors such as organizational size and pace of change. For example, Buchanan describes a situation where the question 'What is your job title?' produced a bemused response from managers whose roles were shifting every few weeks.
- *Historical*: this relates to previous studies of the topic, which must be taken into account because organizational research is rarely cumulative.
- *Political*: this type of influence includes negotiating research objectives, obtaining permission to access respondents, aligning with groups of stakeholders and the way that different methods are perceived by journals, which affects researchers' ability to publish their findings.
- *Ethical*: this relates to the increased ethical scrutiny that is faced by researchers and the role of ethical review in regulating their conduct (see Chapter 5).
- *Evidential*: this relates to the different expectations that academic and managerial audiences have of business research; the former expect knowledge and insight and the latter want practical recommendations. The rise of evidence-based management, which will be discussed in Chapter 4 (see also Key concept 1.1), has only amplified these tensions and debates.
- *Personal*: researchers are also influenced in their choice of methods by such factors as the extent to which they enjoy face-to-face contact, some researchers opting for methods that rely heavily on interpersonal interaction and others choosing methods that confine them to the computer screen.

Buchanan and Bryman (2007) argue that these unavoidable issues that should be treated not as unwelcome distractions but as a central aspect of the research process. They conclude that, as a result, it is difficult to sustain a view of the researcher as a neutral observer. Methods choice is thus not a one-off rational process of selecting the most effective tool to address a particular question but rather a highly complex and continually evolving process.

These can intrude at any or all of a number of points in the process of business research:

- choice of research area;
- formulation of research question;
- choice of method;
- formulation of **research design** and data collection techniques;
- implementation of data collection;
- analysis of data;
- interpretation of data;
- conclusions.

There are, therefore, numerous points at which bias and the intrusion of values can occur (see Thinking deeply 1.19). Values can materialize at any point during the course of research. The researcher may develop an affection or sympathy, which was not necessarily present at the outset of an investigation, for the people being studied. It is quite common, for example, for researchers working within a qualitative research strategy, and in particular when they use participant observation or very intensive interviewing, to develop a close affinity with the people whom they study to the extent that they find it difficult to disentangle their stance as social scientists from their subjects' perspective. This possibility may be exacerbated by the tendency of some researchers to be very sympathetic to underdog groups. For example, following publication of his classic study of the Ford factory in Dagenham, Beynon (1975) was criticized by the press for having become too emotionally involved in the lives of workers. Equally, social scientists may feel unsympathetic towards the people they study. Although business and management researchers generally tend to emphasize their interest in understanding the problems and issues that affect practitioners, their value systems, particularly if they are working within a radical structuralist paradigm, are very likely to be antithetical to those of many managers working within a profit-making industry.

Another position in relation to the whole question of values and bias is to recognize and acknowledge that research cannot be value free, but to ensure that there is no untrammelled incursion of values into the research process, and to be self-reflective and so exhibit *reflexivity* about the part played by such factors. This view is borne of the assumption that the prior knowledge, experience, and attitudes of the researcher will influence not only how the researcher sees things but also *what* he or she sees. The example in Research in focus 1.20 considers some of these issues in relation to organization research. Researchers are increasingly prepared to forewarn readers of their biases and assumptions and how these may have influenced the subsequent findings. There has been a growth since the mid-1970s of collections of inside reports of what doing a piece of research was really like, as against the generalities presented in business research methods textbooks (like this one!). These collections frequently function as 'confessions', an element of which is often the writer's preparedness to be open about his or her personal biases. This point will be taken up further in Chapter 27.

Still another approach is to argue for consciously value-laden research. This is a position taken by some feminist writers, who have argued that only research on women that is intended *for* women will be consistent with the wider political needs of women. Mies (1993: 68) has argued that in feminist research the 'postulate of *value free research*, of neutrality and indifference towards the research objects, has to be replaced by *conscious partiality*, which is achieved through partial identification with the research objects' (emphases in original).

The significance of feminism in relation to values goes further than this, however. In particular, several feminist researchers around the early 1980s proposed that the principles and practices associated with quantitative research were incompatible with feminist research on women. For writers like Oakley (1981), quantitative research was bound up with male values of control that can be seen in the general orientation of the research strategy—control of the research subject/respondent and control of the research context and situation. Moreover, the research process was seen as one-way traffic, in which researchers extract information from the people being studied and give little or more usually nothing in return. For many feminists, such a strategy bordered on exploitation and was incompatible with feminism's values of sisterhood and non-hierarchical relationships between women. The antipathy towards quantitative research resulted in a preference for qualitative research among feminists. Not only was qualitative research seen as more consistent with the values of feminism; it was seen as more adaptable to those values. Thus, feminist qualitative research came to be associated with an approach in which the investigator eschewed a value-neutral approach and engaged with the people being studied as people and not simply as respondents to research instruments. The stance of feminism in relation to both quantitative and qualitative approaches demonstrates the ways in which values have implications for the process of social investigation. In more recent years, there has been a softening of the attitudes of feminists

towards quantitative research. Several writers have acknowledged a viable and acceptable role for quantitative research, particularly when it is employed in conjunction with qualitative research (Jayaratne and Stewart 1991; Oakley 1998). This issue will be picked up in Chapters 16, 24, and 25.



## Research in focus 1.20
## Influence of an author's biography on research values

Brewis (2005) explains that her research on sexual harassment and the sex industry impacts on her being-in-the-world more generally. She considers the reasons why she chose to research sex and organization, even though 'links between my life story and my research, whilst they indubitably exist, are not causal or easily drawn' (2005: 540). For Brewis, readers act as biographers, 'shaping and constructing authors as particular types of individual' (2005: 494). In her own case this has involved them making 'certain assumptions' about her personal life based on her research interests. She explains: 'whether others meet me in settings such as conferences, listen to my presentations, read or hear about my work, their constructions of who I am and what I do derive in no small part from the ways in which they attribute a gender and a sexuality to me . . . Certain deeply embedded paradigms seem to have constructed me as the kind of author who has intimate relationships with her collaborators. Because I am gendered-as-female, and because I tend to collaborate with others who are gendered-as-male, these signs have apparently been read—through the heterosexual matrix—to imply that my relationships with these individuals go further than straightforward "professional" contact' (2005: 498). This biographic construction of professional identity serves to confirm the sexist belief that women can progress in organizations only if they trade on their sexuality. Brewis's analysis suggests a cyclical dynamic to the role of values on the choice of research subject. Not only does biography influence the choice of research subject, but the chosen research subject can also affect how readers construct the researcher's biography.

There are, then, different positions that can be taken up in relation to values and value freedom. Far fewer writers overtly subscribe to the position that the principle of objectivity can be put into practice than in the past. Quantitative researchers sometimes seem to be writing in a way that suggests an aura of objectivity (Mies 1993), but we simply do not know how far they subscribe to such a position. There is a greater awareness today of the limits to objectivity, so that some of the highly confident, not to say naive, pronouncements on the subject, like Durkheim's, have fallen into disfavour. A further way in which values are relevant to the conduct of business research is through the following of ethical principles or standards. This issue will be followed up in Chapter 5.



## Telling it like it is
## The influence of personal values on student research

Many students are influenced in their choice of research subject by their own personal values and life experiences. This can be positive, because it helps to ensure that they remain interested in their chosen subject throughout the project.

For example, Chris's interest in women in management stemmed from seeing how this had formed the basis for his mother's career: 'My mum runs residential courses on women in management for various large, global organizations, so there had always been books around the house about this and we'd sit and talk about it. So it's always been something that's kind of been in my mind and at the front of what's going on in my life. I had access

to an organization that had a large number of women who were doing reasonably well in their careers and I felt it was something that would be really, really interesting to explore. So before I did the internship which allowed me access to the organization I had already decided that I wanted to look at this issue. I don't really know exactly why, looking back on it, but I just thought it was something that not a lot of men would necessarily research. I think a few people were a bit surprised when I chose to do it. I suppose also I wanted to put the argument forward that men aren't necessarily part of the old boy network and doing all the bad stuff. Maybe it's also a positive defence mechanism—I don't know.'

What is also interesting from Chris's account is that he is very aware of the importance of his own gender as potentially affecting how others perceive his interest in this subject.

The extent to which personal values influence the research project will obviously vary. Angharad's decision to study the under-representation of women in senior management was driven by academic interest and personal values. 'It was something that I'd wanted to look at for my dissertation all along but I was also concerned about my own future career as a woman manager and I was worried that I might one day find myself stuck in the wrong job.'

The experience of these students highlights the importance of researcher reflexivity, an issue we will cover in more depth in Chapter 25 (see also the entry in the Glossary).



*To find out more about Chris's and Angharad's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

## The politics of business research

It is relatively rare for management and business researchers to talk openly about the tacit rules that determine the conduct of their research, but it is important to understand how this process works in order to engage with it. One of the most common outlets for management research is for researchers to publish their findings in academic journals in the field. Papers are reviewed anonymously by academic referees who have expertise in the subject area of the paper and a decision is made by the editor based on their reviews. Usually, the editor will require certain revisions of the author (or authors) on the basis of the referees' comments, and the editor will decide whether to accept the revised paper, often after sending it back out to the referees for further comment, a process that may result in the author having to revise the draft for a second time. If the editor is still not satisfied with the changes the author(s) have made to the paper, this process may still result in rejection. Within prestigious journals, it is common for in excess of 90 per cent of articles to be rejected, and it is very unusual for an article to be accepted on its first submission. This process is referred to as 'peer review'. Consequently, the articles that are eventually published are not just the culmination of a research process, but are also the outcome of an often lengthy feedback and review process than can take in excess of two years. Many of the examples used in the Research in focus boxes in this book have been accepted for publication in journals, which means that they have gone through a similar review process to the one described.

In recent years there has been increasing debate about the *politics of business research* and the pressure that the requirement to publish in certain high-profile academic journals can place on researchers concerning their choice of methods. The pressure to publish business research in a few very highly regarded journals in the field has increased because staff publishing in such journals is a measure of business school performance. Publishing in these journals is also an important determinant of career success for individual business researchers. Ranking systems, such as the Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Quality Guide, have been developed to determine the quality of journals based in large part on their 'impact factor', which is derived from the frequency with which the articles that they publish are cited by other researchers. A copy of the most recent Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Quality Guide and an introduction that explains how it is constructed can be found on the Association of Business Schools website: ***www.the-abs.org.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Macdonald and Kam (2007) argue that this 'publish or perish' culture has resulted in business researchers employing gamesmanship to maximize their possibilities of success within the system. These political strategies include self-citation and citation of articles in other high-ranking management journals, especially if they are

in the same journal as the one to which the author is submitting an article. They also suggest that the system encourages authors to write articles that reviewers are likely to see as uncontroversial and to use methods that are broadly accepted within the field, rather than to experiment with pioneering new research approaches or to challenge existing theory.

The importance of the politics of publishing business research arises from the way that it impacts on the researchers' choice of methods. It has been widely suggested that the journal publishing system tends to favour quantitative more than qualitative research. Many of the highest-ranking business journals are North American and are consequently dominated by the positivist tradition (Singh, Haddad, and Chow 2007). Qualitative researchers can, therefore, face greater difficulty than researchers who use quantitative methods in convincing key gatekeepers, including journal editors, reviewers, and funding bodies, of the credibility and quality of their research (Easterby-Smith, Golden-Biddle, and Locke 2008; Symon et al. 2008). Qualitative researchers can also encounter difficulties as a consequence of journals working to contribution-to-length ratios, as quantitative findings can often be presented more tersely and authors who use these methods encounter less pressure to justify and explain in detail their choice of methods (Pratt 2008). Nonetheless, journal editors often feel compelled to defend their journals and their publishing practices against the charge of bias towards qualitative investigations (see, for example, the defence of the *Academy of Management Journal* by Rynes et al. 2005).

The importance of these political issues stems from how they affect what is considered to be good or 'scientific' research in a given field, and this in turn has the potential to affect the methods choices that business researchers make. We have already noted the importance of real examples of published research for students who are learning how to use business research methods. If the politics of business research results in a marginalization of certain methods in the highest-status journals, this could mean that future researchers have a less diverse resource on which to draw in making methods choices. One of the things that can be noticed about Daft's (1995) reasons for rejecting manuscripts in Thinking deeply 1.21 is that he makes little distinction between papers that are based on quantitative and qualitative methods, suggesting that they are evaluated according to similar conventions.



## Thinking deeply 1.21
## Writing for journal publication

An attempt to make the tacit rules of journal publishing more explicit is attempted by Cummings and Frost (1995) in an edited collection entitled *Publishing in the Organizational Sciences*, in which contributors speak from a variety of perspectives, as writers, reviewers, editors, and readers, incorporating viewpoints from newcomers and established scholars, about how the publishing process works. One of the most revealing is the bluntly titled chapter by Daft (1995), 'Why I Recommended that your Manuscript be Rejected and What You can Do about It', which is written from the perspective of the reviewer. Drawing upon his own experiences of writing papers and submitting them to journals, Daft argues that 'the journal review process is central to each scholar's growth and development' and is comprised of a series of highs and lows. Some reviews, he explains, 'were absolutely devastating. The reviewers seemed determined to be destructive, hurtful, and narrow-minded', whereas others were helpful and encouraging, their 'constructive criticism' improving his work 'dramatically' (1995: 165). One of the reasons for sharing views and experiences of the review process is thus because of the enormous impact it can have on the writer. However, Daft suggests that 'reviewing is more subjective than objective', admitting that 'subtle, intangible cues' concerning writing style, tone, and method of theory building 'often cause me to like or dislike the paper, and hence to support or not support the paper for revision or publication' (1995: 165). He goes on to list 11 common manuscript problems based on analysis of 111 of his own reviews of manuscripts submitted to the US journals *Administrative Science Quarterly* and *Academy of Management Journal* that took a traditional theory-based, hypothesis-testing approach. The common types of problems identified were:

- *No theory*: this involves a lack of explanation of the relationships among variables—'without a theory, there is nothing to pull the study together, nothing to justify why the variables should be studied' (1995: 167);
- *Concepts and operationalization not in alignment*: this problem occurs when the research design does not reflect the variables under study, sometimes because of differences in level of analysis. An example of this might involve using fluctuations in the number of employees in an organization as a measure of organizational change.
- *Insufficient definition—theory*: this occurs when authors do not explain what their concepts mean, since enacting a definition is often a part of theory development;

- *Insufficient rationale—design*: this problem arises when manuscripts fail to explain the procedures or methods used in the study, such as sample size, or response rates, in sufficient detail;
- *Macrostructure—organization and flow*: this refers to whether or not the various parts of the paper, such as theory section, methods, conclusions, fit together into a coherent whole. Problems arise when manuscripts contain measures in the results section that are not referred to in the theory section or when conclusions are reached that are not related to the paper's research questions;
- *Amateur style and tone*: indications of amateurism, according to Daft (1995: 170) include 'frequent use of underlining or exclamation marks' or exaggerating the importance of the research topic in order to make the case for publication or tearing down the work of others to justify the author's own study rather than showing how it builds on previous work;
- *Inadequate research design*: this involves the inappropriate use of methods that cannot address the research question posed by the study, such as the use of an undergraduate student sample to analyse the selection of business strategies by corporate executives, as undergraduate students have little or no experience of strategy selection. These often constitute a fatal problem which cannot be put right after the study has been conducted;
- *Not relevant to the field*: some papers were inappropriate for the type of journal they were submitted to and would have been better placed in another discipline (although Daft suspects that some of them have already been rejected from another discipline and are trying for publication in another area). It is also harder to get published in a topic area where a large number of studies have already been published because 'the case for publication is easier if the topic is new, fresh and poorly understood rather than mature and overstudied' (1995: 172).
- *Overengineering*: sometimes authors concentrate so much on the methodology that it becomes an end in itself, at the expense of making a theoretical contribution;
- *Conclusions not in alignment*: this problem involves manuscripts where conclusions are too short or lack sufficient interpretation of the findings, as well as manuscripts which generalize far beyond the data; 'the important thing is to use the conclusion section to fully develop the theoretical contribution and to point out the new understanding from the study' (1995: 173).
- *Cutting up the data:* this problem occurred when a paper under review for one journal overlapped with another paper by the same authors under review for another journal, sometimes with slight modifications. As Daft explains, 'this did not happen often, but when it did the impression on me was terrible' (1995: 173).

Daft suggests that papers based on qualitative research studies are prone to similar shortcomings as quantitative papers, especially in relation to lack of theory and misalignment of concepts and operationalization. Qualitative papers were often rejected 'not because referees did not like qualitative research, but because the investigators had not used the manuscript to build theory' (1995: 174).

He then goes on to suggest seven ways of overcoming these common problems, or what you can do to lessen the likelihood of having your manuscript rejected. His suggestions are:

- *Tell a story*. Think of each **variable** in the research as a character and explain how the characters interact with each other. This will give meaning to the observed relationships between variables.
- *Discuss fully your procedures and thought processes.* Be open about weaknesses and limitations, because it gives reviewers confidence that you are not hiding anything.
- *Concentrate on the macrostructure*. Make sure that all sections of the paper are coordinated and flow logically from one to another.
- *Find the operational base of your research and stick to it*. Think of the research design as the core of an empirical paper, to which the theory, results, and discussion correspond.
- *Listen to your reviewers*. Use the feedback they provide to revise the manuscript and keep in mind that sometimes a paper is just not that good and you may have to accept that it is unpublishable and use it as a learning experience.
- *Allow the manuscript to ripen naturally.* It takes time to write a good paper and most manuscripts go through many revisions before they are ready to be submitted to a journal. Use feedback from colleagues to develop your manuscript prior to submission.
- *Don't exaggerate*. It is better to be cautious in your argument than to overstate your claims. Avoid statements like 'these findings prove' and instead say 'these findings suggest'.

While these comments and suggestions relate to the writing of papers for consideration in academic journals and might therefore seem inapplicable to the immediate contexts faced by many readers of this book, especially students, much of the advice is relevant in that it reveals some of the expectations associated with good academic writing.

## Practical considerations

Nor should we neglect the importance and significance of *practical issues* in decisions about how business research should be carried out. There are a number of dimensions to this issue. For one thing, choices of research strategy, design, or method have to be dovetailed with the specific research question being investigated. If we are interested in teasing out the relative importance of a number of causes of a social phenomenon, it is quite likely that a quantitative strategy will fit our needs, because, as will be shown in Chapter 6, the assessment of cause is one of its keynotes. Alternatively, if we are interested in the world views of members of a certain social group, a qualitative research strategy that is sensitive to how participants interpret their social world may be the direction to choose. If a researcher is interested in a topic on which no or virtually no research has been done in the past, the quantitative strategy may be difficult to employ, because there is little prior literature from which to draw leads. A more exploratory stance may be preferable and, in this connection, qualitative research may serve the researcher's needs better, since it is typically associated with the generation of, rather than the testing of, theory (see Table 1.1) and with a relatively unstructured approach to the research process (see Chapter 16). Another dimension may have to do with the nature of the topic and of the people being investigated. For example, if the researcher needs to engage with individuals or groups involved in illicit activities, such as industrial sabotage (Sprouse 1992) or pilferage (Ditton 1977), it is unlikely that a **social survey** would gain the confidence of the subjects involved or achieve the necessary rapport. It is not surprising, therefore, that researchers in these areas have tended to use a qualitative strategy.

While practical considerations may seem rather mundane and uninteresting compared with the lofty realm inhabited by the philosophical debates surrounding such discussions about epistemology and ontology, they are important ones. All business research is a coming-together of the ideal and the feasible. Because of this, there will be many circumstances in which the nature of the topic or of the subjects of an investigation and the constraints on a researcher loom large in decisions about how best to proceed. Consequently, in certain circumstances, business researchers exercise a degree of opportunism in their choice of research setting and focus on a particular subject. Alvesson (2003) draws a distinction within qualitative research between a '*planned-systematic*' approach to data collection and an '*emergent-spontaneous*' one. The researcher who takes a planned-systematic approach has a reasonably clear idea of his subject of study and plans the process of data collection with the aim of producing a pile of notes and interview transcripts at the end of it that he can then analyse. For example, he might be interested in the topic of organizational identity, so the notes that he makes during fieldwork and the questions he asks in interviews reflect this subject focus. The results of this data collection process then form the basis from which the researcher writes up his findings, whether the data that he collected is interesting. An emergent-spontaneous study, on the other hand, is carried out when something revealing happens. 'In such a study the researcher waits for something interesting/generative to pop up' (Alvesson 2003: 181). Although there are disadvantages associated with such an approach—namely, it might appear somewhat arbitrary and unscientific—Alvesson suggests there are some advantages: 'the most significant one is that it increases the likelihood of coming up with interesting material. The researcher does not find the empirical material, it finds him or her' (2003: 181). By developing sensitivity for rich empirical data and a willingness to respond to situations where it arises, the researcher takes a more opportunistic approach to his task. The experience of Bell (in press) in researching the closure of the Jaguar car manufacturing plant in the UK city of Coventry, which was near to where she lived, illustrates how such an emergent-spontaneous study might arise. In this case it was the result of existing local contacts she already had with members of the local community that enabled her to trace events relating to the closure as they unfolded. However, Alvesson recommends care in presenting studies based on emergent-spontaneous research, as the conventions among some academics might cause them to respond unfavourably to this more unsystematic method of research topic selection, even if the research strategy and research design are well informed. It is also potentially a risky strategy, in that it presumes that something important or significant will materialize while the researcher is around. It also requires a high level of constant vigilance on the part of the researcher—blink and you might miss it!



## Telling it like it is
## Researching your own workplace

Chris, Karen, and Lisa all gained access to their research sites as the result of internship or opportunities organized by their universities as part of their degree course.

Chris used the contacts he had established during his internship to make contact with individuals within the bank who could facilitate his access and provide him with important information. 'I ended up ringing the fourth or fifth most senior person in the bank saying 'I'm doing this. Can I chat to you?' and she was absolutely great about it. Then I spoke to somebody beneath her, who agreed to put me in contact with other women in the bank. I had a good chat with her. She gave me lots of information regarding percentage of women at different levels of management, progression over the years, information on competitors and things like that, so by the time I finished my internship I'd organized three interviewees and I could go back to university with my idea.'

Karen also found that gaining the agreement of her line manager to carry out the research was relatively straightforward. 'Once I had decided that this was a topic I was interested in doing, I had a discussion with my manager and discovered that it was something that she was quite interested in as well and other people in the department who did recruitment were all quite interested in it. So access wasn't really a problem. Obviously it was difficult to get time with people but the management wasn't opposed to me doing it.'

However, gaining access through her placement meant that Karen was constrained by the need to combine her full-time employment with a research role. 'Obviously when you're involved in the organization it's quite good because you can get access to people that you know. If I asked them for a favour, they helped me because I'd helped them with something else, so that was quite good. But then, on the other hand, because I was so involved in the organization, I was concerned that I had brought my own opinions into the analysis. I think to some extent I probably did do this, although I tried as much as possible to keep my university head on and remain distanced from it a little bit.'

However, in some situations it may be impractical to research your own workplace, as Tom found. 'When I started the course I was doing a job which was on a fixed-term basis and I knew I was going to be moving on, so I wasn't in a settled work environment and I knew that it might be tricky to get access and keep it going in the organization where I was working. Also, it wasn't like I'd been working in one organization for a long time and had things that I could explore in that environment.'

Of course, opportunities to do research in an organization where you are an intern are not available to all students, so in setting up a small-scale research project it can be important to make use of personal contacts. Researching your own workplace also introduces particular ethical and analytical considerations that stem from having to maintain the dual roles of being a colleague and a researcher. These issues will be discussed in Chapters 5 and 17.



*To find out more about these students' research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



## *Key points*

- Business research is subject to considerable debate concerning its relevance to practitioners and its fundamental purpose.
- Quantitative and qualitative research constitute different approaches to social investigation and carry with them important epistemological and ontological considerations.

- Theory can be depicted as something that precedes research (as in quantitative research) or as something that emerges out of it (as in qualitative research).
- Epistemological considerations loom large in considerations of research strategy. To a large extent, these revolve around the desirability of employing a natural science model (and in particular positivism) versus interpretivism.
- Ontological considerations, concerning objectivism versus constructionism, also constitute important dimensions of the quantitative/qualitative contrast.
- These considerations have informed the four-paradigm model that has been an important influence on business research.
- Values may impinge on the research process at different times.
- Practical considerations in decisions about research methods are also important.
- Feminist researchers have tended to prefer a qualitative approach, though there is some evidence of a change of viewpoint in this regard.



## Questions for review

### *The nature of business research*

- What do you think is the purpose of business and management research?
- What are the differences between mode 1 and mode 2 forms of knowledge production and why is this distinction important?

### *Theory and research*

- If you had to conduct some business research now, what would the topic be and what factors would influence your choice? How important was theory in your consideration?
- Outline, using examples of your own, the difference between grand and middle-range theory.
- What are the differences between inductive and deductive theory and why is the distinction important?

### *Epistemological considerations*

- What is meant by each of the following terms: positivism; realism; and interpretivism? Why is it important to understand each of them?
- What are the implications of epistemological considerations for research practice?

### *Ontological considerations*

- What are the main differences between epistemological and ontological considerations?
- What is meant by objectivism and constructionism?
- Which theoretical ideas have been particularly instrumental in the growth of interest in qualitative research?
- What are the main arguments for and against paradigm commensurability within management and business research?

### *Relationship of epistemology and ontology to business research*

- What are the four main paradigms in business research and how do they influence the insights that are gained?

### *Research strategy: quantitative and qualitative research*

- Outline the main differences between quantitative and qualitative research in terms of: the relationship between theory and data; epistemological considerations; and ontological considerations.
- To what extent is quantitative research solely concerned with testing theories and qualitative research with generating theories?

### *Influences on the conduct of business research*

- How might your own personal values influence your choice of research topic?
- What are the politics of business research and how could this affect your research project?
- List the three most important practical considerations that need to be taken into consideration in your research project.



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Business Research Strategies.*

2

# Research designs

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 40

**Criteria in business research** 41

- Reliability 41
- Replication 41
- Validity 42

**Research designs** 45

- Experimental design 45
- Cross-sectional design 53
- Longitudinal design(s) 57
- Case study design 59
- Comparative design 63
- Level of analysis 67

**Bringing research strategy and research design together** 68

***Key points*** 69

***Questions for review*** 69






## Chapter outline

In focusing on the different kinds of research design, we are paying attention to the different frameworks for the collection and analysis of data. A research design relates to the criteria that are employed when evaluating business research. It is, therefore, a framework for the generation of evidence that is suited both to a certain set of criteria and to the research question in which the investigator is interested. This chapter is structured as follows:

- **Reliability, replication**, and **validity** are presented as criteria for assessing the quality of business research. The latter entails an assessment in terms of several criteria covered in the chapter: **measurement validity**; **internal validity**; **external validity**; and **ecological validity**.
- The suggestion that such criteria are mainly relevant to quantitative research is examined, along with the proposition that an alternative set of criteria should be employed in relation to qualitative research. This alternative set of criteria, which is concerned with the issue of **trustworthiness**, is outlined briefly.
- Five prominent research designs are then outlined:
  - experimental and related designs (such as the quasi-experiment);
  - **cross-sectional design**, the most common form of which is social **survey research**;
  - longitudinal design and its various forms, such as the panel study and the cohort study;
  - case study design;
  - **comparative design**.
- Each research design is considered in terms of the criteria for evaluating research findings.

# Introduction

In the previous chapter, the idea of research strategy was introduced as a broad orientation to business and management research. The specific context for its introduction was the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research as different research strategies. However, the decision to adopt one or the other strategy will not get you far along the road of doing a piece of research. Two other key decisions will have to be made (along with a host of tactical decisions about the way in which the research will be carried out and the data analysed). These decisions concern choices about research design and research method. On the face of it, these two terms would seem to mean the same thing, but it is crucial to draw a distinction between them (see Key concepts 2.1 and 2.2).



## Key concept 2.1
## What is a research design?

A research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data. A choice of research design reflects decisions about the priority being given to a range of dimensions of the research process. These include the importance attached to:

- expressing causal connections between variables;
- generalizing to larger groups of individuals than those actually forming part of the investigation;
- understanding behaviour and the meaning of that behaviour in its specific social context;
- having a temporal (i.e. over time) appreciation of social phenomena and their interconnections.



## Key concept 2.2
## What is a research method?

A research method is simply a technique for collecting data. It can involve a specific instrument, such as a self-completion questionnaire or a **structured interview schedule**, or participant observation whereby the researcher listens to and watches others.

Research methods can be and are associated with different kinds of research design. The latter represents a structure that guides the execution of a research method and the analysis of the subsequent data. The two terms are often confused. For example, one of the research designs to be covered in this chapter—the case study—is very often referred to as a method. As we will see, a case study entails the detailed exploration of a specific case, which could be a community, organization, or person. But, once a case has been selected, a research method or research methods are needed to collect data. Simply selecting an organization and deciding to study it intensively are not going to provide data. Do you observe? Do you conduct interviews? Do you examine documents? Do you administer questionnaires? You may in fact use any or all of these research methods, but the crucial point is that deciding to choose a case study approach will not in its own right provide you with data. This choice is further complicated by the fact that what counts as data is not an entirely straightforward matter. Bartunek, Bobko, and Venkatraman (1993) acknowledge the diversity in the way that management researchers define the concept of data to include responses to questionnaire items, transcripts of public inquiry hearings, case studies, and advertisements.

In this chapter, five different research designs will be examined: experimental design and its variants, including quasi-experiments; cross-sectional or social survey design; longitudinal design; case study design; and comparative design. However, before embarking on the nature of and differences between these designs, it is useful to consider some recurring issues in business and management research that cut across some or all of these designs.



# Criteria in business research

Three of the most prominent criteria for the evaluation of business and management research are reliability, replication, and validity. All of these terms will be treated in much greater detail in later chapters, but in the meantime a fairly basic treatment of them can be helpful.

## Reliability

Reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable. The term is commonly used in relation to the question of whether or not the measures that are devised for concepts in business and management (such as teamworking, employee motivation, organizational effectiveness) are consistent. In Chapter 6, we will be looking at the idea of reliability in greater detail, in particular the different ways in which it can be conceptualized. Reliability is particularly at issue in connection with quantitative research. The quantitative researcher is likely to be concerned with the question of whether a measure is stable or not. After all, if we found that IQ tests, which were designed as measures of intelligence, were found to fluctuate, so that people's IQ scores were often wildly different when administered on two or more occasions, we would be concerned about it as a measure. We would consider it an unreliable measure—we could not have faith in its consistency.

## Replication

The idea of reliability is very close to another criterion of research—replication and more especially replicability. It sometimes happens that researchers choose to replicate the findings of others. There may be a host of different reasons for doing so, such as a feeling that the original results do not match other evidence that is relevant to the domain in question. In order for replication to take place, a study must be capable of replication—it must be replicable. This is a very obvious point: if a researcher does not spell out his or her procedures in great detail, replication is impossible. Similarly, in order for us to assess the

reliability of a measure of a concept, the procedures that constitute that measure must be replicable by someone else. Ironically, replication in business research is not common. In fact, it is probably truer to say that it is quite rare. When Burawoy (1979) found that by accident he was conducting case study research in a US factory that had been studied three decades earlier by another researcher (Donald Roy), he thought about treating his own investigation as a replication. However, the low status of replication in academic research persuaded him to resist this option. He writes: 'I knew that to replicate Roy's study would not earn me a dissertation let alone a job . . . [In] academia the real reward comes not from replication but from originality!' (Burawoy 2003: 650). Nonetheless, an investigation's capacity to be replicated—replicability—is highly valued by many business researchers working within a quantitative research tradition. See Research in focus 6.11 for an example of a replication study.

## Validity

A further and in many ways the most important criterion of research is validity. Validity is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research. Like reliability, we will be examining the idea of validity in greater detail in later chapters, but in the meantime it is important to be aware of the main types of validity that are typically distinguished.

- *Measurement validity*. This criterion applies primarily to quantitative research and to the search for measures of social scientific concepts. Measurement validity is also often referred to as construct validity. Essentially, it is to do with the question of whether or not a measure that is devised of a concept really does reflect the concept that it is supposed to be denoting. Does the IQ test really measure variations in intelligence? If we take the study reported in Research in focus 2.5, there are two issue-related concepts that need to be measured in order to test the hypotheses: 'magnitude of consequences' and 'issue framing', and two context-related concepts that also need to be measured: 'perceived social consensus' and 'competitive context'. The question then is: do the measures really represent the concepts they are supposed to be tapping? If they do not, the study's findings will be questionable. It should be appreciated that measurement validity is related to reliability: if a measure of a concept is unstable in that it fluctuates and hence is unreliable, it simply cannot be providing a valid measure of the concept in question. In other words, the assessment of measurement validity presupposes that a measure is reliable.
- *Internal validity*. This form of validity relates mainly to the issue of **causality**, which will be dealt with in greater detail in Chapter 6. Internal validity is concerned with the question of whether a conclusion that incorporates a causal relationship between two or more variables holds water. If we suggest that *x* causes *y*, can we be sure that it is *x* that is responsible for variation in *y* and not something else that is producing an apparent causal relationship? In the study examined in Research in focus 2.5, Frayne and Geringer (2000) conclude that moral awareness is more likely when an individual perceives the issue to have significant harmful consequences, such as putting a competitor out of business ('magnitude of consequences'), and when the individual perceives a social consensus within the organization that the activity in question is ethically problematic ('perceived social consensus'). Internal validity raises the question: can we be sure that 'magnitude of consequences' and 'perceived social consensus' really do cause variation in moral awareness and that this apparent causal relationship is genuine and not produced by something else? In discussing issues of causality, it is common to refer to the factor that has a causal impact as the **independent variable** and the effect as the **dependent variable** (see Key concept 2.3).



### Key concept 2.3
### What is a variable?

A variable is simply an attribute on which cases vary. 'Cases' can obviously be organizations, but they can also include things such as people, offices and shops, production plants, cities, or nations. If an attribute does not vary, it is a **constant**. If all manufacturing organizations had the same ratio of male to female managers, this attribute of such organizations would be a constant and not a variable. Constants are rarely of interest to business researchers. It is common to distinguish between different types of variable. The most basic distinction is between independent variables and dependent variables. The former are deemed to have a causal influence on the latter.

In the case of the research of Parboteeah, Hoegl, and Cullen (2009) in Research in focus 1.5, 'religious belief' was an independent variable and 'work obligation' the dependent variable. Thus, internal validity raises the question: how confident can we be that the independent variable really is at least in part responsible for the variation that has been identified in the dependent variable?

- *External validity*. This issue is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study can be generalized beyond the specific research context. It is in this context that the issue of how people or organizations are selected to participate in research becomes crucial. This is why Scase and Goffee (1989) go to such great lengths to detail the process whereby their sample of UK managers was generated (see Research in focus 2.15). External validity is one of the main reasons why quantitative researchers are so keen to generate representative samples (see Chapter 7).
- *Ecological validity*. This criterion is concerned with the question of whether or not social scientific findings are applicable to people's everyday, natural social settings. As Cicourel (1982: 15) has put it: 'Do our instruments capture the daily life conditions, opinions, values, attitudes, and knowledge base of those we study as expressed in their natural habitat?' This criterion is concerned with the question of whether business research sometimes produces findings that may be technically valid but have little to do with what happens in people's everyday lives. If research findings are ecologically invalid, they are in a sense artefacts of the social scientist's arsenal of data collection and analytic tools. The more the social scientist intervenes in natural settings or creates unnatural ones, such as a laboratory or even a special room to carry out interviews, the more likely it is that findings will be ecologically invalid. This was an important finding to have emerged from the Hawthorne studies (see Research in focus 2.8). Furthermore, the conclusions deriving from a study using questionnaires may have measurement validity and a reasonable level of internal validity, and they may be externally valid, in the sense that the findings can be generalized to other samples confronted by the same questionnaire, but the unnaturalness of the fact of having to answer a questionnaire may mean that the findings have limited ecological validity.

One feature that is striking about most of the discussion so far is that it seems to be geared mainly to quantitative rather than to qualitative research. Both reliability and measurement validity are essentially concerned with the adequacy of measures, which are most obviously a concern in quantitative research. Internal validity is concerned with the soundness of findings that specify a causal connection, an issue that is most commonly of concern to quantitative researchers. External validity may be relevant to qualitative research, but the whole question of representativeness of research subjects with which the issue is concerned has a more obvious application to the realm of quantitative research, with its preoccupation with sampling procedures that maximize the opportunity for generating a **representative sample**. The issue of ecological validity relates to the naturalness of the research approach and seems to have considerable relevance to both qualitative and quantitative research.

Some writers have sought to apply the concepts of reliability and validity to the practice of qualitative research (e.g. LeCompte and Goetz 1982; Kirk and Miller 1986; Peräkylä 1997), but others argue that the grounding of these ideas in quantitative research renders them inapplicable to or inappropriate for qualitative research. Writers like Kirk and Miller (1986) have applied concepts of validity and reliability to qualitative research but have changed the sense in which the terms are used very slightly. Some qualitative researchers sometimes propose that the studies they produce should be judged or evaluated according to different criteria from those used in relation to quantitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that alternative terms and ways of assessing qualitative research are required. For example, they propose trustworthiness as a criterion of how good a qualitative study is. Each aspect of trustworthiness has a parallel with the previous quantitative research criteria.

- *Credibility*, which parallels internal validity—i.e. how believable are the findings?
- *Transferability*, which parallels external validity—i.e. do the findings apply to other contexts?
- *Dependability*, which parallels reliability—i.e. are the findings likely to apply at other times?
- *Confirmability*, which parallels objectivity—i.e. has the investigator allowed his or her values to intrude to a high degree?

These criteria will be returned to in Chapter 16.

Hammersley (1992*a*) occupies a kind of middle position here in that, while he proposes validity as an important criterion (in the sense that an empirical account must be plausible and credible and should take into

account the amount and kind of evidence used in relation to an account), he also proposes relevance as a criterion. Relevance is taken to be assessed from the vantage point of the importance of a topic within its substantive field or the contribution it makes to the literature on that field. The issues in these different views have to do with the different objectives that many qualitative researchers argue are distinctive about their craft. The distinctive features of qualitative research will be examined in later chapters.

However, it should also be borne in mind that one of the criteria previously cited—ecological validity—may have been formulated largely in the context of quantitative research, but is in fact a feature in relation to which qualitative research fares rather well. Qualitative research often involves a naturalistic stance (see Key concept 2.4). This means that the researcher seeks to collect data in naturally occurring situations and environments, as opposed to fabricated, artificial ones. This characteristic probably applies particularly well to ethnographic research, in which participant observation is a prominent element of data collection, but it is sometimes suggested that it applies also to the sort of interview approach typically used by qualitative researchers, which is less directive than the kind used in quantitative research. We might expect that much qualitative research is stronger than quantitative investigations in terms of ecological validity.



## Key concept 2.4
## What is naturalism?

**Naturalism** is an interesting example of a—mercifully relatively rare—instance of a term that not only has different meanings, but also has meanings that can actually be contradictory! It is possible to identify three different meanings.

1. *Naturalism means viewing all objects of study—whether natural or social ones—as belonging to the same realm and a consequent commitment to the principles of natural scientific method.* This meaning, which has clear affinities with positivism, implies that all entities belong to the same order of things, so that there is no essential difference between the objects of the natural sciences and those of the social sciences (M. Williams 2000). For many naturalists, this principle implies that there should be no difference between the natural and the social sciences in the ways they study phenomena. This version of naturalism essentially proposes a unity between the objects of the natural and social sciences and, because of this, there is no reason for social scientists not to employ the approaches of the natural scientist.
2. *Naturalism means being true to the nature of the phenomenon being investigated.* According to Matza, naturalism is 'the philosophical view that strives to remain true to the nature of the phenomenon under study' (1969: 5) and 'claims fidelity to the natural world' (1969: 8). This meaning of the term represents a fusion of elements of an interpretivist epistemology and a constructionist ontology, which were examined in Chapter 1. Naturalism is taken to recognize that people attribute meaning to behaviour and are authors of their social world rather than passive objects.
3. *Naturalism is a style of research that seeks to minimize the intrusion of artificial methods of data collection.* This meaning implies that the social world should be as undisturbed as possible when it is being studied (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 6).

The second and third meanings overlap considerably, in that it could easily be imagined that, in order to conduct a naturalistic enquiry in the second sense, a research approach that adopted naturalistic principles in the third sense would be required. Both the second and third meanings are incompatible with, and indeed opposed to, the first meaning. Naturalism, in the first sense, is invariably viewed by writers drawing on an interpretivist epistemology as not 'true' to the social world, precisely because: it posits that there are no differences between humans and the objects of the natural sciences; it therefore ignores the capacity of humans to interpret the social world and to be active agents; and, in its preference for the application of natural science methods, it employs artificial methods of data collection. When writers are described as *anti-naturalists*, it is invariably the first of the three meanings that they are deemed to be railing against.

By and large, these issues in business research have been presented because some of them will emerge in the context of the discussion of research designs in the section on research designs (below), but in a number of ways they also represent background considerations for some of the issues to be examined. They will be returned to later in the book.



# Research designs

In this discussion of research designs, five different types will be examined: experimental design; cross-sectional or social survey design; longitudinal design; case study design; and comparative design. Variations on these designs will be examined in their relevant subsections.

## Experimental design

True field experiments are rare in business and management research, mainly because of the problems of achieving the requisite level of control when dealing with organizational behaviour. Why, then, bother to introduce experimental designs at all in the context of a book written for business and management researchers? The chief reason, quite aside from the fact that they are sometimes employed, is that a true **experiment** is often used as a yardstick against which non-experimental research is assessed. Experimental research is frequently held up as a touchstone because it engenders considerable confidence in the robustness and trustworthiness of causal findings. In other words, true experiments tend to be very strong in terms of internal validity.

### Manipulation

If experiments are so strong in this respect, why then do business researchers not make far greater use of them? The reason is simple: in order to conduct a true experiment, it is necessary to manipulate the independent variable in order to determine whether it does in fact have an influence on the dependent variable. Experimental subjects are likely to be allocated to one of two or more experimental groups, each of which represents different types or levels of the independent variable. It is then possible to establish how far differences between the groups are responsible for variations in the level of the dependent variable. Manipulation, then, entails intervening in a situation to determine which of two or more things happens to subjects. However, the vast majority of independent variables with which business researchers are concerned cannot be manipulated. If we are interested in the effects of gender on work experiences, we cannot manipulate gender so that some people are made male and others female. If we are interested in the effects of variations in the economic environment on organizational performance, we cannot alter share prices or interest rates. As with the huge majority of such variables, the levels of social engineering that would be required are beyond serious contemplation.

Before moving on to a more complete discussion of experimental design, it is important to introduce a basic distinction between the *laboratory experiment* and the *field experiment*. As its name implies, the laboratory experiment takes place in a laboratory or in a contrived setting, whereas field experiments occur in real-life settings, such as in workplaces or retail spaces, as the example in Research in focus 2.5 illustrates. It is experiments of the latter type that are most likely to touch on areas of interest to business and management researchers. However, in business and management research it is more common to find field experiments in which a scenario is employed as a substitute for a real-life setting. Furthermore, and somewhat confusingly, researchers will sometimes refer to their research as a field study. This simply means that the research was conducted in a real-life setting; it need not imply that a field experiment was involved.

### Classic experimental design

In what is known as the classical experimental design, two groups are established and this forms the basis for experimental manipulation of the independent variable. The *experimental group*, or *treatment group*, receives the treatment, and it is compared against the *control group*, which does not. The dependent variable is measured before and after the experimental manipulation, so that a before-and-after analysis can be conducted. Moreover, the groups are assigned randomly to their respective groups. This enables the researcher(s) to feel confident that any difference between the two groups is attributable to manipulation of the independent variable.

In order to capture the essence of this design, the following simple notation is employed:

## Research in focus 2.5
## An example of a field experiment

Frayne and Geringer (2000) examined the possibility that, if individuals are able to manage themselves more than they do usually, their performance in their jobs will be positively affected. Their reasoning was based on some of the literature on 'self-management', as well as on relevant psychological theory such as social cognitive theory. Their primary hypothesis was expressed as follows: 'This study's primary hypothesis was that skill in self-management is a causal or independent variable that affects employee job performance positively' (2000: 363).

Experimental participants were salespeople working for a large North American insurance company. Those salespeople who had not achieved the company's performance targets were sent a memo inviting them to participate in the study. Staff were informed 'only persons who could commit themselves to four weekly training sessions, each of 2 hours' length and offered during normal work hours, should volunteer for the training program' (2000: 364). Sixty individuals volunteered and were assigned randomly to experimental and control groups. Members of the experimental group received training in self-management over several weeks. Members of the control group did not receive the training but were informed that they would receive it in the future. In fact, a year after the experimental group had begun its training, the control group was then trained. The effectiveness of the training in self-management was assessed using 'reaction, learning, cognitive, and behavioral criteria' (2000: 364). Effectiveness was assessed at 3, 6, 9, and 12 months for both groups. The hypothesis was confirmed in that the experimental group performed much better than the control group at each point on the various effectiveness criteria employed. Further, when the control group was trained after the 12 months had elapsed, it exhibited an increase in its effectiveness comparable to that of the experimental group.

This field experiment is fairly unusual in that it is often difficult for researchers to assign participants randomly to experimental and control groups. Often, field experiments are 'quasi-experiments' (see below)—that is, studies that have some if not many of the features of a real experiment but are lacking in one or possibly more ways. This arises because organizations are unable to surrender sufficient control to researchers to allow **random assignment** because of the ongoing work that has to be attended to. However, field experiments are not without their problems, even when they exhibit the features of a true experiment. As Frayne and Geringer note, it is possible that the members of the experimental and control groups communicated with one another about their experiences, which, if it occurred, might have contaminated the findings.

**Obs** An **obs**ervation made in relation to the dependent variable; there may well be two or more observations, before (the pre-test) and after (the post-test) the experimental manipulation.

**Exp** The **exp**erimental treatment (manipulation of the independent variable). **No Exp** refers to the absence of an experimental treatment and represents the experience of the control group.

**T** The **t**iming of the observations made in relation to the dependent variable.

Thus, the classical experimental design comprises the following elements: random assignment to the experimental and control groups; pre-testing of both groups at $T_1$; manipulation of the experimental treatment so that the experimental group receives it (Exp) but the control group does not (No Exp); and post-testing of the two groups at $T_2$. The difference between each group's pre- and post-test scores is then computed to establish whether or not Exp has made a difference. See Figure 2.1 for an outline of these elements.

## Figure 2.1
### Classical experimental design

| $T_1$ | | $T_2$ |
|---|---|---|
| $Obs_1$ | Exp | $Obs_2$ |
| $Obs_3$ | No Exp | $Obs_4$ |

### Classic experimental design and validity

The purpose of the control group in a true experiment is to control (in other words, eliminate) the possible effects

of rival explanations of a causal finding. We might then be in a position to take the view that the study is internally valid. The presence of a control group and the random assignment of subjects to the experimental and control groups enable us to eliminate rival explanations and eliminate threats to internal validity. These threats include the following:

- *Testing*. This threat refers to the possibility that subjects may become sensitized to the aims of the experiment (see Research in focus 2.8). The presence of a control group, which presumably also experiences the same 'experimenter effect', allows us to discount this possibility if there is no difference between the experimental and control groups.
- *History*. This threat refers to the possibility that events in the experimental environment, unrelated to manipulation of the independent variable, may have caused the changes. If there is no control group, we would be less sure that changes to the independent variable are producing the change. If there is a control group, differences between the control and experimental groups can be more confidently attributed to manipulation of the independent variable.
- *Maturation*. Quite simply, people change, and the ways in which they change may have implications for the dependent variable. Since maturation should affect the control group subjects as well, the control group allows us to discount the possibility that changes would have occurred anyway, with or without manipulation of the independent variable.
- *Selection*. If there are differences between the two groups, which would arise if they had been selected by a non-random process, variations between the experimental and control groups could be attributed to pre-existing differences in their membership. However, if a random process of assignment to the experimental and control groups is employed, this possibility can be discounted.
- *Ambiguity about the direction of causal influence*. The very notion of an independent variable and dependent variable presupposes a direction of causality. However, there may be occasions when the temporal sequence is unclear, so that it is not possible to establish which variable affects the other. The existence of a control group can help to make this clear.

These threats are taken from Campbell (1957) and Cook and Campbell (1979), but not all the threats to internal validity they refer to are included. The presence of a control group coupled with random assignment allows us to eliminate these threats. As a result, our confidence in the causal finding is greatly enhanced.

Simply because research is deemed to be internally valid does not mean that it is beyond reproach or that questions cannot be raised about it. When a quantitative research strategy has been employed, other criteria can be applied to evaluate a study. In the case of the Bunce and West (1996) study, for example (see Research in focus 2.9), there is a potential question of measurement validity. Even though measures of intrinsic job motivation and intrinsic job satisfaction may appear to exhibit a correspondence with work-related stress—that is, to possess **face validity**—in the sense that they appear to exhibit a correspondence with what they are measuring, we might feel somewhat uneasy about how far increases in job motivation and satisfaction can be regarded as indicative of improvements in psychological well-being and an individual's ability to manage occupational strain. Does it really measure what it is supposed to measure? The second question relating to measurement validity is whether or not the experimental manipulation really worked. In other words, did the stress management programme and the innovation promotion programme create the conditions for improvements in psychological well-being and reductions in occupational strain to be examined?

Secondly, is the research externally valid? Campbell (1957) and Cook and Campbell (1979) identify five major threats to the external validity and hence **generalizability** of an investigation. These can be summarized as follows:

- *Interaction of selection and treatment*. This threat raises the question: to what social and psychological groups can a finding be generalized? Can it be generalized to a wide variety of individuals who might be differentiated by gender, ethnicity, social class, and personality? For instance, many influential studies of leadership, conducted on samples comprising a majority of men, rarely treat gender as a significant variable (Wilson 1995). It is possible that the findings of these studies simply reflect the characteristics of the predominantly male samples and therefore cannot provide a theory of effective leadership that is generalizable across both men and women.
- *Interaction of setting and treatment*. This threat relates to the issue of how confident we can be that the results of a study can be applied to other settings. For example, in the example in Research in focus 2.5, Frayne and Geringer (2000) had a particularly large amount of influence over the experimental arrangements, given that this research took place in a company rather than in a laboratory. The reason for this control over the

arrangements may have been that the company had a significant number of salespersons who were not meeting its performance criteria and was therefore keen to find a way to redress the situation. Also, the sales staff themselves may have been keen to redress a situation in which they were perceived to be under-performing. As a result, the setting may have been unusual, and this may have had an influence on the experimental participants' receptivity to the training programme.

- *Interaction of history and treatment*. This raises the question of whether or not the findings can be generalized to the past and to the future. The original Aston studies, for example, were conducted in the early 1960s (see Research in focus 2.6). How confident can we be that these findings would apply today?
- *Interaction effects of pre-testing*. As a result of being pre-tested, subjects in an experiment may become sensitized to the experimental treatment. Consequently, the findings may not be generalizable to groups that have *not* been pre-tested and, of course, in the real world people are rarely tested in this way. The findings may, therefore, be partly determined by the experimental treatment as such and partly by how pre-test sensitization has influenced the way in which subjects respond to the treatment. This may have occurred in Bunce and West's research (see Research in focus 2.9).
- *Reactive effects of experimental arrangements*. People are frequently, if not invariably, aware that they are participating in an experiment. Their awareness may influence how they respond to the experimental treatment and therefore affect the generalizability of the findings. This was a major finding of the Hawthorne studies (see Research in focus 2.8).

Thirdly, are the findings ecologically valid? The fact that the research is a field experiment rather than a laboratory experiment seems to enhance this aspect of the Bunce and West (1996) research. The fact that Bunce and West made intensive use of various instruments to measure psychological well-being and job strain might be considered a source of concerns about ecological validity, though this is an area in which most if not all quantitative research is likely to be implicated.

A fourth issue that we might want to raise relates to the question of replicability. For example, Pugh et al. (1968) lay out very clearly the procedures and measures that were employed in the Aston studies, and these have been used by several other researchers seeking to carry out replication of this research, both in business and non-business organizations, including trade unions, churches, schools, and public bureaucracies. Consequently, the research is replicable. However, analysis of the same data by Aldrich (1972) and Hilton (1972) using a different statistical technique showed other possible patterns of relationships between the variables in the Aston studies (see Research in focus 2.6). This failure to replicate casts doubt on the external validity of the original research and suggests that the first three threats referred to above may have played an important part in the differences between the two sets of results.

### The laboratory experiment

Many experiments in fields like social psychology are laboratory experiments rather than field experiments. Some of the most well known of these, such as Milgram's (1963) electric-shock experiments or Zimbardo's prison experiments (see Research in focus 5.3), have informed our understanding of how individuals and groups behave within modern work organizations to such an extent that they have inspired the development of television programmes based on them (see Research in 5.4). One of the main advantages of laboratory experiments is that the researcher has far greater influence over the experimental arrangements. For example, it is easier to randomly assign subjects to different experimental conditions in the laboratory than to do the same in an ongoing, real-life organization. The researcher therefore has a higher level of control, and this is likely to enhance the internal validity of the study. It is also likely that laboratory experiments will be more straightforward to replicate, because they are less bound up with a certain milieu that is difficult to reproduce.

However, laboratory experiments like the one described in Research in focus 2.7 suffer from a number of limitations. First, the external validity is likely to be difficult to establish. There is the interaction of setting and treatment, since the setting of the laboratory is likely to be unrelated to real-world experiences and contexts. Also, there is likely to be an interaction of selection and treatment. In the case of Howell and Frost's (1989) study described in Research in focus 2.7, there are a number of difficulties: the subjects were students, who are unlikely to be representative of the general population, so that their responses to the experimental treatment may be distinctive; they were volunteers, and it is known that volunteers differ from non-volunteers (Rosnow and Rosenthal 1997: ch. 5); and they were given incentives to participate, which may further demarcate them from others, since not everyone is equally amenable to the blandishments of inducements. There will have been no problem of interaction effects of pre-testing, because, like many experiments, there was no pre-testing. However, it is quite feasible that reactive



## Research in focus 2.6
## Establishing the direction of causality

The Aston studies (Pugh et al. 1968) consisted of a highly influential programme of research that derived from an initial survey study of the correlates of organizational structure carried out in forty-six West Midlands organizations during the early 1960s. While the study was guided by the hypothesis that characteristics of an organization's structure would be related to characteristics of its context, there was little in the way of detailed hypothesis formulation on exactly how these characteristics were related. The view taken by the researchers was that, although there was a considerable amount of case study research describing the functioning of organizations, very little in the way of systematic comparison was attempted. Moreover, generalization was made difficult because it was not possible to assess the representativeness of a particular case study. The strategy developed by the Aston researchers was therefore 'to carry out comparative surveys across organizations to establish meaningful stable relationships which would enable the particular idiosyncracies of case studies to be placed into perspective' (Pugh 1998: p. xv). One of the key assumptions on which the research was based was that 'the nature, structure and functioning of an organization will be influenced by its objectives, context and environment, all of which must be taken into account' (1998: p. xv). The researchers concluded that organizational size and production technology were important potential correlates of organization structure, though their findings implied that size, rather than technology, was the more critical factor. This finding contradicted other studies conducted at the time, such as Woodward (1965), which suggested that technology was a more important causal factor. However, in later analysis of the same data using a different statistical technique, Aldrich (1972) and Hilton (1972) were able to show other possible patterns of relationships between the three variables, which suggested that technology was an important cause of organizational structure, which in turn affected size. From this example we can see some of the difficulties in identifying the causal relationship between variables using survey data.

effects may have been set in motion by the experimental arrangements. As Research in focus 2.8 illustrates, reactive effects associated with an experiment can have a profound effect on the outcomes of the research. Secondly, the ecological validity of the study may be poor because we do not know how well the findings are applicable to the real world and everyday life. However, while the study may lack what is often called mundane realism, it may nonetheless enjoy experimental realism (Aronson and Carlsmith 1968). The latter means that the subjects are very involved in the experiment and take it very seriously.



## Research in focus 2.7
## A laboratory experiment on leadership

Howell and Frost (1989) were interested in the possibility that charismatic leadership was a more effective approach within organizations than other types of leadership behaviour. To test this assumption they conducted a laboratory experiment that compared the effectiveness of charismatic leadership as against two alternative approaches—consideration and structuring. A number of hypotheses were generated, including: 'Individuals working under a charismatic leader will have higher task performance than will individuals working under a considerate leader' (1989: 245).

One hundred and forty-four students volunteered for the experiment. Their course grades were enhanced by 3 per cent for agreeing to participate. They were randomly assigned to work under one of the three types of leadership. The work was a simulated business task. All three leadership approaches were performed by two female actresses. In broad conformity with the hypotheses, subjects working under charismatic leaders scored generally higher in terms of measures of task performance than those working under the other leaders, particularly the considerate leader.



## Research in focus 2.8
## The Hawthorne effect

The effect of the experimenter or the fact of being studied on the subject is commonly referred to as the '**Hawthorne effect**'. This phrase was coined as a result of the series of interlinked investigations carried out during the late 1920s and early 1930s at the Hawthorne works of the Western Electric Company in the USA (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939).

One phase of the investigations entailed a group of women carrying out manual tasks being taken away from their department and working in a separate room. The aim of the study was to discover how changes in the number and duration of rest pauses, in length of the working day, in heating and lighting, and so on affected productivity, as this quotation from the study illustrates:

> First, the amount of light was increased regularly day by day, and the girls were asked each day how they liked the change. As the light was increased, the girls told the investigator that they liked the brighter lights. Then for a day or two the investigator allowed the girls to see the electrician come and change the light bulbs. In reality, the electrician merely took out bulbs of a given size and inserted bulbs of the same size, without in any way changing the amount of light. The girls, thinking that the light was still being 'stepped up' day by day, commented favourably about the increase of light. After a few days of this, the experimenter started to decrease the intensity of light, keeping the girls informed of the change and soliciting their reaction. After a period of this day-by-day decrease in illumination, he again allowed the girls to see the electrician change the bulbs without really changing the intensity of illumination. Again the girls gave answers that were to be expected, in that they said the 'lesser' light was not so pleasant to work under as the brighter light. Their production did not change at any stage of the experiment. (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939: 17)

However, as the study went on, it was found that productivity *did* increase, irrespective of the changes that were being introduced. Eventually it was recognized that the women were responding to the positive attention and special treatment they were receiving. The researchers concluded that increases in worker productivity were due not to any changes in the conditions of the working environment, but instead to the favourable circumstances that the experimental arrangements had produced. While this finding did much to stimulate the 'human-relations' approach to the study of work, by pointing to the potential advantages of providing people with psycho-social support in the workplace, it also neatly demonstrates that experimental arrangements may induce an effect over and above the intentions of the investigator. This has been referred to, more generally, as the 'experimenter effect', where the researcher creates a bias in the data through participation in the research situation or by inadvertently communicating his or her preferred research outcome.

The Hawthorne effect also draws attention to the way in which researchers themselves represent 'an audience to the actors being studied', and it is therefore likely that the researcher's activities will have an influence on the research setting. This draws attention to the fact that, 'while the researcher attends to the study of other persons and their other activities, these other persons attend to the study of the researcher and his activities' (Van Maanen and Kolb 1985: 6). The results of fieldwork thus depend in part upon the outcomes of the unofficial study that the observed make of the physical nature and psychological character of the observer, as well as the other way around.

### Quasi-experiments

A number of writers have drawn attention to the possibilities offered by **quasi-experiments**—that is, studies that have certain characteristics of experimental designs but that do not fulfil all the internal validity requirements. A large number of types of quasi-experiment have been identified (Cook and Campbell 1979), and it is not proposed to cover them here. A particularly interesting form of quasi-experiment occurs in the case of 'natural experiments'. These are 'experiments' in the sense of entailing manipulation of a social setting, but as part of a naturally occurring attempt to alter social arrangements. In such circumstances, random assignment to experimental and control groups is invariably not possible. An example is provided in Research in focus 2.9.



## Research in focus 2.9
## A quasi-experiment

In a study of health-care workers in the UK National Health Service, reported by Bunce and West (1996), a traditional stress management programme was compared with an intervention promoting innovation at work as a form of stress management. It was expected that both types of intervention would improve psychological well-being and reduce strain. In order to test this proposition, the two groups were compared against a control group, which was comprised of health-care workers who were not involved in any kind of workplace stress management initiative. Some of the participants were volunteers, but others were encouraged to take part by their line managers. Bunce and West suggest that this reduced the possibility of self-selection bias.

The groups met on two occasions, a week apart, and were led by qualified facilitators (one of whom was Bunce). A range of questionnaire instruments was used to measure 'psychological well-being', 'psychological strain', 'innovation', and 'session process' among participants. Measurements were taken three months prior to the start of the interventions, three months after they had ended, and again one year later. This meant independent variables were measured before and after the experimental manipulation so that a before-and-after analysis could be conducted. The researchers could therefore be confident that, if they did establish a difference in stress levels between the three groups, it was likely to be due to experimental manipulation.

This study uses a quasi-experimental design, in which a control group is compared to the two treatment groups. It bears some of the hallmarks of a classic experimental design, but there is no random assignment; participants were assigned to the groups according to their work location. Subjects were not randomly assigned to the three groups because of practical constraints such as staff availability. Although the traditional stress management programme and the innovation promotion programme both achieved positive results, it was found that the process of participation was important in achieving these outcomes.

The absence of random assignment in Research in focus 2.9 casts a certain amount of doubt on the study's internal validity, since the groups may not have been equivalent. However, the results of such studies are still compelling, because they are not artificial interventions in social life and because their ecological validity is therefore very strong. Hofstede's study of cultural differences (see Research in focus 1.12) falls into this category, because the research design enabled some degree of control to be maintained over variables—all employees belonged to the same multinational organization, even though the research took place in a natural setting. This meant that corporate culture constituted the dependent variable and differences in national cultures and mentalities of employees constituted independent variables, where Hofstede anticipated the main differences would be seen. In addition, some requirements of internal validity were fulfilled, through replication of the questionnaire survey on two separate occasions, once in 1967–9 and again in 1971–3.

Most writers on quasi-experimentation discount experiments in which there is no control group or basis for comparison (Cook and Campbell 1979). However, some experiments do involve manipulation of the independent variable within experimental groups without a control group as the basis for comparison. For example, in an experimental study of electronic brainstorming, Gallupe et al. (1992) wanted to test the effect of group size on performance. The researchers wanted to find out if electronic brainstorming could more effectively support the generation of ideas within large groups (six and twelve persons), as well as in small groups (two, four, and six persons)—unlike the traditional, verbal brainstorming technique. In this study, both the large and the small groups received the experimental treatment—that is, electronic brainstorming—and both received the control treatment—that is, verbal brainstorming. It was anticipated that large and small groups would show similar levels of productivity in the verbal brainstorming experiment, but that large groups would outperform small groups in the electronic brainstorming experiment. Because there was no control group, where no manipulation of the independent variable occurs, this study cannot be seen as a classic experimental design. However, the internal validity of the findings was reinforced by the fact that both the experiments were also carried out on small groups, where it was found that electronic brainstorming made no difference to group performance. Comparison between

large and small experimental groups helped to reduce threats to the internal validity of the findings. The study thus exhibits some of the characteristics of an experimental design, even though no control group was used.

Finally, experimental designs, and more especially quasi-experimental designs, have been particularly prominent in **evaluation research** studies (see Key concept 2.10 and Research in focus 2.11).

Possibly because of the various difficulties with quasi-experiments that have been noted in this section, Grant and Wall (2009) have noted that they are used relatively infrequently in organizational research. However, they also note that there may be ways of addressing some of the concerns regarding internal validity that beset quasi-experiments. For example, they suggest that it may be possible to strengthen causal inferences when it is not possible to assign experimental and control group participants randomly and the researcher has limited or no control over the experimental manipulation. This might be done by seeking out further information that will help to discount some of the rival interpretations of a causal link that arise from the lack of a true experimental design. However, it is unlikely that such a view will find favour among writers who adopt a purist view about the need for experimental designs in order to generate robust causal inferences.



## Key concept 2.10
## What is evaluation research?

Evaluation research, as its name implies, is concerned with the evaluation of such occurrences as organizational programmes or interventions. The essential question that is typically asked by such studies is: has the intervention (for example, a new policy initiative or an organizational change) achieved its anticipated goals? A typical design may have one group that is exposed to the treatment—that is, the new initiative—and a control group that is not. Since it is often not feasible or ethical to randomly assign research participants to the two groups, such studies are usually quasi-experimental. The use of the principles of experimental design is fairly entrenched in evaluation research, but other approaches have emerged in recent years. Approaches to evaluation based on qualitative research have also been developed. While there are differences of opinion about how qualitative evaluation should be carried out, the different views typically coalesce around a recognition of the importance of an in-depth understanding of the context in which an intervention occurs and the diverse viewpoints of the stakeholders (Greene 1994, 2000). Pawson and Tilley (1997) advocate an approach that draws on the principles of critical realism (see Key concept 1.9) and that sees the outcome of an intervention as the result of generative mechanisms and the contexts of those mechanisms. A focus of the former element entails examining the causal factors that inhibit or promote change when an intervention occurs. Pawson and Tilley's approach is supportive of the use of both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

### Significance of experimental design

As was stated at the outset, the chief reason for introducing the experiment as a research design is because it is frequently considered to be a yardstick against which quantitative research is judged. This occurs largely because of the fact that a true experiment will allow doubts about internal validity to be allayed and reflects the considerable emphasis placed on the determination of causality in quantitative research. As we will see in the next section, cross-sectional designs of the kind associated with social survey research are frequently regarded as limited, because of the problems of unambiguously imputing causality when using such designs.

### Logic of comparison

However, before exploring such issues, it is important to draw attention to an important general lesson that an examination of experiments teaches us. A central feature of any experiment is the fact that it entails a *comparison*: at the very least it entails a comparison of results obtained by an experimental group with those engendered by a control group. In the case of the Howell and Frost (1989) experiment in Research in focus 2.7, there is no control group: the research entails a comparison of the effects of three different forms of leadership. The advantage of carrying out any kind of comparison like this is that we understand the phenomenon that we are interested in



## Research in focus 2.11
## An evaluation study of role redesign

The purpose of research conducted by Hyde et al. (2006) was to examine the introduction of role redesign in the NHS under the Changing Workforce Programme (CWP), highlight implications for employment relations, and identify characteristics of successful CWP initiatives. This was a qualitative, rather than an experimental, evaluation that was based on secondary data analysis, semi-structured interviews, and observations. The two-phase study was carried out by the research team in 2003 and funded by the Department of Health. The first phase of the evaluation focused on the thirteen pilot sites where the CWP had been introduced and 'involved documentary review of reports relating to this initiative. In addition, individual interviews were conducted with participants from each of the pilot sites' (2006: 700); in total thirty interviews were conducted across the thirteen sites. The second phase involved a case study design 'to study the process of role redesign and identify examples of good practice' (2006: 700). Four of the thirteen pilot sites were selected as case studies 'to illustrate varying degrees of progress in relation to individual roles; variation in type of redesign attempted; different types of partnership arrangement; differing means of involving those receiving the service; and relevance to the wider NHS and other care sectors' (2006: 700). The fifth case study involved the CWP team itself, to gain an overview of the development of the programme. A further sixty-four interviews were carried out in the five case study sites. In addition, the research team attended meetings and conducted role observations. This approach to evaluation enabled the researchers to 'take account of the heterogeneity and complexity of CWP interventions' (2006: 703) in different health service contexts.

better when we compare it with something else that is similar to it. The case for arguing that charismatic leadership is an effective, performance-enhancing form of leadership is much more persuasive when we view it in relation to other forms of leadership. Thus, while the specific considerations concerning experimental design are typically associated with quantitative research, the potential of comparison in business research represents a more general lesson that transcends matters of both research strategy and research design. In other words, while the experimental design is typically associated with a quantitative research strategy, the specific logic of comparison provides lessons of broad applicability and relevance. This issue is given more specific attention below in relation to the comparative design.

## Cross-sectional design

The cross-sectional design is often called a social survey design, but the idea of the social survey is so closely connected in most people's minds with questionnaires and structured interviewing that the more generic-sounding term *cross-sectional design* is preferable. While the research methods associated with social surveys are certainly frequently employed within the context of cross-sectional research, so too are many other research methods, including **structured observation**, **content analysis**, official statistics, and diaries. All these research methods will be covered in later chapters, but in the meantime the basic structure of the cross-sectional design will be outlined.

The cross-sectional design is defined in Key concept 2.12. A number of elements of this definition have been emphasized.



## Key concept 2.12
## What is a cross-sectional research design?

A cross-sectional design entails the collection of data on more than one case (usually quite a lot more than one) and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables (usually many more than two), which are then examined to detect patterns of association.

- *More than one case*. Researchers employing a cross-sectional design are interested in variation. That variation can be in respect of people, organizations, nation states, or whatever. Variation can be established only when more than one case is being examined. Usually, researchers employing this design will select a lot more than two cases for a variety of reasons: they are more likely to encounter variation in all the variables in which they are interested; they can make finer distinctions between cases; and the requirements of sampling procedure are likely to necessitate larger numbers (see Chapter 7).
- *At a single point in time*. In cross-sectional design research, data on the variables of interest are collected more or less simultaneously. When an individual completes a questionnaire, which may contain fifty or more variables, the answers are supplied at essentially the same time. This contrasts with an experimental design. Thus, in the classical experimental design, someone in the experimental group is pre-tested, then exposed to the experimental treatment, and then post-tested. Days, weeks, months, or even years may separate the different phases.
- *Quantitative or quantifiable data*. In order to establish variation between cases (and then to examine associations between variables—see next point), it is necessary to have a systematic and standardized method for gauging variation. One of the most important advantages of quantification is that it provides the researcher with a consistent benchmark. The advantages of quantification and of measurement will be addressed in greater detail in Chapter 6.
- *Patterns of association*. With a cross-sectional design it is only possible to examine relationships between variables. There is no time ordering to the variables, because the data on them are collected more or less simultaneously, and the researcher does not (invariably because he or she cannot) manipulate any of the variables. This creates the problem referred to in Research in focus 2.6 in establishing the direction of causal influence. If the researcher discovers a relationship between two variables, he or she cannot be certain whether this denotes a causal relationship, because the features of an experimental design are not present. All that can be said is that the variables are related. This is not to say that it is not possible to draw causal inferences from research based on a cross-sectional design. As will be shown in Chapter 14, there are a number of ways in which the researcher is able to draw certain inferences about causality, but these inferences rarely have the credibility of causal findings deriving from an experimental design. As a result, cross-sectional research invariably lacks the internal validity that one finds in most experimental research.

In this book, the term 'survey' will be reserved for research that employs a cross-sectional research design and in which data are collected by questionnaire or by structured interview (see Key concept 2.13). This will allow us to retain the conventional understanding of what a survey is while recognizing that the cross-sectional research design has a wider relevance—that is, one that is not necessarily associated with the collection of data by questionnaire or by structured interview. An example of a survey that is widely used and cited in the study of UK human resource management and industrial relations is given in Research in focus 2.14.



## Key concept 2.13
## What is survey research?

Survey research comprises a cross-sectional design in relation to which data are collected predominantly by questionnaire or by structured interview on more than one case (usually quite a lot more than one) and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables (usually many more than two), which are then examined to detect patterns of association.

### Reliability, replicability, and validity

How does cross-sectional research measure up in terms of the previously outlined criteria for evaluating quantitative research: reliability, replicability, and validity?

- The issues of *reliability* and *measurement validity* are primarily matters relating to the quality of the measures that are employed to tap the concepts in which the researcher is interested, rather than matters



## Research in focus 2.14

# An example of survey research: the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS)

The 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) (previously the Workplace Employee Relations Survey) is the fifth in a series started in 1980 looking at changing employment relations policies and practices in the UK. The main objectives of the survey, which uses a research design that has remained broadly the same since the survey was started, are:

- to provide a map of employment relations practices in workplaces across the UK;
- to monitor changes in those practices over time;
- to inform policy development and permit assessment of the effects of public policy.

The purpose of the survey is thus to provide 'an extensive and authoritative body of factual information on practice in British workplaces' (Millward, Bryson, and Forth 2000: p. xiv). It is funded by a consortium of government agencies and research bodies. The survey collects information from:

- managers with responsibility for employment relations or personnel matters;
- trade union or employee representatives;
- employees.

The main unit of analysis in WERS is the 'workplace', which is defined as 'the activities of a single employer at a single set of premises' (Cully et al. 1999: 4). This definition means that a branch of a high-street bank is classed as a workplace, the head office of the bank as another, even though they legally form part of the same organization. A statistically representative random sample is generated using the Inter-Departmental Business Register, which contains details of all private and publicly owned 'going concerns' operating in the UK. The sample is stratified by employment size and by industrial activity. The 2004 WERS reduced the size threshold to include smaller workplaces of five or more employees, which is different from the threshold used in the 1998 survey, which included only workplaces with ten or more employees. The cross-section survey contains the following elements:

- a face-to-face interview with the senior manager with responsibility for employment relations or personnel issues (average duration 110 minutes);
- a four-page self-completion questionnaire on the financial performance of the establishment over the previous twelve months, to be completed by the senior manager;
- a face-to-face interview with a trade union representative and a non-union employee representative, where present (average duration 45 minutes);
- an eight-page self-completion questionnaire distributed to a random selection of up to twenty-five employees at each workplace.

Although the full results were not yet available at the time of writing this book, it was anticipated that the main management interviews would be conducted in around 2,500 workplaces and that self-completion questionnaires would be returned by around 30,000 employees.

New and expanded question areas in the 2004 management questionnaire focused on:

- trust, business strategy, and computer use;
- consultation, dispute resolution, work–life balance, and equal opportunities;
- organizational status, employee representation, and payment systems.

These data enable researchers to build up a picture of employee relations that links the view of employees with those of managers and workers in the same workplace. A key strength of the survey is thus derived from its representation of multiple interests in the workplace, rather than just relying on the account given by a senior manager.

One of the primary interests of the researchers has been to track changes over time. This was enabled by two specific elements of the survey design: a time-series dataset based on the cross-section survey and a panel study. The time series was formed from face-to-face interviews with the manager in each workplace in each of the five surveys, conducted in 1980, 1984, 1990, 1998, and 2004. This provides direct comparison of employment relations practice at five specific points in time over three decades using different, randomly generated samples on each occasion. However, the limitation of time-series analysis derives from the fact that, although it provides a snapshot of practice at a particular point in time, it does not reveal the process whereby change has occurred. For this reason, in 1998 the researchers incorporated a panel study, comprising workplaces that had taken part in the 1990 survey, where the same manager was re-interviewed in 1998 and again in 2004. This panel of around 900 workplaces enables analysis of the dynamics of change within workplaces that had continued to operate over this twelve-year period.

Most of the survey data will be made available in an anonymous form to academic and other researchers via the UK Data Archive at the University of Essex (see Chapter 13 for information on how to access this resource).

to do with a research design. In order to address questions of the quality of measures, some of the issues outlined in Chapter 6 would have to be considered.

- *Replicability* is likely to be present in most cross-sectional research to the degree that the researcher spells out procedures for: selecting respondents; designing measures of concepts; administration of research instruments (such as structured interview or self-completion questionnaire); and the analysis of data. Most quantitative research based on cross-sectional research designs specifies such procedures to a large degree.
- *Internal validity* is typically weak. As has just been suggested above, it is difficult to establish causal direction from the resulting data. Cross-sectional research designs produce associations rather than findings from which causal inferences can be unambiguously made. However, procedures for making causal inferences from cross-sectional data will be referred to in Chapter 14, though most researchers feel that the resulting causal findings rarely have the internal validity of those deriving from experimental designs.
- *External validity* is strong when, as in the case of research like the 2004 Workplace Employee Relations Survey (see Research in focus 2.14), the sample from which data are collected has been randomly selected. When non-random methods of sampling are employed, external validity becomes questionable. Sampling issues will be specifically addressed in Chapter 7.
- Since much cross-sectional research makes a great deal of use of research instruments, such as self-completion questionnaires and structured observation schedules, *ecological validity* may be jeopardized because these very instruments disrupt the 'natural habitat', as Cicourel (1982) put it (see quotation on p. 43).

## Non-manipulable variables

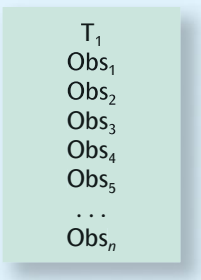
As was noted at the beginning of the section on experimental design, in much, if not most, business research it is not possible to manipulate the variables in which we are interested. This is why most quantitative business research employs a cross-sectional research design rather than an experimental one. Moreover, some of the variables in which social scientists are interested, and which are often viewed as potentially significant independent variables, simply cannot be manipulated, other than by extreme measures. At the individual level of analysis, age, ethnicity, gender, and social backgrounds are 'givens' that are not really amenable to the kind of manipulation that is necessary for a true experimental design. To a lesser extent this also applies at the organizational level of analysis to variables such as size, structure, technology, and culture. On the other hand, the very fact that we can regard certain variables as givens provides us with a clue as to how we can make causal inferences in cross-sectional research. Many of the variables in which we are interested can be *assumed* to be temporally prior to other variables. For example, we can assume that, if we find a relationship between gender and entrepreneurial behaviour, then the former is more likely to be the independent variable, because it is likely to be temporally prior to entrepreneurial behaviour. In other words, while we may not be able to manipulate the gender variable, we can draw some causal inferences from cross-sectional data.

## Structure of the cross-sectional design

The cross-sectional research design is not easy to depict in terms of the notation previously introduced, but Figure 2.2 captures its main features, except that in this case Obs simply represents an observation made in relation to a variable.

## Figure 2.2

**A cross-sectional design**




## Figure 2.3

**The data rectangle in cross-sectional research**

| | $Obs_1$ | $Obs_2$ | $Obs_3$ | $Obs_4$ | . . . | $Obs_n$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| $Case_1$ | | | | | | |
| $Case_2$ | | | | | | |
| $Case_3$ | | | | | | |
| $Case_4$ | | | | | | |
| $Case_5$ | | | | | | |
| . . . | | | | | | |
| $Case_n$ | | | | | | |

Figure 2.2 implies that a cross-sectional design comprises the collection of data on a series of variables ($Obs_1$ $Obs_2$ $Obs_3$ $Obs_4$ $Obs_5$ . . . $Obs_n$) at a single point in time, $T_1$. The effect is to create what Marsh (1982) referred to as a 'rectangle' of data that comprises variables $Obs_1$ to $Obs_n$ and cases $case_1$ to $case_n$, as in Figure 2.3. For each case (which may be a person, household, city, nation, etc.) data are available for each of the variables, $Obs_1$ to $Obs_n$, all of which will have been collected at $T_1$. Each **cell** in the matrix will have data in it.

### Cross-sectional design and research strategy

This discussion of the cross-sectional design has placed it firmly in the context of quantitative research. Also, the evaluation of the design drew on criteria associated with the quantitative research strategy. It should also be noted, however, that qualitative research often entails a form of cross-sectional design. A fairly typical form of such research is when the researcher employs unstructured interviewing or semi-structured interviewing with a number of people. Research in focus 2.14 provides an illustration of such a study.

While not typical of the qualitative research tradition, the study described in Research in focus 2.15 bears some research design similarities with cross-sectional studies within a predominantly quantitative research tradition, like the WERS (see Research in focus 2.14), while retaining some research design features more typical of qualitative studies. The research was not directly preoccupied with such criteria of quantitative research as internal and external validity, replicability, measurement validity, and so on, but it is clear that the researchers took considerable care to ensure the representativeness of their sample of managers in relation to the overall **population**. In fact, it could be argued that the use of interview as a follow-up method after the initial questionnaire survey made the study more ecologically valid than research that just uses more formal instruments of data collection. It is common within business and management research to see such a *triangulated* approach, where attempts are made to cancel out the limitations of one method by the use of another in order to cross-check the findings. Hence, cross-sectional studies in business and management tend not to be so clearly divided into those that use either quantitative or qualitative methods.

## Longitudinal design(s)

The longitudinal design represents a distinct form of research design that is typically used to map change in business and management research. Pettigrew (1990) has emphasized the importance of longitudinal study in understanding organizations as a way of providing data on the mechanisms and processes through which changes are created. Such a 'contextualist' research design involves drawing on 'phenomena at vertical and horizontal levels of analysis and the interconnections between those levels through time' (1990: 269). However, partly because of the time and cost involved, longitudinal design is relatively little used in business and management research. In the form in which it is typically found, it is usually an extension of social survey research based on self-completion questionnaire or structured interview research within a cross-sectional design. Consequently, in terms of reliability, replication, and validity, the longitudinal design is



## Research in focus 2.15
## A representative sample?

Scase and Goffee (1989) conducted a survey of 374 managers employed in six large organizations—four of which were privately owned and two of which were in the public sector. A number of issues were taken into account in order to ensure that the sample was representative of a wider population.

1. The sample of 323 men and 51 women chosen for the questionnaire survey was designed to reflect gender proportions within the wider UK management population.
2. The researchers attempted to achieve a broad spread of ages within their sample, to reflect the relative proportions of male and female managers in each group.
3. They also sought to reflect labour market patterns and functional groupings—for example, by including more women in the sample who were engaged in personnel management, training, and industrial relations.
4. They included more men in senior and middle-level management positions to reflect the fact that women are under-represented in these positions.
5. Finally, the sample was selected to reflect patterns of employment, levels of education, salary levels, and marital status broadly representative of patterns in the wider population.

From the questionnaire survey, a smaller representative group of 80 men and women was selected for in-depth interviews. However, Scase and Goffee make no claim for the statistical representativeness of their sample. Instead they suggest that their findings can be 'regarded as indicative of broader trends . . . affecting the work, careers and personal experiences of men and women managers during the closing decades of the twentieth century' (1989: 197).

little different from cross-sectional research. However, a longitudinal design can allow some insight into the time order of variables and therefore may be more able to allow causal inferences to be made. This was one of the aims of the WERS series (see Research in focus 2.14).

With a longitudinal design, a sample is surveyed and is then surveyed again on at least one further occasion. It is common to distinguish two types of longitudinal design: the *panel study* and the *cohort study*. With the former type, a sample, often a randomly selected national one, is the focus of data collection on at least two (and often more) occasions. Data may be collected from different types of case within a panel study framework: individuals, organizations, and so on. An illustration of this kind of study is incorporated into the 2004 WERS (see Research in focus 2.14).

The cohort study selects either an entire cohort of people or a randomly selected sample of them as the focus of data collection. The cohort is made up of people who share a certain characteristic, such as all being born in the same week or having a certain experience, such as being unemployed or getting married on a certain day or in the same week. However, this design is rarely used in business and management research.

Panel and cohort studies share similar features. They have a similar design structure: Figure 2.4 portrays this structure and implies that data are collected in at least two waves on the same variables on the same people or organizations. They are both concerned with illuminating social change and improving the understanding of causal influences over time. The latter means that longitudinal designs are somewhat better able to deal with the problem of ambiguity about the direction of causal influence that plagues cross-sectional designs. Because certain potentially independent variables can be identified at $T_1$, the researcher is in a better position to infer that purported

## Figure 2.4

### The longitudinal design

| $T_1$ | . . . | $T_n$ |
|---|---|---|
| $Obs_1$ | | $Obs_1$ |
| $Obs_2$ | | $Obs_2$ |
| $Obs_3$ | | $Obs_3$ |
| $Obs_4$ | | $Obs_4$ |
| $Obs_5$ | | $Obs_5$ |
| . . . | | . . . |
| $Obs_n$ | | $Obs_n$ |

effects that are identified at $T_2$ or later have occurred *after* the independent variables. This does not deal with the entire problem about the ambiguity of causal influence, but it at least addresses the problem of knowing which variable came first. In all other respects, the points made above about cross-sectional designs are the same as those for longitudinal designs.

Panel and cohort studies share similar problems. First, there is the problem of sample attrition through employee job changes, companies going out of business, and so on, and through subjects choosing to withdraw at later stages of the research. The 1998 WERS panel survey, for example, traced a random selection of workplaces from the 1990 survey for re-interview. This yielded a sample of 846 'continuing workplaces', a response rate of 82 per cent, which effectively minimized potential bias through attrition. A continuing workplace was defined as one that employed twenty-five or more people and had continued to operate between 1990 and 1998. However, changes in activity, ownership, or location were not considered critically to impair this concept of continuity. The problem with attrition is largely that those who leave the study may differ in some important respects from those who remain, so that the latter do not form a representative group. In order to account even more fully for this possibility, the WERS panel survey was accompanied by a short telephone survey of all remaining workplaces from the 1990 cross-section not included in the panel survey. The researchers wanted to know how many of the 1990 cross-section sample workplaces had survived, whether they had expanded, moved premises, changed ownership, or amalgamated with or split from another establishment since the time of the 1990 study. This enabled them to build up a more general picture of the survival status of workplaces, which helped to enhance the internal validity of the panel study. Secondly, there are few guidelines as to when is the best juncture to conduct further waves of data collection. Thirdly, it is often suggested that many longitudinal studies are poorly thought out and that they result in the collection of large amounts of data with little apparent planning. Fourthly, there is evidence that a *panel conditioning* effect can occur whereby continued participation in a longitudinal study affects how respondents behave.

## Case study design

The basic case study entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case. As Stake (1995) observes, case study research is concerned with the complexity and particular nature of the case in question. The case study approach is a very popular and widely used research design in business research (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007), and some of the best-known studies in business and management research are based on this design. A case can be:

- *a single organization*, such as Pettigrew's (1985; see Research in focus 2.16) research at Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI), Joanne Martin's (1992) study of organizational culture at 'OzCo', a high-technology industry company based in California, or Born's (2004) study of managerialism in the BBC;
- *a single location*, such as a factory, production site, or office building—for example, Pollert's (1981; see Research in focus 17.16) research in a tobacco factory, Linstead's (1985) study of humour in a bakery, or Milkman's (1997) investigation of an automobile assembly plant (see Chapter 16);



### Research in focus 2.16
### A longitudinal case study of ICI

Pettigrew (1985) conducted research into the use of organizational development (OD) expertise at Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI). The fieldwork was conducted between 1975 and 1983. He carried out 'long semi-structured interviews' in 1975–7 and again in 1980–2. Some individuals were interviewed more than once, and care was taken to ensure that interviews included people from all hierarchical levels in the company and from the different functional and business areas within the firm. The total number of interviews conducted during this period amounted to 175. During the period of the fieldwork Pettigrew also had fairly regular contact with members of the organization through his involvement with the company as a consultant, and he had access to archival materials that explained how internal OD consultants were recruited and how external OD consultants were used. He writes: 'The continuous real-time data collection was enriched by retrospective interviewing and archival analysis . . .' (1985: 40). The study thus covered ten years of 'real-time' analysis, complemented by over twenty years of retrospective data. This longitudinal case study thus spans more than thirty years, although Pettigrew (1990) acknowledges that this is rarely feasible in organizational research.

- *a person*, as in Marshall's (1995; see Key concept 16.5) study of women managers, where each woman constitutes a separate case—such studies are characterized as using the life history or biographical approach; or
- *a single event*, such as the NASA space shuttle *Challenger* disaster in 1986 (Vaughan 1990; see Chapter 21) or the events surrounding a pipeline accident in Canada (Gephart 1993; see Research in focus 21.4).

### What is a case?

The most common use of the term associates the case study with a geographical location, such as a workplace or organization. What distinguishes a case study from other research designs is the focus on a bounded situation or system, an entity with a purpose and functioning parts. The emphasis tends to be upon intensive examination of the setting. There is a tendency to associate case studies with qualitative research, but such an identification is not appropriate. It is certainly true that exponents of the case study design often favour qualitative methods, such as participant observation and unstructured interviewing, because these methods are viewed as particularly helpful in the generation of an intensive, detailed examination of a case. Knights and McCabe (1997) suggest that the case study provides a vehicle through which several qualitative methods can be combined, thereby avoiding too great a reliance on one single approach. In their study of quality management in a UK retail bank, they were able to combine participant observation with semi-structured interviewing and documentary data collection of company reports, Total Quality Management (TQM) guides, and newsletters. They suggest that the findings from the case study can be used to identify insights into why so many quality management programmes have failed. However, case studies are frequently sites for the employment of both quantitative and qualitative research, an approach that will receive attention in Chapter 25. Indeed, within business research the dominance of positivism has meant that the way that case studies are conducted has been heavily influenced by this epistemological tradition. For example, Lee (1999) reports that qualitative research that is published in American journals tends to cite the work of Yin (1984), who adopts a relatively narrow view of case study research (Lee, Collier, and Cullen 2007) (see Thinking deeply 2.17). In some instances, when an investigation is based exclusively upon quantitative research, it can be difficult to determine whether it is better described as a case study or as a cross-sectional research design. The same point can often be made about case studies based upon qualitative research.

With a case study, the case is an object of interest in its own right, and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of it. Unless a distinction of this or some other kind is drawn, it becomes impossible to distinguish the case study as a special research design, because almost any kind of research can be construed as a case study. However, it also needs to be appreciated that, when specific research illustrations are examined, they can exhibit features of more than one research design. However, for some case study researchers, cases are selected in order to represent a population, and, in such cases, more formal sampling is required. What distinguishes a case study is that the researcher is usually concerned to elucidate the unique features of the case. This is known as an *idiographic* approach. Research designs like the cross-sectional design are known as *nomothetic* in that they are concerned with generating statements that apply regardless of time and place.

Stake (1995) suggests that the selection of cases should be based first and foremost on the anticipation of the opportunity to learn. Researchers should, therefore, choose cases where they expect learning will be greatest. He distinguishes between three different types of case study. Intrinsic cases are undertaken primarily to gain insight into the particularities of a situation, rather than to gain insight into other cases or generic issues. Instrumental case studies are those that focus on using the case as a means of understanding a broader issue or allowing generalizations to be challenged. Finally, there is the category of multiple or collective cases that are undertaken jointly to explore a general phenomenon. Stake (2005) notes, however, that the boundaries between these three types of case study are often blurred.

With experimental and cross-sectional designs, the typical orientation to the relationship between theory and research is a deductive one. The research design and the collection of data are guided by specific research questions that derive from theoretical concerns. However, when a qualitative research strategy is employed within a cross-sectional design, the approach tends to be inductive. In other words, whether a cross-sectional design is inductive or deductive tends to be affected by whether a quantitative or a qualitative research strategy is employed. The same point can be made of case study research. When the predominant research strategy is qualitative, a case study tends to take an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research; if a predominantly quantitative strategy is taken, it tends to be deductive. Thinking deeply 2.17 illustrates how the strategy adopted affects the type of case study approach that is taken.



## Thinking deeply 2.17
## The case study convention in business research

Piekkari, Welsh, and Paavilainen (2009) suggest that the way that researchers in the area of international business use case study designs is different from how they are used in other social science disciplines. To find out how the case study research design is used, the authors argue that it is necessary to look at how researchers use it, rather than at how methods textbooks say it can be used. Based on a review of 135 case study articles in international business journals, Piekkari, Welsh, and Paavilainen argue that the way that case studies are conducted is relatively narrow and is dominated by the positivist tradition as developed by Yin (1984) and Eisenhardt (1989), at the expense of alternative, interpretative approaches. They distinguish between:

- *positivistic approaches*, such as propounded by Eisenhardt (1989), where the goal is to extract variables from their context in order to generate generalizable propositions and build theory, often through conducting multiple case studies and using a variety of data collection methods to triangulate and improve the validity of the study;
- *alternative approaches*, where the aim is to produce rich, holistic, and particularized explanations that are located in situational context through using multiple methods of data collection to uncover conflicting meanings and interpretations.

They argue that these conventions 'affect judgments about the proper role of case studies in research, how case studies should be conducted, and the criteria for evaluating the quality of case research' (Piekkari, Welsh, and Paavilainen 2009: 570). The authors express the concern that variable oriented approaches can be constraining for international business researchers by limiting the extent to which they are flexible in their research. They conclude that researchers need to be more aware of the type of case study approach they are adopting and to justify their choice more explicitly.

### Reliability, replicability, and validity

The question of how well the case study fares in the context of the research design criteria cited early on in this chapter—measurement validity, internal validity, external validity, ecological validity, reliability, and replicability—depends in large part on how far the researcher feels that these are appropriate for the evaluation of case study research. Some writers on case study research, such as Yin (1984), consider that they are appropriate criteria and suggest ways in which case study research can be developed to enhance its ability to meet the criteria; for others, like Stake (1995), they are barely mentioned, if at all. Writers on case study research whose point of orientation lies primarily with a qualitative research strategy tend to play down or ignore the salience of these factors, whereas those writers who have been strongly influenced by the quantitative research strategy tend to depict them as more significant.

However, one question on which a great deal of discussion has centred concerns the *external validity* or *generalizability* of case study research. How can a single case possibly be representative so that it might yield findings that can be applied more generally to other cases? For example, how could the findings from Pettigrew's (1985) research into ICI (see Research in focus 2.16), be generalizable to all large multinational pharmaceutical corporations? The answer, of course, is that they cannot. It is important to appreciate that case study researchers do not delude themselves that it is possible to identify typical cases that can be used to represent a certain class of objects, whether it is factories, managers, or critical events. In other words, they do not think that a case study is a sample of one.

However, although many researchers emphasize that they are interested in the detail of a single case, they do sometimes claim a degree of theoretical generalizability on the basis of it. For example, in her study of Indsco Supply Corporation, Kanter (1977) explains that the case enabled her to generate concepts and give meaning to abstract propositions, which she then sought to test in three other large corporations. It is, therefore, clear that she is seeking to achieve a degree of theoretical generalizability from this case. Lee, Collier, and Cullen (2007) suggest that particularization rather than generalization constitutes the main strength of case studies. The goal of case study analysis should, therefore, be to concentrate on the uniqueness of the case and to develop a deep understanding of its complexity.

### Types of case

Following on from the issue of external validity, it is useful to consider a distinction between different types of case that is sometimes made by writers. Yin (2003) distinguishes five types.

- *The critical case*. Here the researcher has a clearly specified hypothesis, and a case is chosen on the grounds that it will allow a better understanding of the circumstances in which the hypothesis will and will not hold.
- *The unique case*. The unique or extreme case is, as Yin observes, a common focus in clinical studies.
- *The revelatory case*. The basis for the revelatory case exists 'when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyse a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation' (Yin 1984: 44). While the idea of the revelatory case is interesting, it seems unnecessary to restrict it solely to situations in which something has not previously been studied. Much qualitative case study research that is carried out with a predominantly inductive approach to theory treats single case studies as broadly 'revelatory'.
- *The representative* or *typical case*. This type seeks to explore a case that exemplifies an everyday situation or form of organization.
- *The longitudinal case*. This type of case is concerned with how a situation changes over time.

Any particular study can involve a combination of these elements, which can be viewed as rationales for choosing particular cases. However, Lee, Collier, and Cullen (2007) argue that Yin's categorization of cases is still rather narrow and defers to the positivist tradition.

> Unfortunately, the majority of these uses are best understood as poor relations to positivistic, quantitative research. Exploratory case studies tend to be conducted as preliminary research in advance of wide-scale surveys to map out the themes for the subsequent research. Descriptive case studies are often used to expand on trends and themes already discovered by survey research. It is only the explanatory case that seeks to derive a detailed understanding of a particular phenomenon where the case is not seen as ancillary to more quantitative methods. (Lee, Collier, and Cullen 2007: 170)

Exponents of case study research counter suggestions that the evidence they present is limited because it has restricted external validity by arguing that it is not the purpose of this research design to generalize to other cases or to populations beyond the case. This position is very different from that taken by practitioners of survey research. Survey researchers are invariably concerned to be able to generalize their findings to larger populations and frequently use **random sampling** to enhance the representativeness of the samples on which they conduct their investigations and therefore the external validity of their findings. Case study researchers argue strenuously that this is not the purpose of their craft.

However, the notion of the case study is by no means straightforward. Tight (2010) has reviewed a range of methodological writings on the case study, including a book that was written by Bryman (2004*a*) for students of social research methods. He notes that the term is used in a wide variety of ways and that there is a sense in which many different kinds of study can end up being described as case studies. Indeed, he proposes that 'we simply use case study as a convenient label for our research—when we can't think of anything "better"—in an attempt to give it some added respectability' (Tight 2010: 337). He goes on to propose 'why don't we just call this kind of research what it is—small-sample, in-depth study, or something like that?' (Tight 2010: 338). While this is one solution to the problem of 'case study' being employed in different ways, it is not one that we share. It ought to be possible for an agreed-upon definition to be arrived at and for authors of studies who describe their work as based on a case study and to justify why the label is warranted.

## Case study as intensive analysis

Instead, case study researchers tend to argue that they aim to generate an intensive examination of a single case, in relation to which they then engage in a theoretical analysis. The central issue of concern is the quality of the theoretical reasoning in which the case study researcher engages. How well do the data support the theoretical arguments that are generated? Is the theoretical analysis incisive? For example, does it demonstrate connections between different conceptual ideas that are developed out of the data? The crucial question is not whether or not the findings can be generalized to a wider universe, but how well the researcher generates theory out of the findings (Mitchell 1983; Yin 1984). Such a view places case study research firmly in the inductive tradition of the relationship between theory and research. However, a case study design is not necessarily associated with an inductive approach, as can be seen in the research by Whittington (1989), which was referred to in Chapter 1. Thus, case studies can be associated with both theory generation and theory testing. However, within this, case study researchers vary in their approach to theory generation and testing. Eisenhardt's (1989) article on case studies has been highly influential in promoting a view of

case-based theory building that relies on strategic sampling of cases from which generalizations can be made. She further recommends that researchers avoid getting too involved in the particularities of individual cases, because this will lead them to develop overly complex theory. Other researchers see case studies as a means of refining or refuting existing theories, rather than building entirely new explanatory frameworks (Jack and Kholief 2007). Bitektine (2008) has argued that the case study can have a role in the testing of hypotheses by conducting what he calls a 'prospective case study design'. He proposes the development of hypotheses that relate to an ongoing process (for example, the introduction of a new technology in a particular kind of organization), which are then tested at some point in the future by collecting qualitative data that allow the researcher to determine whether the hypothesized patterns correspond to the findings.

### More than one case

Case study research is not confined to the study of a single case. Multiple-case study designs have become increasingly common in business and management research. They are extensions of the case study design. The multiple-case study design is considered in the section on 'Comparative design' because multiple-case studies are largely undertaken for the purpose of comparing the cases that are included. As such, they allow the researcher to compare and contrast the findings deriving from each of the cases. This in turn encourages researchers to consider what is unique and what is common across cases, and frequently promotes theoretical reflection on the findings.

It might be asked what the difference is between a multiple-case study involving several cases and a cross-sectional design. After all, if an investigation involved, say, eight cases, it could be viewed as either a multiple-case study involving several cases or as a cross-sectional design. A simple rule of thumb is to ask: what is the focus? If the focus is on the cases and their unique contexts, it is a multiple-case study and as such is an extension of the case study approach; if the emphasis is on producing general findings, with little regard for the unique contexts of each of the eight cases, it is better viewed as a cross-sectional design. In other words, with a multiple-case study design, the emphasis is on the individual case; with a cross-sectional design, it is on the sample of cases.

### Longitudinal research and the case study

Case study research frequently includes a longitudinal element. The researcher is often a participant of an organization for many months or years. Alternatively, he or she may conduct interviews with individuals over a lengthy period. Moreover, the researcher may be able to inject an additional longitudinal element by analysing archival information and by retrospective interviewing. Research in focus 2.16 provides an illustration of longitudinal case study research.

Another way in which a longitudinal element occurs is when a case that has been studied is returned to at a later stage. An interesting instance of this is Burawoy's (1979) study of a factory in Chicago, which he claims was the same one as was originally studied by Roy in the 1950s. This is a somewhat loose connection, however, as the theoretical focus adopted by the two researchers was markedly different, although their research methods, based on participant observation, were quite similar. A further example of **longitudinal research** carried out by different researchers is given in Research in focus 2.18. This study is interesting because it relies on social survey methods in addition to preliminary interviews with managers, union officials, and employees. Generally speaking, however, it is difficult for the researcher to establish how far change is the result of real differences over the two time periods or of other factors, such as different people in the organization, different ownership of the company between the two time periods, and the possible influence of the initial study itself.

## Comparative design

It is worth distinguishing one further kind of design: comparative design. Put simply, this design entails the study using more or less identical methods of two or more contrasting cases. It embodies the logic of comparison, in that it implies that we can understand social phenomena better when they are compared in relation to two or more meaningfully contrasting cases or situations. The comparative design may be realized in the context of either quantitative or qualitative research. Within the former, the data collection strategy will take the form outlined in Figure 2.5. This figure implies that there are at least two cases (which may be organizations, nations, people, etc.) and that data are collected from each, usually within a cross-sectional design format.

One of the more obvious forms of such research is in cross-cultural or cross-national research (see Key concept 2.19). In a useful definition, Hantrais (1996) has suggested that such research occurs when individuals or teams set out to examine particular issues or phenomena in two or more countries with the express intention of comparing their manifestations in different sociocultural settings (institutions, customs, traditions, value systems, lifestyles,



## Research in focus 2.18
## A study of a steelworks spanning fifty years

One way of overcoming some of the difficulties associated with longitudinal study is by revisiting case study organizations that have previously been studied by other researchers in order to explore how they have changed over time. This was the approach taken by Bacon and Blyton (2001) in their case study of a North Wales steelworks. These researchers sought to replicate and extend survey research carried out in the 1950s (Scott et al. 1956), which looked at the social systems of industrial organizations to explain the positive orientation of steelworkers to technical change. Even though the steelworks was not actually named in the original study, information about its size, location, history, and activities meant that it was relatively easy for Blyton and his colleagues to identify it as the Shotton plant.

In 1991, Blyton, Bacon, and Morris (1996) conducted an employee attitude survey at the plant in order to explore the impact of teamworking on employee attitudes and behaviour, focusing on a variety of aspects of job satisfaction, change, attitudes to management, and industrial relations issues. This survey formed part of a broader study of the role of industrial relations and workplace change in the UK and German steel industries. They found that, despite the massive changes that had affected the plant between the 1950s and the 1990s, the social system of the works continued to influence steelworkers' attitudes to work, contributing towards their positive attitude to workplace change. However, at the end of the 1990s, when they returned to the plant to conduct a similar survey, they found that employee attitudes had changed. In particular, the steelworkers, who had been deeply affected by competitive pressures leading to increased job insecurity, were no longer as positively oriented towards change. As the authors note, the 'almost fifty year time span between the first and last surveys provides a unique research setting upon which to base some broader reflections on organisational change, management practices and employee attitudes' (Bacon and Blyton 2001: 224).

## Figure 2.5
### A comparative design

| | |
|---|---|
| Case 1 | $T_1$<br>$Obs_1$<br>$Obs_2$<br>$Obs_3$<br>$Obs_4$<br>$Obs_5$<br>. . .<br>$Obs_n$ |
| Case *n* | $Obs_1$<br>$Obs_2$<br>$Obs_3$<br>$Obs_4$<br>$Obs_5$<br>. . .<br>$Obs_n$ |

language, thought patterns), using the same research instruments either to carry out secondary analysis of national data or to conduct new empirical work. The aim may be to seek explanations for similarities and differences or to gain a greater awareness and a deeper understanding of social reality in different national contexts.

Cross-cultural research in business and management tends to presuppose that culture is a major explanatory variable that exerts profound influence on organizational behaviour. In business and management research, there has been a tendency to question the adaptability of many management theories and practices to other, particularly non-Western, cultural contexts. There has also been mounting criticism of the universalist vision that business and management research has promoted, based predominantly on unacknowledged Anglo-Saxon values. These pressures have led to greater interest in cross-cultural research. Within this overall category, however, there are some important distinctions. International management research concerns itself with how and why companies internationalize; it may focus on a specific country, or make cross-cultural comparisons between several countries. Usunier (1998) distinguishes between:

- *cross-cultural approaches*—which compare national management systems and local business customs in various countries; and
- *intercultural approaches*—which focus on the study of interaction between people and organizations with different national/cultural backgrounds.



## Key concept 2.19
# What is cross-cultural and international research?

As its name implies, cross-cultural research entails the collection and/or analysis of data from two or more nations. Possible models for the conduct of cross-cultural research are as follows:

1. A researcher, perhaps in conjunction with a research team, collects data in a number of countries. Hofstede's (1984) research on the cultural differences between IBM workers in different countries (see Research in focus 1.12) is an illustration of this model, in that he took comparable samples of IBM employees from all hierarchical levels, allowing for a similar representation of gender and age, in sixty-six national subsidiaries of the company. More than forty countries are eventually compared using this method.
2. A central organization coordinates a portion of the work of national organizations or groups. An example is the Global Disney Audiences Project (Wasko, Phillips, and Meehan 2001), whereby a research group in the USA recruited researchers in a variety of countries who were interested in the ways Disney products are viewed, and then coordinated the ways questions were asked in the research. Each nation's research groups were responsible for sampling and other aspects of the interview process.
3. Secondary analysis is carried out using data that are comparable, but where the coordination of their collection is limited or non-existent. This kind of cross-cultural analysis might occur if researchers seek to ask survey questions in their own country that have been asked in another country. The ensuing data may then be analysed cross-culturally. A further form of this model is through the secondary analysis of officially collected data, such as unemployment statistics. However, this kind of cross-cultural research makes it particularly important to be sure about the accuracy of data, which will probably have been produced by several different agencies, in providing a suitable basis for cross-cultural comparison. For example, Roy, Walters, and Luk (2001) suggest that business researchers have tended to avoid relying on secondary data about China because of concerns about the reliability and representativeness of government sources. Research units associated with local authorities may overstate certain factors to give the impression that the economy is doing better than it really is, statistical approaches and classification schemes may differ from one province to another, and data may have been censored at certain points in time or even lost. Business researchers must therefore be cautious in their use of secondary data for the purpose of cross-cultural analysis.
4. Teams of researchers in participating nations are recruited by a person or body that coordinates the programme. Each researcher or group of researchers has the responsibility of conducting the investigation in his, her, or their own country. The work is coordinated in order to ensure comparability of research questions, survey questions, and procedures for administering the research instruments. This model differs from (2) above in that it usually entails a specific focus on certain research questions. The article by Terence Jackson (2001) provides an example of this model: Jackson relied on academic associates to collect data in their respective countries, using the questionnaire instrument he had designed for this purpose (see Research in focus 8.15).

Comparative research should not be treated as solely concerned with comparisons between nations. The logic of comparison can be applied to a variety of situations to inform a number of levels of analysis. For example, Hofstede's (1984) research on cultural differences has informed a generation of studies that have explored cultural differences in organizations other than IBM, and the framework has also been applied to understanding specific organizational behaviours, such as ethical decision-making.

Cross-cultural research is not without problems such as: managing and gaining the funding for such research (see Key concept 2.19); ensuring, when existing data, such as official statistics or survey evidence, are submitted to a secondary analysis, that the data are comparable in terms of categories and data collection methods; and ensuring, when new data are being collected, that the need to translate data collection instruments (for example, interview schedules) does not undermine genuine comparability. This raises the further difficulty that, even

when translation is carried out competently, there is still the potential problem of an insensitivity to specific national and cultural contexts. On the other hand, cross-cultural research helps to reduce the risk of failing to appreciate that social science findings are often, if not invariably, culturally specific. Cross-cultural research also creates particular issues in achieving equivalence—between the samples, variables, and methods that are used (McDonald 2000). For example, in many cases nationality is used as a surrogate for culture; differences may thus be attributed to culture even if they could be more readily attributed to national situation. Equally, people inhabiting a country under the same government may belong to quite different cultures that reflect historical or religious affiliations. Further issues are raised by language differences, which can cause translation problems. Adler (1983) claims that many comparative cross-cultural studies in business and management do not adequately acknowledge these distinctions.

In terms of issues of reliability, validity, replicability, and generalizability, the comparative study is no different from the cross-sectional design. The comparative design is essentially two or more cross-sectional studies carried out at more or less the same point in time.

The comparative design can also be applied in relation to a qualitative research strategy. When this occurs, it takes the form of a multiple-case study (see Research in focus 2.20). Essentially, a multiple-case (or multi-case) study occurs whenever the number of cases examined exceeds one. In business research this is a popular research design that usually takes two or more organizations as cases for comparison, but occasionally a number of people are used as cases. For example, Marshall (1984) adopts a multiple-case study approach in her study of women managers; she retains a focus on intensive examination of each case, but there is qualitative comparison of each woman manager's situation with the others. The main argument in favour of the multiple-case study is that it improves theory building. By comparing two or more cases, the researcher is in a better position to establish the circumstances in which a theory will or will not hold (Yin 1984; Eisenhardt 1989). Moreover, the comparison may itself suggest concepts that are relevant to an emerging theory.



## Research in focus 2.20
## A comparative analysis and a panel study of female employment

Collins and Wickham (2004) used data from 'Servemploi', which is a study of women's employment and career prospects in the Information Society. The project had eight European Union partners, comprising members of universities or research institutes in Ireland, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain, Sweden, and Belgium. The main objective of the study was 'to examine the implications for women workers of technical and organizational changes in the retail and financial services sectors' (2004: 36). Each national team studied four workplaces, two in each sector, and each case involved workplace observation and interviews with managers and employees.

However, as well as being comparative, the study was also longitudinal, as it involved a two-year panel study of women based on semi-structured interviews. As they explain: 'using a variety of sources, in particular, contacts in the trade unions, we located four women working in each sector (but not in the case study companies) who would be prepared to participate in the study' (2004: 36). The reason for keeping the sample for the panel study separate from the comparative cases was because they wanted to follow the women as they moved between workplaces, so it made sense to focus on individuals rather than on workplaces, as WERS has done (see Research in focus 2.14). This generated a total of 500 interviews.

Research in focus 2.20 describes one approach to selecting cases for a multiple-case study that involved researchers in each country selecting two workplaces from retail and financial service sectors. Another example is found in the study of TQM by Edwards, Collinson, and Rees (1998), where the researchers selected two case studies from three main sectors of the UK economy: private services, public sector, and manufacturing. Their selection of two cases in each sector, rather than just one, was intended to allow for variation; the limitation to two

cases, rather than three, was due to time and resource constraints. To identify their cases the researchers searched press reports and listings of leading quality institutes such as the National Society for Quality through Teamwork. However, they were also keen to avoid companies that had a high profile as 'success stories', instead choosing cases that 'had made significant moves' in quality management but 'were not among the leading edge examples' (1998: 454). From this they identified twenty-five potential cases, and, on the basis of interviews with quality or HR managers in each one, narrowed their sample down to just six. With a case selection approach such as this, the findings that are common to the firms can be just as interesting and important as those that differentiate them.

However, not all writers are convinced about the merits of multiple-case study research. Dyer and Wilkins (1991), for example, argue that a multiple-case study approach tends to mean that the researcher pays less attention to the specific context and more to the ways in which the cases can be contrasted. Moreover, the need to forge comparisons tends to mean that the researcher needs to develop an explicit focus at the outset, whereas it may be advantageous to adopt a more open-ended approach in many instances. These concerns about retaining contextual insight and a rather more unstructured research approach are very much associated with the goals of the qualitative research strategy (see Chapter 16).

The key to the comparative design is its ability to allow the distinguishing characteristics of two or more cases to act as a springboard for theoretical reflections about contrasting findings. It is something of a hybrid, in that in quantitative research it is frequently an extension of a cross-sectional design and in qualitative research it is frequently an extension of a case study design. It even exhibits certain features that are similar to experiments and quasi-experiments, which also rely on the capacity to forge a comparison.

## Level of analysis

A further consideration for business researchers that applies to the research designs covered in this chapter relates to the concept of level; in other words, what is the primary unit of measurement and analysis? Hence, research might focus on:

- *individuals*: this would include studies that focus on specific kinds of individuals such as managers or shop-floor employees;
- *groups*: this would include research that considered certain types of groupings—for example, HR departments or boards of directors;
- *organizations*: in addition to studies that focused on companies, this would include surveys, such as WERS (see Research in focus 2.14), that treat the workplace as the principal unit of analysis;
- *societies*: the main focus of this kind of analysis would be on the national, political, social, environmental, and economic contexts in which business organizations are located.

Differences in level of analysis are commonly referred to in terms of the SOGI model (societies, organizations, groups, and individuals). However, some research designs draw on samples that combine different levels of analysis—for example, organizations and departments. This begs the question as to whether it is possible to combine data from different levels to produce a meaningful analysis. The complexity of organizational types can make the issue of level particularly difficult to determine. Rousseau (1985) suggests it is important to make explicit the problems of using data derived from one level to represent something at another level in order to avoid misinterpretation. For example, processes of individual and organizational learning may be constructed quite differently at different levels. If researchers make inferences about organizational learning on the basis of data about individuals, they are at risk of making a cross-level misattribution. Since the phenomenon of learning is an essentially human characteristic, as organizations do not behave but people do, this leads to the attribution of human characteristics to a higher-level system. Misattribution can also occur when metaphors are used to interpret organizational behaviour. It is, therefore, good practice to identify and make clear in your research design the level of analysis that is being used and then to switch to another level only after having made this clear (Rousseau 1985).

Another illustration of mixed-level research cited by Rousseau (1985) is found in the area of leadership studies. The average leadership style (ALS) approach assumes that leaders display the same behavioural style toward all subordinates. Research therefore relies on eliciting subordinate perceptions of the leader, which are averaged and treated as group-level characteristics. In contrast, the vertical dyadic linkage (VDL) model assumes that a leader's style may be different with each subordinate, thereby treating leadership as an individual-level phenomenon rather than as a group one. Each model thus conceptualizes leadership at a different level.



# Bringing research strategy and research design together

Finally, we can bring together the two research strategies covered in Chapter 1 with the research designs outlined in this chapter. Table 2.1 shows the typical form associated with each combination of research strategy and research design and a number of examples that either have been encountered so far or will be covered in later chapters.

## Table 2.1

**Research strategy and research design**

| Research design | Research strategy | |
|---|---|---|
| | Quantitative | Qualitative |
| Experimental | *Typical form.* Most researchers using an experimental design employ quantitative comparisons between experimental and control groups with regard to the dependent variable. See, for example, the study of leadership by Howell and Frost (1989) (Research in focus 2.7). | *No typical form.* However, the Hawthorne experiments (Chapter 1 and Research in focus 2.8) provide an example of experimental research design that gradually moved away from the 'test room method' towards use of qualitative methods. |
| Cross-sectional | *Typical form.* Social survey research or structured observation on a sample at a single point in time. See, for example, the Aston studies of organizational size, technology, and structure (Research in focus 1.8 and Research in focus 2.6); Parboteeah, Hoegl, and Cullen's (2009) study of the influence of religious values on work obligation norms (Research in focus 1.5); and Berg and Frost's (2005) telephone survey of low-skill, low-wage workers (Research in focus 8.3). This can also include content analysis on a sample of documents such as in Kabanoff, Waldersee, and Cohen's (1995) study of organizational values (Research in focus 12.3). | *Typical form.* Qualitative interviews or focus groups at a single point in time. For example, Scase and Goffee's (1989) research into managers in large UK organizations (Research in focus 2.15); or Blackburn and Stokes's (2000) study of small business owner-managers (Research in focus 19.4). Can also be based upon **qualitative content analysis** of a set of documents relating to a single event or a specific period in time such as in Gephart's (1993) study of an organizational disaster (Research in focus 21.4). |
| Longitudinal | *Typical form.* Social survey research on a sample on more than one occasion, as in the five Workplace Employment Relations Surveys (Research in focus 2.14); the 1997 and 2001 Skills Survey (Research in focus 7.3); or may involve content analysis of documents relating to different time periods such as in Boyce and Lepper's (2002) study of information in a joint venture involving two shipping firms between 1904 and 1975 (Research in focus 12.8). | *Typical form.* Ethnographic research over a long period, qualitative interviewing on more than one occasion, or qualitative content analysis of documents relating to different time periods. Such research warrants being dubbed longitudinal when there is a concern to map change, such as in Pettigrew's (1985) study of ICI (Research in focus 2.16) or in the Work Foundation's study of what happened to workers following the closure of the MG Rover plant in Longbridge (Research in focus 18.11). |
| Case study | *Typical form.* Social survey research on a single case with a view to revealing important features about its nature. Examples include Hofstede's study of cultural differences based on a survey study of a large multinational business organization (Research in focus 1.12); and Sørensen's (2004) study of the racial composition of workplaces based on a large multidivisional financial services institution (Research in focus 13.2). | *Typical form.* The intensive study by ethnography or qualitative interviewing of a single case, which may be an organization—such as Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, and Alberts's (2006) study of organizational bullying (Research in focus 1.6); a group of employees within an organization—as in Perlow's (1997) study of software engineers in a high-tech organization (Research in focus 17.1); or an individual—as in Marshall's (1995) study of women managers (Key concept 16.5). |
| Comparative | *Typical form.* Social survey research in which there is a direct comparison between two or more cases, including cross-cultural research. Examples include Brengman et al.'s (2005) study of Internet shoppers in the United States and Belgium (Research in focus 7.4); and Tüselmann, McDonald, and Heise's (2002) study of German multinational companies operating in an Anglo-Saxon setting (Research in focus 13.3). | *Typical form.* Ethnographic or qualitative interview research on two or more cases where some comparison is sought between them, such as in Hyde et al.'s (2006) evaluation study of role redesign in the NHS (Research in focus 2.11); and Collins and Wickham's (2004) panel study of patterns of female employment across Europe (Research in focus 2.20). |

Table 2.1 refers also to research methods that will be encountered in later chapters, but that have not been referred to so far. The Glossary (see page 712) will give you a quick reference to terms used that are not yet familiar to you.

The distinctions are not always perfect. In particular, in some qualitative and quantitative research it is not obvious whether a study is an example of a longitudinal design or a case study design. Life history studies, research that concentrates on a specific issue over time, and **ethnography**, in which the researcher charts change in a single case are examples of studies that cross the two types. Such studies are perhaps better conceptualized as longitudinal case studies rather than as belonging to one category of research design or another. A further point to note is that there is no typical form in the qualitative research strategy/experimental research design cell. Qualitative research in the context of true experiments is very unusual. However, as noted in the table, the Hawthorne studies (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939) provide an interesting example of the way that a quasi-experimental research design can change over time. What you will also notice as you encounter many of the examples in this book is that business research designs often use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, so the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research strategies that is suggested in Table 2.1 is rarely as clear as this table suggests. In Chapters 24 and 25 of the book we will consider the implications of this and discuss the implications of research that combines quantitative and qualitative methods. Increasingly, research that combines quantitative and qualitative research is referred to as mixed methods research.



## Key points

- There is an important distinction between a research method and a research design.
- It is necessary to become thoroughly familiar with the meaning of the technical terms used as criteria for evaluating research: reliability; validity; replicability; and the types of validity (measurement, internal, external, ecological).
- It is also necessary to be familiar with the differences between the five major research designs covered (experimental, cross-sectional, longitudinal, case study, and comparative) and to consider the level of analysis (individual, group, organization, and market) that research may focus on. In this context, it is important to realize that the term 'experiment', which is often used somewhat loosely in everyday speech, has a specific technical meaning.
- There are various potential threats to validity in non-experimental research.
- Although the case study is often thought to be a single type of research design, it in fact has several forms. It is also important to be aware of the key issues concerned with the nature of case study evidence in relation to issues like external validity (generalizability).



## Questions for review

- In terms of the definitions used in this book, what are the chief differences between each of the following: a research method; a research strategy; and a research design?

### *Criteria in business research*

- What are the differences between reliability and validity and why are these important criteria for the evaluation of business research?
- Outline the meaning of each of the following: measurement validity; internal validity; external validity; and ecological validity.
- Why have some qualitative researchers sought to devise alternative criteria from reliability and validity when assessing the quality of investigations?

- What is the 'experimenter effect' and how might it contribute towards bias?
- What is social desirability bias and how might its effects be reduced?

### *Research designs*

- What are the main research designs that have been outlined in this chapter?
- Why is level of analysis a particular consideration in business and management research?

### *Experimental design*

- 'The main importance of the experimental design for the business researcher is that it represents a model of how to infer causal connections between variables.' Discuss.
- Following on from the last question, if it is so useful and important, why is it not used more?
- What is a quasi-experiment?

### *Cross-sectional design*

- What is meant by a cross-sectional research design?
- In what ways does the social survey exemplify the cross-sectional research design?
- Assess the degree to which the survey researcher can achieve internally valid findings.
- To what extent is the survey design exclusive to quantitative research?

### *Longitudinal design(s)*

- Why might a longitudinal research design be superior to a cross-sectional one?
- What are the main differences between panel and cohort designs in longitudinal research?

### *Case study design*

- What is a case study?
- Is case study research exclusive to qualitative research?
- What are some of the principles by which cases might be selected?

### *Comparative design*

- What are the chief strengths of a comparative research design?
- Why might comparative research yield important insights?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Research Designs.*

# 3

# Planning a research project and formulating research questions

## *Chapter outline*


| | |
|---|---|
| **Introduction** | 72 |
| **Get to know what is expected of you by your institution** | 72 |
| **Thinking about your research area** | 73 |
| **Using your supervisor** | 74 |
| **Managing time and resources** | 76 |
| **Formulating suitable research questions** | 79 |
| **Writing your research proposal** | 84 |
| **Preparing for your research** | 85 |
| **Doing your research and analysing your results** | 86 |
| ***Checklist*** | 88 |
| ***Key points*** | 88 |
| ***Questions for review*** | 88 |



## Chapter outline

The goal of this chapter is to provide advice to students on some of the issues that they need to consider if they have to prepare a dissertation based upon a research project. Increasingly, business and management students are required to produce such a dissertation as part of the requirements for their degrees. In addition to needing help with the conduct of research, which will be the aim of the chapters that come later in this book, more specific advice on tactics in doing and writing up research for a dissertation can be useful. It is against this background that this chapter has been written. The chapter explores a wide variety of issues such as:

- advice on timing;
- advice on generating research questions;
- advice on writing to help you produce compelling findings;
- advice on understanding the requirements of a dissertation project;
- advice on what makes a good dissertation.

Chapter 4 will then focus on how to get started with your research project by conducting a literature review.

# Introduction

This chapter provides some advice for readers who might be carrying out a research project of their own. The chapters that follow in Parts Two, Three, and Four of this book will then provide more detailed information about the choices available to you and how to implement them. But, beyond this, how might you go about conducting a small project of your own? We have in mind here the kind of situation that is increasingly common among business and management degree programmes—the requirement to write a dissertation of between 7,000 and 15,000 words. In particular, we have in mind the needs of undergraduate students, as well as students on postgraduate degree programmes, who will also find some of the observations we make helpful. Also, the advice is really concerned with students conducting projects with a component of empirical research in which they collect new data or perhaps conduct a secondary analysis of existing data.



# Get to know what is expected of you by your institution

Your institution or department will have specific requirements concerning a wide variety of different features that your dissertation should comprise and a range of other matters relating to it. These include such things as: the form of binding; how the dissertation is to be presented; whether or not an abstract is required; how big the page margins should be; the format for referencing; the number of words; perhaps the structure of the dissertation; how much advice you can get from your supervisor; whether or not a proposal is required; plagiarism; deadlines; how much (if any) financial assistance you can expect; and so on.

The advice here is simple: *follow the requirements, instructions, and information you are given*. If anything in this book conflicts with your institution's guidelines and requirements, ignore this book! We very much hope this is not something that will occur very much, but if it does, keep to the guidelines your institution gives you.

# Thinking about your research area

The chances are that you will be asked to start thinking about what you want to do research on well before you are due to start work on your dissertation. It is worth giving yourself a good deal of time for this. As you are doing your various modules, begin to think about whether there are any topics that might interest you and that might provide you with a researchable area. This may at times feel like a rather unproductive process in which a number of false starts or changes of direction are made. However, taking the time to explore different avenues at the point of problem identification can prevent difficulties at a much later stage.



## Telling it like it is
## The importance of starting early

For Lisa, one of the main lessons she learned from her experience of doing a research project was the importance of starting early. 'Time management is definitely a big thing with your dissertation. Starting it early, starting the reading early as well, because the paper trail can take for ages to trace back authors and what they've written in the past. It's really important to start early, I think.' Karen expressed a similar view: 'I started my dissertation very early on. A lot of people didn't start it until they got back to University in September/October time, whereas I'd already started mine in January. I actually finished it a bit early because it was due in at the beginning of May and I finished it for the beginning of April.'

Angharad also said that this was something that she had learned from the experience of doing a research project. 'I'm quite organized so it wasn't too big a deal for me, but I know people have left it to the last minute and they're having a big panic. So getting organized is probably the main thing.'

Tom also felt that one of the main lessons he had learned from doing a research project was the importance of starting early, even though the demands of other taught courses might discourage this. 'It's very tempting when you've got taught modules of the course as well to do to put the project back and back, but you've kind of got to force yourself to get on with it even when it feels difficult and it's good to have some milestones . . . some things to aim for rather than just the end of the project.'

These views were also confirmed by the supervisors we surveyed.

*To find out more about these students' research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



## Telling it like it is
## Why do a research project?

For some students, doing a research project is an optional part of their degree programme or dissertation requirement. In this case, the decision whether or not to do research becomes more personal. For Chris, doing a research project was an opportunity 'to find things out from the horse's mouth' by investigating how things worked in the 'real world' after three years of studying theories of business and management. 'I thought it would be interesting to actually find out what people really think about a subject. When you read these textbooks you read theories, you know, papers, and you get told things in lectures or newspapers or whatever and you think "Right, great. That's interesting and I'm sure that must be right." I mean sometimes I used to question. "Well, I don't agree with that." and I thought "Well, now I've got this really good opportunity to find out things" in an organization.'

For Tom, a research-based dissertation stood apart from dissertations that did not include research. 'Some of my friends for their dissertations took a load of information commented on it and came up with a conclusion and essentially, you know, that's an essay like any other that we've been doing throughout the three years at university, just a bit longer. For me, it was worth putting the extra effort in because it was an entire module. And it was fun. It was enjoyable and I got exposure to people that I wouldn't otherwise have had which has helped me recently in my graduate scheme And maybe it's just me, but it's nice to question theories that you don't necessarily believe and it's very easy to say "Oh well, I don't believe it, but there we go." The way I [saw] it was: "Well, I don't believe it, so [let's] see if I can find out anything to back that up."'

Karen explained that doing her research on something that she was genuinely interested in was crucial in maintaining her enthusiasm for the project. 'My manager said "Just make sure that it's something you're interested in, because, if it isn't, then you're not going to get through it and you're going to get disheartened." If it is something you're interested in, you can really enjoy doing the research and it becomes really good for you. You feel like you're really getting something out of it.'

Tom found that doing a research project helped him to feel that he had become a specialist in a particular subject area. 'I did like getting really into a topic and feeling like, you know, "I'm a bit of an expert on this now." You know, I know a lot about this and I've read more than 99 per cent of the population about this now and actually I feel kind of, you know, if anyone's going to have anything sensible to say about call centres it might be me.' Lucie felt that the experience of doing a research project had equipped her with skills that had the potential to be useful in other contexts. As she explained, 'In every job there's some element of research. A lot of my friends have gone into consultancy; you have to do research there. And a lot of my friends have gone into banking and there's a lot of research there as well. So you can apply the skills that you gain from research to everyday life and everyday jobs.'

These views were confirmed by one of the supervisors we questioned, who said: 'A piece of research can be a talking point for a job interview, as it is something the student has done!' Another commented: 'by the end of the research project, students have an awareness of the need for flexible thinking and the ability to adapt in order to make progress'.



*To find out more about these students' research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# Using your supervisor

Most institutions that require a dissertation or similar component allocate students to supervisors. Institutions vary quite a lot in what can be expected of supervisors; in other words, they vary in terms of what kinds of and how much assistance supervisors will give to students allocated to them. Equally, students vary a great deal in how frequently they see their supervisors and in their use of them. Our advice here is simple: use your supervisor to the fullest extent that you are allowed and follow the pointers you are given by him or her. Your supervisor will almost certainly be someone who is well versed in the research process and who will be able to provide you with help and feedback at all stages of your research, subject to your institution's strictures in this regard. If your supervisor is critical of your research questions, your **interview schedule**, drafts of your dissertation, or whatever, try to respond positively. Follow the suggestions that he or she provides, since the criticisms will invariably be accompanied by reasons for the criticisms and suggestions for revision. It is not a personal attack. Supervisors regularly have to go through the same process themselves when they submit an article to a peer-refereed journal, apply for a research grant, or give a conference paper. So respond to criticisms and suggestions positively and be glad that you are being given the opportunity to address deficiencies in your work before it is formally examined.

A further point is that students who get stuck at the start of their dissertations or who get behind with their work sometimes respond to the situation by avoiding

their supervisors. They then get caught up in a vicious circle that results in their work being neglected and perhaps rushed at the end. Try to avoid this situation by confronting the fact that you are experiencing difficulties in getting going or are getting behind and seek out your supervisor for advice.



## Telling it like it is
## Maintaining a good relationship with your supervisor

The expectations concerning the frequency and format of meetings between students and supervisors vary considerably from one university course to another. Of the supervisors we contacted, the majority met students individually, but some held meetings with a group of dissertation students so that common issues could be shared. Face-to-face meetings were also complemented by email communication, telephone calls, and online discussion groups. The students whom we spoke to had different experiences of their relationship with supervisors. Angharad valued the expertise of her supervisor and his knowledge of the subject. She advised: 'Make sure you use your supervisor, because they know the subject area and they're marking your dissertation, so you might as well draw on their expertise as much as possible.' From her own experience and that of other students, Karen observed differences in the expectations that students had of their supervisors. 'All supervisors are different anyway, but I think that students have different needs as well. My supervisor was really good for me, because he wasn't very prescriptive about what to do and what not to do. He was really good in that sense for me, but he wasn't, I don't think, the right type of tutor for everybody, because he didn't tell me anything, I don't think. He never said that that's wrong or that's right. He just used to ask questions and guide me and that type of thing. He read the plan and he gave that a good mark and then that was it; he didn't actually read any of my dissertation during the supervision process. I think it's really good, because hopefully now when he looks at it, it'll be really fresh for him as well. I was really excited about him reading it, because I thought "I'm really looking forward to seeing what he thinks!"' Karen enjoyed the independence afforded to her by her supervisor but felt this would not have suited all students equally. 'I think that, if a supervisor thinks you are a bit lost, that's when they come in and they say, "Right, well let me have a look at it," or something like that, because they think you need guidance. But the good thing about him was that he recognized I had my own ideas. I think that when they start to read it and give you feedback, it becomes more their work than your work. Whereas the reason I feel so good about my dissertation is because it is all my work and my supervisor hasn't put anything into it.'

Tom, a postgraduate student, saw his relationship with his supervisor as quite different from when he had been an undergraduate. 'When I did my undergraduate dissertation I was such a poor student I actively avoided my supervisor in case he asked me any questions and I hadn't done any reading or anything. This time I was determined I was going to make active use of my supervisor and so I did programme in to meet him at various points. At Birkbeck they're very keen that, when you go and see your supervisor, you don't just go and have a chat. Instead you go with some questions to ask and specific issues to talk about. So having those dates in the diary kind of really forced me to say, "Right, I'll go and see my supervisor and I need to have done A, B, and C before I go." You know, "I need to have done the interviews and done some preliminary data analysis before I go and see him." So that was quite helpful in terms of planning—you know, in spurring me on.' These views were confirmed by several of the supervisors we surveyed who echoed the importance of preparation beforehand by both parties in making supervision meetings successful. One stated: 'I adopt a fairly demanding regime for the production of draft material and require plans for activity between meetings.'

Lucie emphasized she was expected to be proactive in seeking support from her supervisor rather than expecting him to be constantly checking her progress. 'It wasn't like he would chase me up or anything. It was purely up to me. He was there as much as I wanted to use him. So he wouldn't chase me up and say "have you written your dissertation yet?" or "have you written your literature review yet?" It was purely up to me to go to him.' Another supervisor in our survey talked about the importance of a mature relationship between supervisor and student. 'Doing research and writing a thesis are things that you very much learn by doing. Supervision at higher levels therefore becomes much more guiding and discussing ideas (like working *with* the student) than teaching or

suggesting how to do something (working *for* the student).' We feel that this is a really helpful distinction for students to make. Students can find these expectations disconcerting at first, but in the long run they tend to pay off.

When asked what makes for a successful supervision meeting, one supervisor replied: 'the moment when you know the student sparks off a new insight for you . . . or vice versa'. This comment highlights the reciprocal nature of the learning involved in supervision relationships that rely on the commitment of both parties to be successful.



*To find out more about these students' research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



## Managing time and resources

All research is constrained by time and resources. There is no point in working on research questions and plans that cannot be seen through because of time pressure or because of the costs involved. Two points are relevant here.

1. Work out a timetable—preferably in conjunction with your supervisor—detailing the different stages of your research (including the review of the literature and writing up). This is particularly important if you are a part-time student combining your studies with full-time work. The timetable should specify the different stages and the calendar points at which you should start and finish them. Some stages of the research are likely to be ongoing—for example, searching the literature for new references—but that should not prove an obstacle to developing a timetable.
2. Find out what, if any, resources can be put at your disposal for carrying out your research. For example, will you receive help from your institution with such things as travel costs, photocopying, secretarial assistance, postage, stationery, and so on? Will the institution be able to loan you hardware such as tape recorders and **transcription** machines if you need to record and transcribe your interviews? Has it got the software you need, such as **SPSS** or a qualitative data analysis package like NVivo? This kind of information will help you to establish how far your research design and methods are financially feasible and practical. The imaginary gym survey used in Chapter 14 is an example of an investigation that would be feasible within the kind of time frame usually allocated to undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations. However, it would require such facilities as: typing up the questionnaire, which nowadays students can usually do for themselves with the help of word-processing programs; photocopying covering letters and questionnaires; postage for sending the questionnaires out and for any follow-up letters to non-respondents; return postage for the questionnaires; and the availability of a quantitative data analysis package like SPSS.



## Telling it like it is
## Finding time to do a research project

For part-time MBA, undergraduate, and postgraduate students, doing a research project sometimes has to be combined with the intense demands of work and family, which in themselves may constitute more than a full-time job. From our experience of supervising such students, we have observed that they develop many different and creative ways of managing the time pressures associated with doing a dissertation project, but this can often involve an element of personal sacrifice for them. Female MBA students from Warwick Business School interviewed by Bell (2004) described some of the effects of these time pressures—for example, causing them temporarily to give up social activities or family time in order to work on their dissertation at weekends or during holidays. Students also highlighted the importance of partners and other family members in helping to enable them to find time and giving them emotional and practical support in doing their research project.

Students who don't fully take these time pressures into account can sometimes find that they are unable to meet the deadlines for submitting the dissertation and have repeatedly to postpone this final stage of their degree study. One female MBA student working full-time with two young children interviewed by Bell (2004: 69–70) summarized the pressures associated with these conflicting demands. 'My son is growing up really quickly and, yes, people can take him off so I can work on my MBA dissertation, but I'm at work all week and I actually quite like seeing him at the weekend. I'm just conscious that, as the gap between the MBA course and the project gets longer, the project gets harder because you can't remember anything that you've done.'

Tom, a part-time student at Birkbeck, took a different approach, cutting down on his work time to create time for his research project. 'This isn't going to be any help to people that are working full time, but I reduced my hours to work four days a week for the second half of the course so I had a day a week to do my studies; that was a big help . . . A lot of people did extend their studies over a third year because it was just really difficult to fit it all in.' Even so, Tom found the pressures of doing a research project daunting at times. 'It's very easy to feel like it's this huge mountain that you'll never get to the top of and just feel like you can never do. You can never sit down and watch telly or relax because this thing's always there; living with it can be annoying at times; and there are times when you get stuck and it doesn't feel great.'



*To find out more about Tom's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



## Tips and skills

# Constructing a Gantt chart for your research project

One way of keeping track of your research project is through the use of a Gantt chart. This is a horizontal bar chart that was originally developed as a production control tool in 1917 by Henry L. Gantt, an American engineer and social scientist. Although Gantt charts are more commonly used in project management, they can also help you to plan, coordinate, and track specific tasks in your research project by providing a graphical illustration of your timetable and the key tasks involved in it. Simple Gantt charts may be designed on graph paper or as a table in Microsoft Word. More complex automated versions can be created using project management applications such as Microsoft Project or Excel. The horizontal axis of the chart represents the total time span of the project divided into units such as weeks or months. The vertical axis represents the tasks involved in the project. An example of a Gantt chart for a student research project is provided in Figure 3.1. As Figure 3.1 shows, you would shade the squares on the graph to represent the amount of time you expect to spend on each task. The filled-in squares may overlap, to reflect the fact, for example, that you may continue to review the literature in the same time span as starting to collect your data. As the research project progresses, the chart may be amended to indicate the portions of tasks that have been completed. However, one of the limitations of Gantt charts is that they do not indicate task dependencies, so you cannot tell, for example, how falling behind with your literature review will affect the timing of other tasks in your research project. This is a particular problem for student research projects, where you will almost certainly be working to a fixed and immovable deadline for completion of the dissertation, so falling behind in your timetable will necessarily reduce the amount of time that you have to devote to other stages of the project. A further difficulty with Gantt charts is that, even though they allow for overlaps between different tasks, they do encourage you to see the research process as a linear, sequential activity. This may be inappropriate, particularly for qualitative research projects where many of the tasks are iterative. Such a project might produce a Gantt chart where tasks overlap to such an extent that the graph becomes impossible to follow.

# Figure 3.1

**An example of a Gantt chart for a student research project**

| | Sept. | Oct. | Nov. | Dec. | Jan. | Feb. | Mar. | Apr. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Identify research area | | | | | | | | |
| Formulate research questions | | | | | | | | |
| Formulate research strategy, research design, and select methods | | | | | | | | |
| Write research proposal | | | 15th | | | | | |
| Negotiate access | | | | | | | | |
| Literature review | | | | | | | | |
| Data collection | | | | | | | | |
| Data analysis | | | | | | | | |
| Write first draft | | | | | | | | |
| Write second draft | | | | | | | | |
| Write final draft | | | | | | | | |
| Dissertation due | | | | | | | | 21st |



## Telling it like it is

## When doing a research project doesn't turn out to be a linear process

Tom found that his experience of doing a research project contradicted some of what he had been told to expect. 'People talk about the research process being this linear thing. You review the literature, find your question and identify your methods and, you know, it kind of neatly follows on. I didn't really experience it like that to be perfectly honest.' Our experience in supervising research projects suggests Tom is by no means unusual in this and there is not necessarily anything to feel concerned about—particularly in a qualitative research project like Tom's. Tom also found himself revisiting his research questions throughout the research project. As he explained, 'I found identifying a question that I was able to investigate and that was meaningful was the most difficult bit of my whole project. I kept coming back to that throughout the year I was doing the project refining it, changing it.' The main thing in planning your research project is to be conscious of the deadlines imposed by your university and to be active in setting achievable milestones along the way, so you are less likely to get discouraged and more likely to feel you are making progress.



*To find out more about Tom's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# Formulating suitable research questions

Many students want to conduct research into areas that are of personal interest to them. This is not a bad thing at all and, as we noted in Chapter 1, many business researchers start from this point as well (see also Lofland and Lofland 1995: 11–14). However, you must move on to develop research questions. This recommendation applies to qualitative research as well as to quantitative research. As we will go on to explain in Chapter 16, qualitative research is more open-ended than quantitative research, and in Chapter 17 we will mention some notable studies that appear not to have been driven by specific research questions. However, very open-ended research is risky and can lead to the collection of too much data and, when it comes to writing up, to confusion about your focus. So, unless your supervisor advises you to the contrary, we would definitely advise you to formulate some research questions, even if they turn out to be somewhat less specific than the kinds we often find in quantitative research. In other words, what is it about your area of interest that you want to know?

Research questions are, therefore, important. No research questions or poorly formulated research questions will lead to poor research. If you do not specify clear research questions, there is a great risk that your research will be unfocused and that you will be unsure about what your research is about and what you are collecting data for. It does not matter how well you design a questionnaire or how skilled an interviewer you are; you must be clear about your research questions. Equally, it does not matter whether your research is for a research contract of £200,000, a doctoral thesis, or a small mini-project. Research questions are crucial because they will:

- guide your literature search;
- guide your decisions about the kind of research design to employ;
- guide your decisions about what data to collect and from whom;
- guide your analysis of your data;
- guide your writing-up of your data;
- stop you from going off in unnecessary directions.

Marx (1997) has suggested a wide range of sources of research questions (see Thinking deeply 3.1) and outlines some of the features that your research questions should exhibit. Figure 3.2 brings out the main steps in developing research questions. Research questions in quantitative research are sometimes more specific than in qualitative research. Indeed, some qualitative researchers advocate a very open approach with no research questions. This is a very risky approach and can be a recipe for collecting masses of data without a clear sense of what to observe or what to ask your interviewees. There is a growing tendency for qualitative researchers to advocate a somewhat more focused approach to their craft (e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 24–9).

We usually start out with a general research area that interests us. It may derive from any of several sources:

- *Personal interest/experience*. As we pointed out in Chapter 1, Bryman's interests in theme parks can be traced back to a visit to Disney World in Orlando in 1991 (a holiday that was somewhat affected by his showing the first signs of chicken pox on the first night), while Bell's interest in 'Investors in People' stems from her involvement in managing the implementation of this quality standard in an NHS trust hospital.
- *Theory*. Someone might be interested in testing aspects of labour process theory or the contingency perspective on organization structure.
- *The research literature*. Studies relating to a research area like the Japanization of work in British industry could be an example of a literature that might stimulate an interest in the nature of shop-floor work in such a context.
- *Puzzles*. How are team and individual empowerment, both of which have been themes in research on quality initiatives, compatible?
- *New developments in organizations*. Examples might include the rise of the Internet or the diffusion of new models of organization—for example, Total Quality Management (TQM), customer service programmes, call centres.
- *Organizational problems*. An example might be how staff in call centres should handle consumer rage when consumers are interrupted by unwanted telephone calls.

As these types of source suggest, in research we often start out with a general research area or research objective that has to be narrowed down so that we can develop a tighter focus out of which research questions can be developed. We can depict the process of generating research questions as a series of steps, as suggested in Figure 3.2.



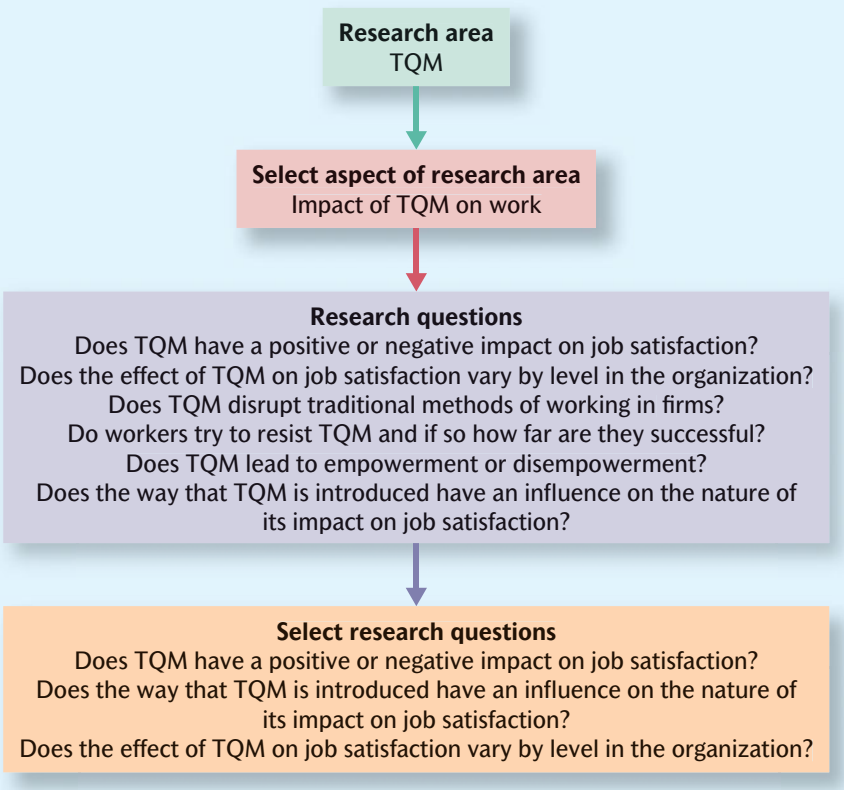
## Thinking deeply 3.1
## Marx's sources of research questions

Marx (1997) suggests the following as possible sources of research questions:

- Intellectual puzzles and contradictions.
- The existing literature.
- Replication.
- Structures and functions. For example, if you point to a structure such as a type of organization, you can ask questions about the reasons why there are different types and the implications of the differences.
- Opposition. Marx identifies the sensation of feeling that a certain theoretical perspective or notable piece of work is misguided and exploring the reasons for your opposition.
- A social problem. But remember that this is just a source of a research question; you still have to identify business and management research issues in relation to a social problem: 'Gaps between official versions of reality and the facts on the ground' (Marx 1997: 113). An example here is something like Delbridge's (1998) fascinating ethnographic account of company **rhetoric** about Japanized work practices and how they operate in practice.
- The counter-intuitive. For example, when common sense seems to fly in the face of social scientific truths.
- 'Empirical examples that trigger amazement' (Marx 1997: 114). Marx gives, as examples, deviant cases and atypical events.
- New methods and theories. How might they be applied in new settings?
- 'New social and technical developments and social trends' (Marx 1997: 114).
- Personal experience.
- Sponsors and teachers. But do not expect your teachers to provide you with detailed research questions.

# Figure 3.2

### Steps in selecting research questions



The series of stages is meant to suggest that, when developing research questions, the researcher is involved in a process of progressive focusing down, so that we move from a general research area down to specific research questions. In making this movement, we have to recognize the following restrictions:

- Remember that a research question should end with a question mark. If there is no question mark, it is not a research question.
- We cannot answer all the research questions that occur to us. This is not just to do with issues of time and the cost of doing research. It is very much to do with the fact that we must keep a clear focus so that our research questions must relate to each other to form a coherent set of issues.
- We therefore have to select from the possible research questions that we arrive at.
- In making our selection, we should be guided by the principle that the research questions we choose should be related to one another. If they are not, our research will probably lack focus and we may not make as clear a contribution to understanding as would be the case if research questions were connected. Thus, in the example in Figure 3.2, the research questions relating to TQM are closely connected.



## Telling it like it is
## Finding a research area

Lucie's choice of research subject reflected her personal experience of having been exposed to entrepreneurial discourses while she was a student at university. 'As a student I was being exposed to kind of these enterprise courses. I was bombarded with messages like "Join this course", and I was quite interested in enterprise, so I attended one of these courses as an undergraduate and that's how I became interested in it. Also, a lot of my friends are really interested in enterprise, and a lot of them kind of have started to try and run businesses while at university. So I was interested in what was provoking students to do this.' Lucie's choice of research area illustrates how practical considerations (see Chapter 1) can impact upon choice of research area, since Lucie already had social contact with the kinds of people who might become the focus of her research, in this case university students, and had already had contact with the research setting on which she was intending to base her study. Lucie was thus studying a social group of which she was a member—university students. This is interesting, because it raises particular considerations about the nature of the relationship between the researcher and research subjects, an issue that we will return to in Chapter 16.

Tom's research interest was driven initially by his curiosity about the rise of telephone call centres as a new type of workplace environment. 'I guess that I started by probably not thinking about testing a theory so much—like "How does goal-setting theory affect behaviour in the workplace?" or something. I was more interested in looking at a type of workplace. There had been a lot of stuff in the media about call centres and there were quite a lot of references to call centres in the literature that I'd read in my first term and so that's how my interest evolved.' A further advantage to Tom's choice of research subject stems from its clearly defined parameters. He was attracted to the subject of call centres because it constituted a relatively clearly defined literature that did not go back very far in time. This helped to make it suitable for a student research project. As he explained 'If you type in "call centre" to a database you get a compact set of references and it's quite attractive because call centres have only been in existence for sort of ten years or something, so actually the literature is not that extensive, which makes kind of getting into it a lot easier.'



*To find out more about these students' research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

Tips and skills 'Criteria for evaluating research questions' gives some suggestions about the kinds of considerations that should be taken into account when developing your own research questions.

Research in focus 3.2 describes some considerations that went into Watson's (1994*a*, *b*) exploration of management at ZTC Ryland, a UK-based telecommunications firm.



## Telling it like it is
## Using your supervisor to help develop your research questions

Tom found it was common for students on his course to be too ambitious in forming their research questions. 'We all came up with really big questions like "How does leadership impact on the NHS?" Some huge question like that—you know, not the sort of thing that's very easy to test in a student research project. We were encouraged to knock these ideas around. Most of them were pretty impractical, because they were sort of like five-year research projects needing thousands and thousands of hours to be operationalized, whereas we only had very limited time. So we were encouraged to kind of focus down.'

Karen had a similar experience: 'I used to send my supervisor drafts of my proposal and get his feedback, to check that I was on the right lines. But to be honest, I don't think he ever actually told me anything. He just used to ask me questions, which I think was the best thing for me, because that just sort of got me thinking about it and that was really what I needed at that time. He kind of narrowed me down when I was trying to take on too much, when I was saying: "Well, I think I might do this and I might do that as well." Then he would just sort of ask me questions and get me to narrow it down.'

This experience was echoed by the supervisors we spoke to, who said that it was common for students to be too broad in designing their research questions. One said: 'undergraduate students tend to be unrealistic about what can be achieved and to assume that doing research is easy and not very time consuming. Many choose something which is "fashionable" or "current", often without much apparent initial investigation, only to find later that the topic has limited foundations in the existing literature. Apart from the usual problem of students having a broad question, underpinned by multiple more focused research questions, each of which might be the basis for a more effective proposal, it is striking that many students will not narrow the focus, despite numerous signals that it is necessary. I also notice that very few revisit and refine the research question as they proceed. Another substantial minority of students feel that they have to have both a qualitative and a quantitative aspect to the project, irrespective of the context or the specific research question. The outcome is that the project typically falls "between both stools" and lacks conviction.' While this supervisor's comments might sound a little harsh, they are based on substantial experience of trying to help students to avoid these common pitfalls.



*To find out more about Tom's and Karen's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



## Tips and skills
## Criteria for evaluating research questions

Research questions for a dissertation or project should meet the following criteria:

- *Questions should be clear*. They must be understandable to you and to others.
- *Questions should be researchable*. They should be capable of development into a research design, so that data may be collected in relation to them. This means that extremely abstract terms are unlikely to be suitable.
- *Questions should connect with established theory and research*. This means that there should be a literature on which you can draw to help illuminate how your research questions should be approached. Even if you find a topic that has been scarcely addressed by social scientists, it is unlikely that there will be no relevant literature (for example, on related or parallel topics). Making connections with theory and research will also allow you to show how your research has made a contribution to knowledge and understanding.
- *Questions should be linked to each other*. Unrelated research questions are unlikely to be acceptable, since you should be developing an argument in your dissertation. You will not very readily be able to construct a single argument in connection with unrelated research questions.

- *Questions should have potential for making a contribution to knowledge*. They should at the very least hold out the prospect of being able to make a contribution—however small—to the topic.
- *Questions should be neither too broad nor too narrow*. The research questions should be neither too large (so that you would need a massive grant to study them) nor too small (so that you cannot make a reasonably significant contribution to your area of study).

If you are stuck about how to formulate research questions (or indeed other phases of your research), it is a good idea to look at journal articles or research monographs to see how other researchers have formulated them. Also, look at past dissertations for ideas as well.



## Research in focus 3.2
## Developing research questions

Watson (1994*b*) gives a very frank account of the process by which he developed his research questions for his participant observation study of ZTC Ryland, 'a plant of three thousand or so employees engaged in developing, making and selling telecommunications products' (Watson 1994*a*: 4). The fact that the company was involved in several change initiatives at the time made it particularly interesting to Watson. His initial aim, therefore, was to improve understanding of how people doing managerial work 'shape' their own lives and identities in the context of organized work efforts (1994*b*). He writes that he 'sharpened' this general area of interest somewhat by reflecting on the impact on managers of the emergence of what were then fairly new developments, such as the rise of cultural change programmes and of HRM principles. In developing this set of interests into research questions, Watson was influenced by writers and researchers on managerial work who had been critical of existing knowledge in this area. In particular he notes that these critics recommended: greater attention to the terms managers use to reflect on their work; a greater emphasis on explaining why managers engage in the forms of behaviour that have been uncovered; and a greater appreciation of the way in which managerial behaviour is embedded in organizational arrangements. These reflections on the literature on managerial work gave rise to Watson's research questions and led to an emphasis on: the linguistic categories and rhetorical processes involved in managers' constructions of their work and jobs; explaining patterns of behaviour observed; and exploring the ways in which organizational arrangements have implications for managerial behaviour and indeed are influenced by it.

Watson (1994*a*, *b*) has also provided a useful account of the process of 'crafting research', as he puts it. Before embarking on the task of research design and choice of research methods, it is a good idea to ask yourself a series of questions about your research and the findings that you hope to produce. Crafting a research design relies on addressing a series of what, why, and how questions (see Figure 3.3), which eventually result in the production of a set of 'findings' or conclusions. Watson (1994*b*) sees management research as an intellectual craft that relies on the acquisition of a set of skills, which, when combined imaginatively, result in the production of an artefact.

Watson's figure illustrates how central research questions are to the overall research process and the way in which they are embedded in the many decisions that have to be made during it. In the case of his own research, Watson found that his research questions were pushing him in the direction of needing to appreciate 'issues of language and meaning'. He goes on to say:

> This implies investigative techniques which take one close to individuals, which allow close attention to the way people use language and which enable the researcher to relate closely the individual to the context in which they work. The basic research design shaped to meet these criteria was one of participant observation within the management team of a single organization combined with detailed interviews with a cross-section of that group of managers. (Watson 1994*b*: S82)

# Figure 3.3

**A 'what, why, and how' framework for crafting research**

| | |
|---|---|
| **What?**<br>What puzzles/intrigues me? What do I want to know more about/understand better? What are my key research questions? | **Why?**<br>Why will this be of enough interest to others to be published as a thesis, book, paper, guide to practitioners or policy-makers? Can the research be justified as a 'contribution to knowledge'? |
| **How—conceptually?**<br>What models, concepts, and theories can I draw on/develop to answer my research questions? How can these be brought together into a basic conceptual framework to guide my investigation? | **How—practically?**<br>What investigative styles and techniques shall I use to apply my conceptual framework (both to gather material and analyse it)? How shall I gain and maintain access to information sources? |

*Source*: Watson (1994*b*: S80). Reprinted with permission of Wiley Publishing.

In other words, the way in which Watson's research questions were framed profoundly influenced both his research design (a case study) and his research methods (participant observation and semi-structured interviewing). Decisions about research questions are therefore crucial to how research is designed and how data are collected. You are advised not to begin thinking about your research methods until you have established what your research questions are. Some people do prefer to use particular methods and frame their research questions in terms of those preferences (Bryman 2007*c*); that is not regarded as a good practice (P. White 2009).

One final point to make is that a research question is not the same as a hypothesis. A hypothesis is a specific type of research question. It is an informed speculation, which is set up to be tested, about the possible relationship between two or more variables. Hypotheses are not as common in quantitative research as is sometimes supposed and in qualitative research they are typically avoided, other than as speculations that arise in the course of fieldwork.

If you are still stuck about how to formulate research questions (or indeed about other phases of your research), it is always a good idea to look at journal articles or research monographs to see how other researchers have formulated them. Also, look at past dissertations for ideas as well.



## Writing your research proposal

You may be required as part of your dissertation to write a short proposal or plan outlining what your research project will be about and how you intend to go about it. This is a useful way of preparing for your research, and it will encourage you to think about many of the issues that are covered in the next section. In addition to outlining the research design and methods that you intend to use, the topic area in which your study is going to be located, and the research questions that you intend to address, the proposal will ask you to demonstrate some knowledge of the literature in your chosen field—for example, by identifying several key authors or important research

studies. This information may be used as the basis for allocating a supervisor who is knowledgeable in your area of research interest. The proposal is also a useful basis for discussion of your research project with your supervisor, and, if it includes a timetable for the project, this can provide a basis for planning regular meetings with your supervisor to review your progress. Developing a timetable can be very important in making you think about aspects of the overall research process such as the different stages of your research and their timing and in giving you a series of ongoing goals to aim for. Even if you are not required to produce a research proposal, it is worthwhile constructing a timetable for your research and asking your supervisor to look at it, so that you can assess how (un)realistic your goals are and whether you are allowing enough time for each of the components of the research process.

When writing a research proposal, there are a number of issues that you will probably need to cover:

- What is your research topic or, alternatively, what are your research objectives?
- Why is your research topic (or why are those research objectives) important?
- What is your research question or what are your research questions?
- What does the literature have to say about your research topic/objectives and research question(s)?
- How are you going to go about collecting data relevant to your research question(s)? In other words, what research methods are you intending to use?
- Why are the research methods/sources you have selected the appropriate ones for your research question?
- What resources will you need to conduct your research (for example, postage, travel costs, software) and how will those resources be funded?
- What is your timetable for the different stages of the project?
- What problems do you anticipate in doing the research (for example, access to organizations)?
- What are the possible ethical problems associated with your research?
- How will you analyse your data?

Writing a proposal is, therefore, useful in getting you started on your research project and encouraging you to set realistic objectives for your research project. However, the important thing to remember about the research proposal is that it is a working document and the ideas that you set out in it can be refined and developed as your research progresses. But it is also important to bear in mind that, if you keep changing your mind about your area of research interest and research design, you will be using up valuable time needed to complete the dissertation within the deadline.



## Telling it like it is
## The importance of planning

Karen found one of the things she had learned from the experience of doing a research project was the importance of planning. 'For our dissertation we actually had to do a proposal and submit it and get that approved by our dissertation tutor before we started the actual writing. I think that's really important for them to check that you're on the right lines and just to clarify for you because I think when you first start you think "Oh, it's such a lot of pages or a lot of words" and you have the desire to do so much, but then once you start writing you realize that it's much better to be a lot more focused and then you can go a lot deeper into things. So I think having that plan right at the beginning is really important.'



*To find out more about Karen's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# Preparing for your research

Do not begin your data collection until you have identified your research questions reasonably clearly and conducted your literature review. Decide on your data collection methods with these research questions at the forefront of

your thinking. If you do not do this, there is the risk that your results will not allow you to illuminate the research questions. If at all possible, conduct a small pilot study to determine how well your research methods work.

You will also need to think about access and sampling issues. If your research requires you to gain access to or the cooperation of one or more closed settings such as an organization, you need to confirm at the earliest opportunity that you have the necessary permission to conduct your work. You also need to consider how you will go about gaining access to people. These issues lead you into sampling considerations, such as the following:

- Who do you need to study in order to investigate your research questions?
- How easily can you gain access to a **sampling frame**?
- What kind of sampling strategy will you employ (for example, probability sampling, quota sampling, **theoretical sampling**, convenience sampling)?
- Can you justify your choice of sampling method?

Also, at this stage, if you are using a case study design, you will almost certainly need to find out more about the organization that you intend to investigate. What is its financial position? Has it been in the news recently? Where are its premises? What market conditions does it face? There are a wide variety of sources available on the Web that can provide this kind of background information to inform your research. Company accounts are available through Companies House and some free company information is available from:
***www.companieshouse.gov.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

In addition, the largest multinational corporations often make their annual report and accounts available through their homepages. Although this is for them primarily a marketing exercise, you can often obtain the full text, as it appears in hard copy free of charge. The best way to find these pages is by using a search engine and entering the full company name as a phrase.

Newspapers such as the *Financial Times* are also accessible on the Web, although there are some limitations on the amount of information that you can obtain free of charge. Newslink is a collection of links to countries and then to newspapers all over the world. It can be found at:
***www.newslink.org*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Also, while preparing for your data collection, you should consider whether there are any possible ethical problems associated with your research methods or your approach to contacting people (see Chapter 5).



## Doing your research and analysing your results

Since this is what the bulk of this book will be about, it is not necessary at this point to go into this in detail, but here are some useful reminders of practicalities.

- Keep good records of what you do. A research **diary** can be helpful, but there are several other things to bear in mind. For example, if you are doing a survey by **postal questionnaire**, keep good records of who has replied, so that you know who should be sent reminders. If participant observation is a component of your research, remember to keep good field notes and not to rely on your memory.
- Make sure that you are thoroughly familiar with any hardware you are using in collecting your data, such as tape recorders for interviewing, and check that it is in good working order (for example, that the batteries are not flat or close to being flat).
- Do not wait until all your data have been collected to begin coding. This recommendation applies to both quantitative and qualitative research. If you are conducting a questionnaire survey, begin coding your data and entering them into SPSS or whatever package you are using after you have put together a reasonably sized batch of completed questionnaires. In the case of qualitative data, such as interview transcripts, the same point applies, and, indeed, it is a specific recommendation of the proponents of grounded theory that data collection and analysis should be intertwined.
- Remember that the transcription of tapes with recorded interviews takes a long time. Allow at least six hours' transcription for every one hour of recorded interview talk, at least in the early stages of transcription.
- Become familiar with any data analysis packages as soon as possible. This familiarity will help you to establish whether or not you definitely need them and will ensure that you do not need to learn everything about them at the very time you need to use them for your analysis.
- Do not at any time take risks with your personal safety (see Tips and skills 'Safety in research' on page 87).



## Tips and skills
## Safety in research

You must bear in mind that, even though the majority of business research carries a low risk of personal harm to the researcher, there are occasions when doing research places you in potentially dangerous situations. You should avoid taking personal risks at all costs and you should resist any attempts to place yourself in situations where personal harm is a possibility. Just as you should ensure that no harm comes to research participants (as prescribed in the discussion of ethical principles in Chapter 5), individuals involved in directing others' research should not place students and researchers in situations in which they might come to harm. Equally, lone researchers should avoid such situations. There are also situations in which there is no obvious reason to think that a situation may be dangerous, but the researcher is faced with a sudden outburst of abuse or threatening behaviour. This can arise when people react relatively unpredictably to an interview question or to being observed. If there are signs that such behaviour is imminent (for example, through body language), begin a withdrawal from the research situation.

R. M. Lee (2004) draws an important distinction between two kinds of danger in fieldwork: ambient and situational. The former refers to situations that are avoidable and in which danger is an ingredient of the context. Situational danger occurs 'when the researcher's presence or activities evoke aggression, hostility or violence from those in the setting' (R. M. Lee 2004: 1285). While problems surrounding safety may be easier to anticipate in the case of ambient danger, they are less easy to foresee in connection with situational danger.



## Telling it like it is
## Listen to the advice of your supervisor, but make your own choices

We asked the supervisors we surveyed to tell us what the most important advice they gave to students at the start of their research project was. Here's what they told us!

- Choose a topic that interests *you*.
- Ask yourself whether you can answer the research question.
- Read a lot, read thoroughly and appropriately (this includes articles in refereed journals).
- Identify your strengths, weaknesses, interests, and personal development opportunities and take them into account in designing the project.
- Don't pre-commit to one idea, approach, research design, data source, and so on, to the exclusion of other possibilities.
- Use opportunities to talk to others in your own field and other fields about your proposed research and assess its importance, characteristics, and possible relationship to what others are doing.
- Research something that is likely to be interesting to others: either practitioners or researchers (or both).
- Start writing early. Build in a cushion round the deadline; analysis takes much longer than you think. This is where 'added value' can be gained.
- Remember that this is not your life work or a bid for a Nobel Prize.
- Listen to my advice, but make your own choices.



# Checklist

## Planning a research project

- ◯ Do you know what the requirements for your dissertation are, as set out by your university or department?
- ◯ Have you made contact with your supervisor?
- ◯ Have you left enough time for planning, doing, and writing up your research project?
- ◯ Do you have a clear timetable for your research project with clearly identifiable milestones for the achievement of specific tasks?
- ◯ Have you got sufficient financial and practical resources (for example, money to enable travel to research site, tape recorder) to enable you to carry out your research project?
- ◯ Have you formulated some research questions and discussed these with your supervisor?
- ◯ Are the research questions you have identified able to be answered through your research project?
- ◯ Do you have the access that you require in order to carry out your research?
- ◯ Are you familiar with the data analysis software that you will be using to analyse your data?



# Key points

- Follow the dissertation guidelines provided by your institution.
- Thinking about your research subject can be time-consuming, so allow plenty of time for this aspect of the dissertation process.
- Use your supervisor to the fullest extent allowed and follow the advice offered by him or her.
- Plan your time carefully and be realistic about what you can achieve in the time available.
- Formulate some research questions to express what it is about your area of interest that you want to know.
- Writing a research proposal is a good way of getting started on your research project and encouraging you to set realistic objectives.
- Consider access and sampling issues at an early stage and consider testing your research methods by conducting a pilot study.
- Keep good records of what you do in your research as you go along and don't wait until all of your data have been collected before you start coding.



# Questions for review

### *Managing time and resources*

- What are the main advantages/disadvantages associated with using a Gantt chart to plan your research?

*Formulating suitable research questions*

- What are the main sources of research questions?
- What are the main steps involved in developing research questions?
- What criteria can be used to evaluate research questions?

*Writing your research proposal*

- What is the purpose of the research proposal and how can it be useful?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Planning a Research Project and Formulating Research Questions.*

# 4

# Getting started: reviewing the literature

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 91

**Reviewing the existing literature and engaging with what others have written** 91

Getting the most from your reading 94
Systematic review 94
Narrative review 101

**Searching the existing literature and looking for business information** 103

Electronic databases 104
Keywords and defining search parameters 108

**Referencing your work** 111

The role of the bibliography 115

**Avoiding plagiarism** 116

***Checklist*** 119
***Key points*** 119
***Questions for review*** 119



## Chapter outline

The goal of this chapter is to provide guidance for students on how to get started on their research project. Once you have identified your research questions (see Chapter 3), the next step in any research project is to search the existing literature and write a literature review. The principal task at this early stage involves reviewing the main ideas and research relating to your chosen area of interest. This provides the basis for the writing of a literature review, which forms an important part of the dissertation.

The chapter explores:

- how to go about searching the literature and engaging critically with the ideas of other writers;
- what is expected in a literature review and the criteria that are used to evaluate it;
- how to assess the quality of existing research in your subject area;
- the role of the bibliography and the importance of referencing the work of others;
- the importance of understanding what constitutes plagiarism and the penalties that are associated with it.

# Introduction

This chapter is intended to help you to get started on one of the most important tasks in carrying out a research project of your own—reviewing the literature in your chosen subject area. The literature review is a crucial part of an undergraduate or postgraduate dissertation, often constituting a separate chapter or substantial section that is usually positioned towards the beginning of the finished document. It provides the basis on which you justify your research questions and build your research design. The literature review also informs how you collect your data and enables you to analyse your data in an informed way. However, doing a literature review can initially feel quite daunting, either because so many other researchers have written so many books and articles about your chosen subject often based on much larger-scale studies than your own, or because your subject area does not seem to have a clearly defined boundary, hence there are various literatures that you could review and you are not sure how to choose between or combine them. The process of reviewing the literature therefore involves making judgements about what to include and exclude from your literature review and then reading what other researchers have written about your subject and writing about it in a way that demonstrates your understanding. The advice we give in this chapter is designed to assist in this process.



# Reviewing the existing literature and engaging with what others have written

Why do you need to review the existing literature? The most obvious reason is that you want to know what is already known about your area of interest so that you do not simply 'reinvent the wheel'. Your literature review is where you demonstrate that you are able to engage in scholarly review based on your reading and understanding of the work of others in the same field as you. Beyond this, using the existing literature on a topic is a means of developing an argument about the significance of your research and where it leads. The simile of a *story* is also sometimes used in this context (see Thinking deeply 4.1). Whatever different understandings of the literature review process you adopt, it is perhaps easier to be clear about the goal that the process is directed towards

achieving. A competent review of the literature is at least in part a means of affirming your credibility as someone who is knowledgeable in your chosen area. This is not simply a matter of reproducing the theories and opinions of other scholars, but also of being able to interpret what they have written, possibly by using their ideas to support a particular viewpoint or argument. The purpose of exploring the existing literature should be to identify the following issues:

- What is already known about this area?
- What concepts and theories are relevant to this area?
- What research methods and research strategies have been employed in studying this area?
- Are there any significant controversies?
- Are there any inconsistencies in findings relating to this area?
- Are there any unanswered research questions in this area?

This last issue points to the possibility that you will be able to revise and refine your research questions in the process of reviewing the literature.



## Telling it like it is
## Using the literature to refine your research questions

One of the most common ways that students refine and revise their research questions is through reviewing the literature. Angharad explained how this had worked for her. 'I started off reading through my literature review I think and I just pulled out questions from that, things that had cropped up in research. There were things that had come up that I wanted answering, but a lot of it was things that I wanted to test out from the literature and then I went to see my supervisor and said, "This is the area I want to look at", and he said, "Well, that's a big area. You need to think of a question. Have you got something you want to know?" And I said, "Yeah, I want to know why women aren't senior managers and specifically whether they're choosing not to go that way or whether something is holding them back." And that was my question.'

A similar process was described by Lucie. 'I had some loose research questions but because it was an exploratory study I wasn't quite sure what I was going to find, so at first I had rough research questions based on my literature review. The main piece of literature that I was working from was an article. The authors of the article had this concept of governmentality and all these kind of technologies that governments employ, such as working through these programmes and expertise and knowledge bases. So I used those concepts to base my research questions on and I thought "I can go into this Institute with these things that I'm looking for." But they weren't strict research questions and when I started carrying out the research my research questions became more defined. I started to see trends and themes that were emerging, so I could base my research questions on these and try and explore those further.' Lucie's experience shows how the literature can provide the starting point for developing research questions, which are refined and developed as the research progresses.



*To find out more about Angharad's and Lucie's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



## Tips and skills
## Ways of conceptualizing a literature review

Bruce's (1994) study of research students' early experiences of the dissertation literature review identified six qualitatively different ways in which the review process was experienced or understood by postgraduates. The six conceptions included:

1. *List*. The literature review is understood as a list comprising pertinent items representing the literature of the subject.
2. *Search*. The review is a process of identifying relevant information and the focus is on finding or looking, which may involve going through sources (for example, article, database) to identify information.
3. *Survey*. Students also see the literature review as an investigation of past and present writing or research on a subject. This investigation may be active (critical/analytical) or passive (descriptive).
4. *Vehicle*. The review is also seen as having an impact on the researcher because it is seen as a vehicle for learning that leads to an increase in their knowledge and understanding. Within this conception the review acts as a sounding board through which the student can check ideas or test personal perceptions.
5. *Facilitator*. The literature review can be understood as directly related to the research that is about to be or is being undertaken, the process helping them to identify a topic, support a methodology, provide a context, or change research direction. The review thus helps to shape the course of the student's research.
6. *Report*. The review is understood as a written discussion of the literature drawing on previously conducted investigations. The focus is on 'framing a written discourse about the literature which may be established as a component part of a thesis or other research report' (1994: 223).

These six conceptions reflect the varying relationship between the student and the literature, the earlier ones being more indirect—the student works with items that represent the primary literature such as bibliographic citations, and the latter conceptions being more direct—the student works with source material rather than, for example, a representative abstract. The conceptions can also be seen as cumulative, since a student who adopts the facilitator conception may also continue to hold the conception of the literature review as a survey. Bruce therefore recommends that students be encouraged to adopt the higher level conceptions (4–6) because through this the other ways of experiencing the literature review (1–3) become more meaningful.



## Telling it like it is
## Hitting a brick wall . . . and getting through it

Sometimes the experience of searching the literature for a research project can require a level of persistence beyond that which you may have needed to obtain access to literature on other courses, where you will probably have been given extensive reading lists and had recommended textbooks to support your learning. In doing a research project you will be focusing on a specialized subject of your own choosing. It is, therefore, unlikely that there will be a textbook that precisely matches your subject focus, so you may have to be patient in your search for existing literature, as Karen's experience illustrates: 'I became quite interested in the relationship between person and organization culture fit and so I started doing a little bit more reading and then I stumbled upon this one article in a human resources journal but then I sort of hit a wall after this first article where I thought, "Great! There's something about it!" I hit a wall where there was just nothing else that I could find and I went to all you know, all sorts of mainstream human resources textbooks and recruitment textbooks and they were just talking all the time about evaluating job criteria and nothing about culture fit. And so then I started to look a bit more broadly and then it was just all of a sudden I just hit on this one article and it just led to loads of things. I just looked in the bibliography and it was just one thing really that opened up the whole sphere to me and said like "There is some stuff written about this." Because at that point I was thinking "Argh! There's nothing and I'm not going to be able to do it because there's nothing else written about it."'

Of course, you may also find that there really is nothing written about your chosen subject, although you would probably already have been advised against taking on such a research project in the first place. If you do become worried that, despite your best efforts, there is not enough literature on which to base your research project, you should discuss this with your supervisor at the earliest opportunity.



*To find out more about Karen's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

## Getting the most from your reading

Since a great deal of time during the early stages of your research project will be taken up with reading the existing literature in order to write your review, it is important to make sure that the process of reading is also preparing you for this. Getting the most from your reading involves developing your skills in being able to read actively and critically. When you are reading the existing literature, try to do the following:

- Take good notes, including details of the material you read. It is infuriating to find that you forgot to record the volume number of an article you read and that needs to be included in your Bibliography. This may necessitate a trip to the library on occasions when you are already hard pressed for time.
- Develop critical reading skills. In reviewing the literature you should do more than simply summarize what you have read, and should, whenever appropriate, be critical in your approach. It is worth developing these skills and recording relevant critical points in the course of taking notes. Developing a critical approach is not necessarily one of simply criticizing the work of others. It entails moving beyond mere description and asking questions about the significance of the work. It entails attending to such issues as: how does the item relate to others you have read? Are there any apparent strengths and deficiencies—perhaps in terms of methodology or in terms of the credibility of the conclusions drawn? What theoretical ideas have influenced the item?
- Use your review of the literature as a means of showing why your research questions are important. For example, if one of your arguments in arriving at your research questions is that, although a lot of research has been done on $X$ (a general topic or area, such as the psychological contract, female entrepreneurship, or employee absenteeism), little or no research has been done on $X_1$ (an aspect of $X$), the literature review is the point where you can justify this assertion. Alternatively, it might be that there are two competing positions with regard to $X_1$ and you are going to investigate which one provides a better understanding. In the literature review, you should outline the nature of the differences between the competing positions. The literature review, then, allows you to locate your own research within a tradition of research in an area. Indeed, reading the literature is itself often an important source of research questions.
- Bear in mind that you will want to return to much of the literature that you examine in the discussion of your findings and conclusion.
- Do not try to get everything you read into a literature review. Trying to force everything you have read into your review (because of all the hard work involved in uncovering and reading the material) is not going to help you. The literature review must assist you in developing an argument, and bringing in material of dubious relevance may undermine your ability to get your argument across.
- Bear in mind that reading the literature is not something that you should stop doing once you begin designing your research. You should continue your search for and reading of relevant literature more or less throughout your research. This means that, if you have written a literature review before beginning your data collection, you will need to regard it as provisional. Indeed, you may want to make quite substantial revisions of your review towards the end of writing up your work.
- Further useful thoughts about how to develop the literature can be found in Thinking deeply 4.1. The different ways of construing the literature that are presented in this box are derived from a review of qualitative studies of organizations, but the approaches identified have a much broader applicability, including to quantitative research.

## Systematic review

In recent years, considerable thought has been devoted to the notion of *systematic review* (see Key concept 4.2). This is an approach to reviewing the literature that adopts explicit procedures. An example of systematic review is given in Research in focus 4.3.

Systematic review has emerged as a focus of interest for two main reasons. First, it is sometimes suggested that many reviews of the literature tend to 'lack thoroughness' and reflects the biases of the researcher (e.g. Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart 2003). Proponents of systematic review suggest that adopting explicit procedures makes such biases less likely to arise. Second, as discussed in Chapter 1, in fields like medicine and latterly business, there has been a growing movement towards evidence-based solutions. Systematic reviews of the literature are seen as a cornerstone of evidence-based approaches. Their purpose is to provide advice for practitioners based on all the available evidence. Such reviews are deemed to be valuable for decision-makers, particularly in areas where there is conflicting evidence concerning the best way of doing things (as in the case of management and business).



## Thinking deeply 4.1
## Presenting literature in articles based on qualitative research on organizations

Further useful advice on relating your own work to the literature can be gleaned from an examination of the ways in which articles based on qualitative research on organizations are composed. In their examination of such articles, Golden-Biddle and Locke (1993, 1997) argue that good articles in this area develop a story—that is, a clear and compelling framework around which the writing is structured. This idea is very much in tune with Wolcott's (1990: 18) recommendation to 'determine the basic story you are going to tell'. Golden-Biddle and Locke's research suggests that the way the author's position in relation to the literature is presented is an important component of storytelling. They distinguish two processes in the ways that the literature is conveyed.

- Constructing intertextual coherence—refers to the way in which existing knowledge is represented and organized; the author shows how contributions to the literature relate to each other and the research reported. The techniques used are:
  - *Synthesized coherence*—puts together work that is generally considered unrelated; theory and research previously regarded as unconnected are pieced together. There are two prominent forms:
    1. the organization of very incompatible references (bits and pieces);
    2. connections forged between established theories or research programmes.
  - *Progressive coherence*—portrays the building-up of an area of knowledge around which there is considerable consensus.
  - *Non-coherence*—recognition that there have been many contributions to a certain research programme, but there is considerable disagreement among practitioners. Each of these strategies is designed to leave room for a contribution to be made.
- Problematizing the situation—the literature is then subverted by locating a problem. The following techniques were identified:
  - *Incomplete*—the existing literature is not fully complete; there is a gap.
  - *Inadequate*—the existing literature on the phenomenon of interest has overlooked ways of looking at it that can greatly improve our understanding of it; alternative perspectives or frameworks can then be introduced.
  - *Incommensurate*—argues for an alternative perspective that is superior to the literature as it stands; differs from 'inadequate problematization' because it portrays the existing literature as 'wrong, misguided, or incorrect' (Golden-Biddle and Locke 1997: 43).

The key point about Golden-Biddle and Locke's account of the way the literature is construed in this field is that it is used by writers to achieve a number of things:

- They can demonstrate their competence by referring to prominent writings in the field (Gilbert 1977).
- They develop their version of the literature in such a way as to show and to lead up to the contribution they will be making in the article.
- The gap or problem in the literature that is identified corresponds to the research questions.

The idea of writing up one's research as storytelling acts as a useful reminder that reviewing the literature, which is part of the story, should link seamlessly with the rest of the article and not be considered a separate element.

However, Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003) acknowledge that, unlike medical science, management and business research is a relatively young field that stems from the social, rather than the biological, sciences and is characterized by low consensus concerning key research questions. Also, medical science is often concerned with research questions to do with whether or not particular interventions (such as a medicine or a therapy) are effective. Such issues are well suited to systematic review, but are not often encountered in business and management research. So, can a review process developed in a discipline that is largely based on a quantitative research strategy inform the development of a more systematic literature review process in management research?

The main steps of the systematic review process are:

- *Specifying the question and planning the review*. The first step of the process involves specifying the research question, which must be clearly answerable. Denyer



## Telling it like it is
## Getting help from your supervisor at the literature review stage

Nirwanthi found that her supervisor was influential in helping her to identify an area of existing literature that helped her to better understand her research data. She explained: 'I got a lot of help from my supervisor. He actually found an important article for me that was very close to what I was studying. What was useful was that he had a whole list of references that I started reading. I picked a few—like ten to fifteen that I thought would be useful and started reading and then it just started to materialise, you know. It became specific.'

Angharad also found that she turned to her supervisor to advise her at the literature review stage. 'I had absolutely no idea where to start. It was all up in the air. Basically I was encouraged and I did do some reading around the subject, so I knew what the issues were. My supervisor recommended three or four books and told me, "These are central to what you're doing." He was very good. He just said, "If you want to do this topic, start with this and see what you think." So I read those and I could see what the issues were and what I was looking for.'

Angharad also went a step further than this by contacting the author of one of the studies that was key to her research project to ask for her advice. 'Just by chance I came across her email address on a search on Google and I emailed her and said, "I'm doing interviews tomorrow and I've read your book and it really helped me." Her book really helped me in getting an idea of how you go about doing research into these kinds of things. So I emailed her and told her what I was doing and she wrote back and said, "Ask what you want to know." So I did! [*laughs*].'

Although we do not recommend that you should rely on authors responding to emails of this nature from students doing a research project, or that you start sending off emails left, right, and centre to management academics across the world, Angharad's experience does show that the process of doing a research project can bring you closer to the community of researchers who have contributed to the literature on which you seek to build.



*To find out more about Nirwanthi's and Angharad's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



## Key concept 4.2
## What is a systematic review?

Systematic review has been defined as 'a replicable, scientific and transparent process, in other words a detailed technology, that aims to minimize bias through exhaustive literature searches of published and unpublished studies and by providing an audit trail of the reviewer's decisions, procedures and conclusions' (Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart 2003: 209). Such a review is often contrasted with traditional narrative review, which is the focus of the next section. Proponents of systematic review argue that it is more likely than the traditional review to generate unbiased and comprehensive accounts of the literature, especially in relation to fields where the aim is to understand whether a particular intervention has benefits. A systematic review that includes only quantitative studies is a **meta-analysis** (see Key concept 4.4). Very recently, the development of systematic review procedures for qualitative studies has attracted a great deal of attention, especially in the social sciences. Meta-ethnography (see Key concept 4.6) is one such approach to the synthesis of qualitative findings, but currently there are several methods, none of which is in widespread use (Mays, Pope, and Popay 2005).



## Research in focus 4.3
## A systematic review of networking and innovation

Pittaway et al. (2004) carried out a review on the role of business networking on innovative capacity of firms. The objectives of the review were:

1. to establish the nature of the relationship between networking and innovation;
2. to compare the degree/impact of networking behaviour in the UK with that in other competing countries;
3. to explore the literature on failure of business-to-business networks;
4. to generate insights that could inform policies aimed at fostering business-to-business networking;
5. to identify areas for future research.

The review team comprising the five authors of the paper started by identifying subject keywords based on their prior experience, which were then constructed into search strings such as

Network* AND Innovat*

An initial search on the database ABI/INFORM via Proquest was analysed in Procite, and this was used to generate further keywords and extend the search using six other search engines. The citations generated were reviewed according to inclusion and exclusion criteria defined by the team. An example of the inclusion criteria used is 'Working papers'—to ensure coverage of the most current research. An example of the exclusion criteria is 'Pre-1980'—because few contributions to networking theory were published before this date. The articles were then separated into three lists:

A articles of particular relevance with interesting empirical approaches;

B articles where there 'may have been some question' (2004: 139) over the value of the empirical work;

C articles of little relevance or predominantly conceptual.

Then the AIM Fellows (a group of academics who are appointed to the Advanced Institute of Management) were invited to comment on the A-list and add to it, and this list was then reviewed according to the pre-established quality criteria. Abstracts of the A-list articles were imported into NVivo and coded according to their content. Finally, the sections of the review were written to reflect the eleven subject themes identified.

One of the challenges faced by the researchers was related to the keywords used, since networking and innovation are inherently ambiguous terms that are used in a variety of subject disciplines from economic geography to sociology. A further challenge related to the sheer volume of papers that were identified as relevant—623 in total. The authors claim it was therefore very important to rank the papers according to relevance, so that an A-list of 179 papers could then be used as the primary basis for the review.

and Tranfield (2009) suggest that this involves looking at the relationship between variables and why, and in what circumstances, the relationship occurs. There are four elements to this: *Context* (what individuals/relationships/institutional settings/systems are being studied); *Intervention* (what effects, relating to events, actions, or activities are being studied); *Mechanisms* (what mechanisms explain the relationship between interventions and outcomes), and *Outcomes* (the intended and unintended effects of the intervention and how will they be measured). Denyer and Tranfield (2009: 682) give an example of a suitable question to illustrate: 'Under what conditions (C) does leadership style (I) influence the performance of project teams (O), and what mechanisms operate in the influence of leadership style (I) on project team performance?' Next, a group of stakeholders, including practitioners and researchers, meets at regular intervals, first to define and clarify the boundaries of the review and later to monitor its progress. This includes setting the

criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies from the review. 'This helps ensure that reviews are impartial and balanced, preventing reviewers from including only those studies supporting their particular argument' (Briner, Denyer, and Rousseau 2009: 26).

- *Conducting the review*. This involves carrying out 'a comprehensive, unbiased search' (Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart 2003: 215) based on keywords and search terms. The search strategy must be described in terms that allow it to be replicated and searches should include unpublished (for example, working or conference papers) as well as published articles. The information search leads to the production of a list of all the articles and books on which the review will be based. Once the items to be included in the review have been identified, the analysis begins. The aim of this is to achieve a cumulative understanding of what is known about the subject through applying techniques of research synthesis, which may include meta-analysis (see Key concept 4.4 and Research in focus 4.5) or meta-ethnography, which is one approach to the systematic review of qualitative studies (see Key concept 4.6).
- *Reporting and dissemination*. This involves reporting in a way that provides a descriptive map of the research on the subject, including who the contributors are, where they are based, and when the main temporal periods of research activity on the subject occurred. A further criterion for reporting is accessibility and readability. The review process should make it easier for the practitioner to understand the research, so that it is more likely that it will be translated into practice.

Tranfield, Denyer, and Smart (2003) suggest that the systematic review process provides a more reliable foundation on which to design research, because it is based on a more comprehensive understanding of what we know about a subject. Research that involves systematic literature review is argued to be more strongly evidence-based because it is concerned with seeking to understand the effects of a particular variable or intervention that has been found in previous studies. This is particularly useful in subjecting certain widely held assumptions about a subject to empirical scrutiny. For example, it is widely assumed that workplace stress produces ill-health effects in employees. Systematic review provides a way for the researcher who is interested in this subject to find out whether or not previous studies have found this to be the case. This can be helpful in encouraging researchers to think critically about their subject. Proponents of systematic review also commend the approach for its transparency; in other words, the grounds on which studies were selected and how they were analysed are clearly articulated and are potentially replicable.



## Key concept 4.4
## What is meta-analysis?

Meta-analysis involves summarizing the results of a large number of quantitative studies and conducting various analytical tests to show whether or not a particular variable has an effect. This provides a means whereby the results of large numbers of quantitative studies of a particular topic can be summarized and compared. The aim of this approach is to establish whether or not a particular variable has a certain effect by comparing the results of different studies. Meta-analysis thus involves pooling the results from various studies in order to estimate an overall effect by correcting the various sampling and non-sampling errors that may arise in relation to a particular study. In a sense, a meta-analysis lies between two kinds of activity covered in this book: doing a literature review of existing studies in an area in which you are interested (the focus of this chapter), and conducting a secondary analysis of other researchers' data (see the section on 'Other researchers' data' in Chapter 13). However, the technique relies on all the relevant information being available for each of the studies examined. Since not all the same information relating to methods of study and sample size is included in published papers, meta-analysis is not always feasible. One particular problem that meta-analysts face is known as the 'file drawer problem', whereby research that does not generate interesting publishable findings tends to be filed away and never sees the light of day. This tendency almost certainly creates a bias in meta-analytic reviews, since findings that fail to support a hypothesis or are equivocal in their implications may be less likely to be published.



## Research in focus 4.5
## A meta-analysis of the effectiveness of teamwork

A meta-analysis conducted by Gully et al. (2002) sought to test the proposition that team *efficacy*, a team's belief that it can successfully perform a particular task, and team *potency*, a team's general belief in its capabilities across tasks and contexts, are positively related to team performance. They also wanted to examine the impact of *interdependence* (defined as the task, goal, and outcome interconnections between team members) on this relationship. They hypothesized that team efficacy would be more strongly related to performance when interdependence within a team was high.

Studies were identified using computer and manual searches of management-related journals and abstracting and indexing databases. Gully and his colleagues also contacted researchers working in the field to find out about projects that they were currently involved with and they searched conference proceedings for relevant papers. Sixty-seven studies were identified as suitable for meta-analysis. Each was read and coded according to the size of the effect relating team efficacy or potency to performance and was rated for aspects of interdependence. The researchers explored the reliability of the measurement instruments that had been used and took the sample size into account in their analysis of the studies.

Results of the analysis indicated that team efficacy and potency are related positively to performance. In addition, although interdependence was found to moderate the relationship between team efficacy and performance, interdependence was not found to affect the relationship between team potency and performance. These findings led the authors to conclude that the characteristics of the task environment are an important influence on the relationship between team efficacy and performance. In particular, when there is a high degree of interdependence—that is, coordination, communication, and cooperation among team members—team efficacy is more strongly related to performance.



## Key concept 4.6
## What is meta-ethnography?

Meta-ethnography is a method that is used to achieve interpretative synthesis of qualitative research and other secondary sources, thus providing a counterpart to meta-analysis in quantitative research (Noblit and Hare 1988). It can be used to synthesize and analyse information about a phenomenon that has been extensively studied, such as transformational leadership (see Research in focus 4.7). However, this is where the similarity ends, because meta-ethnography 'refers not to developing overarching generalizations but, rather, translations of qualitative studies into one another' (1988: 25). Noblit and Hare base their approach on the idea developed by S. Turner (1980) that all social science explanation is comparative, involving the researcher in a process of translating existing studies into their own world view, and through this they create a reading of other people's readings about a subject. Meta-ethnography involves a series of seven phases that overlap and repeat as the synthesis progresses.

1. *Getting started*. This involves the researcher in identifying an intellectual interest that the qualitative research might inform by reading interpretative accounts.
2. *Deciding what is relevant to the initial interest*. Unlike positivists, interpretative researchers are not concerned with developing an exhaustive list of studies that might be included in the review. Instead the primary intent is to determine what accounts are likely to be credible and interesting to the intended audience for the synthesis.
3. *Reading the studies*. This involves the detailed, repeated reading of the studies, rather than moving to analysis of their characteristics.

4. *Determining how the studies are related*. This stage entails 'putting together' the various studies by determining the relationships between them and the metaphors used within them.
5. *Translating the studies into one another*. This phase is concerned with interpreting the meaning of studies in relation to each other: are they directly comparable or 'reciprocal' translations; do they stand in opposition to each other as 'refutational' translations; or do they, taken together, represent a line of argument that is neither 'reciprocal' nor 'refutational'?
6. *Synthesizing translations*. The researcher compares the different translations and shows how they relate to each other. This may involve grouping them into different types.
7. *Expressing the synthesis*. This involves translating the synthesis into a form that can be comprehended by the audience for which it is intended.

Crucial to understanding this approach is that the synthesis is primarily focused on the interpretations and explanations offered by studies that are included, rather than on the data that these studies are based on. Meta-ethnography thus translates the interpretations of one study into the interpretations of another one.



## Research in focus 4.7
## A meta-ethnography of leadership

Pielstick (1998) used open coding and the constant comparative technique to produce a profile of transformational leadership based on meta-ethnographic analysis. Pielstick used the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see Chapter 16 for a summary) for evaluating the quality of the research studies included in his review. He also evaluated the quality of items based on the utilization of the research, and whether or not the findings have value for practitioners. Pielstick concentrated on including sources specifically related to community college leadership. The content of each of the items selected for the review was then coded to identify concepts that reflected their content; up to twelve **code** words could be applied to each text segment. The constant comparative technique (Strauss and Corbin 1990) was then used to identify similarities and differences between items included in the review to ensure consistency and to generate convergence. This process enabled the identification of seven major themes, which together constituted a profile of transformational leadership. This review was published in a practitioner journal for community college leaders, who are interested in applying the concept of transformational leadership in their workplaces but have limited time to study and synthesize the available literature. Pielstick's article thus satisfies one of the main criteria of systematic review in that it makes the literature more accessible to practitioners.



## Tips and skills
## Using systematic review in a student research project

The systematic review approach does contain some elements that cannot easily be applied in a student research project because of limitations of time and resources. For example, you are unlikely to be able to assemble a panel of experts in methodology and theory to meet regularly with you and discuss the boundaries of the review. However, there are some aspects of the approach that can be applied to students' research. For example, meeting regularly with your supervisor during the planning stage of your literature review to define the boundaries of the subject and to come up with likely search terms is extremely useful. Your supervisor's knowledge of the subject can be invaluable at this stage, as some of the students we interviewed indicated.

However, one of the limitations of systematic review stems from situations where research questions are not capable of being defined in terms of the effect of a particular variable, or when the subject boundaries are more fluid and open or subject to change. Since, as we discussed in Chapter 1, business and management is an applied field of study that borrows theory from a range of social science and other disciplines, this is more common than it might first seem. Another criticism of the approach is that it can lead to a bureaucratization of the process of reviewing the literature because it is more concerned with the technical aspects of how it is done than with the analytical interpretations generated by it. A third potential limitation of the approach relates to its application to qualitative research studies and in particular the methodological judgements that inform decisions about quality that determine the inclusion or exclusion of an article from a literature review. These stem from differences between qualitative and quantitative research in relation to the criteria used to assess their methodological quality (see Chapters 6 and 16). The systematic review approach assumes that an objective judgement about the quality of an article can be made. Such judgements have the potential to be controversial for all research, but are likely to be especially so for ones based on qualitative research. Among quantitative researchers there is somewhat more agreement about the criteria that might be applied than among qualitative researchers, who have not achieved even a near consensus (see Chapter 16). The growth of interest in systematic review and of the inclusion of qualitative studies within such reviews has almost certainly added an increased focus on quality criteria among qualitative and mixed methods researchers (Bryman, Becker, and Sempik 2008).

It is interesting to note that this is something that many management researchers have spent a great deal of time and energy debating in relation to the practice of management, and they are by no means in agreement about it. Moreover, some researchers would say that they measure the quality of published research in terms of what they find interesting—this may or may not include empirical study, but such a view is not compatible with the systematic approach, which requires articles to be evaluated in terms of methodological criteria. In addition, researchers in the medical sciences have found the process of identifying relevant qualitative studies is quite time-consuming and cannot be done on the basis of the abstract or summary in the way that quantitative research studies can (M. L. Jones 2004). Finally, whether or not the systematic review approach makes sense to you depends somewhat on your epistemological position (see Chapter 1). As Noblit and Hare (1988: 15) state: 'Positivists have had more interest in knowledge synthesis than interpretivists. For them, knowledge accumulates. The problem has been how best to accomplish that accumulation.' For these reasons, researchers who adopt an interpretative approach to understanding the social sciences and use qualitative methods may find the systematic review approach more problematic. Similar concerns have been expressed by educational researchers about the suitability of systematic review in an area of study that is quite different from the medical field where it was developed (see Thinking deeply 4.9).

## Narrative review

Rather than reviewing the literature to find out what their research project can add to existing knowledge about a subject, interpretative researchers (see Chapter 1 for an explanation of interpretivism) can have quite different reasons for reviewing the literature on a particular subject, since their purpose is to enrich human discourse (Geertz 1973*a*) by generating understanding rather than by accumulating knowledge. The literature review is for them a means of gaining an initial impression of the topic area that they intend to understand through their research. Narrative reviews therefore tend to be less focused and more wide-ranging in scope than systematic reviews. They are also less explicit about the criteria for exclusion or inclusion of studies. An example of this type of review is given in Research in focus 4.8.

If your approach to the relationship between theory and research is inductive rather than deductive (see Chapter 1), setting out all the main theoretical and conceptual terms that define your area of study prior to data collection is extremely problematic, because theory is the outcome of the study, rather than the basis for it. Hence, in the process of researching a topic, researchers may discover issues that they did not previously anticipate as likely to be important to their area of study. As a result, they become aware of the limitations of the topic area that they originally intended to inform, and this can lead them towards an unanticipated understanding of it (Noblit and Hare 1988). Interpretative researchers are thus more likely than deductive researchers to change their view of the theory or literature as a result of the analysis of collected data, and so they require greater flexibility to modify the boundaries of their subject of study as they go along. This means that narrative review may be more suitable for qualitative researchers, whose research strategy is based on an interpretative epistemology, and systematic review should



## Research in focus 4.8
## A narrative review of narrative research

Rhodes and Brown (2005) conducted a review of the business and management literature on **narrative analysis** (see Chapter 22 for an explanation of narrative analysis). Their use of narrative review is consistent with the focus of their review, which was on a qualitative research method. They identify five principal research areas that narrative analysis has explored, assessing the theoretical value each has added:

1. *Sensemaking*—focuses on the role of stories as a device through which people make sense of organizational events.
2. *Communication*—explores how narratives are used to create and maintain organizational culture and power structure.
3. *Learning/change*—analyses how stories help people to learn and subjectively to make sense of change.
4. *Politics and power*—considers the role of shared narratives in the control of organizational meaning.
5. *Identity and identification*—focuses on the role of stories in creating and maintaining organizational identity.

While they do not make explicit their criteria for inclusion or exclusion of certain studies, the authors assess the main contributions, implications, and limitations of narrative analysis. They also cite a number of their own publications in this subject area. This helps to convince the reader of the credibility of the authors' evaluations of other people's research on the subject from the 1970s to 2004.



## Thinking deeply 4.9
## Debates about the role of systematic review in education research

Debates about the role of systematic review in education research are of potential relevance to business and management researchers because of the similarities shared between these two applied fields of study. Both education and management research draw on a range of social science disciplines, involve the study of practitioners, and are sometimes criticized for not focusing sufficiently on the concerns of practitioners and policy-makers. Evans and Benefield (2001) have argued that the medical model of systematic review can be adapted for application in education research. This would enable researchers to 'say something more precise and targeted' about the effectiveness of specific interventions, or in other words to provide evidence about 'what works' (2001: 538). Systematic reviews would thus help to make research evidence more usable.

However, Hammersley (2001) criticizes the assumption in systematic review about the superiority of the positivist model of research, which is expressed through the methodological criteria applied in evaluating the validity of studies (experiments being more highly valued), and through the explicit procedures used to produce reviews that are intended to be 'objective'. This 'takes little or no account of the considerable amount of criticism that has been made of that model since at least the middle of the twentieth century' (2001: 545). Moreover, Hammersley suggests that the dichotomy portrayed between rational rule-following, systematic review, and irrational-judgement, narrative review, is overstated, because even the simplest rule following involves an element of interpretation. He concludes:

> What all this means, I suggest, is that producing a review of the literature is a distinctive task in its own right. It is not a matter of 'synthesising data'; or, at least, there is no reason why we should assume that reviewing *must* take this form. Rather, it can involve judging the validity of the findings and conclusions of particular studies, and thinking about how these relate to one another, and how their interrelations can be used to illuminate the field under investigation. This will require the reviewer to draw on his or her tacit knowledge, derived from experience, and to *think* about the substantive and methodological issues, not just to apply replicable procedures. (2001: 549)

MacLure (2005) suggests that the recent prioritization of systematic review in education research is worrying because 'it is hostile to anything that cannot be seen, and therefore controlled, counted and quality assured' (2005: 409); it thus degrades the status of reading, writing, thinking, and interpreting as activities that are crucial to the development of analysis and argument. Although systematic review has so far not been as widely adopted in management research, the concerns expressed by education researchers are of potential relevance, particularly to qualitative researchers.

not be automatically accepted as a better way of dealing with the literature.

Most reviews are of the narrative kind, regardless of whether they are meant to be springboards for the reviewer's own investigation (for example, when the literature is reviewed as a means of specifying what is already known in connection with a research topic, so that research questions can be identified that the reviewer will then examine) or are ends in their own right (as a means of summarizing what is known in an area). When we examine some examples of writing up research in Chapter 27, we will see that the literature relevant to the researcher's area of interest is always reviewed as a means of establishing why the researcher conducted the research and what its contribution is likely to be. Such reviews are still mainly narrative reviews. However, the gap between systematic and narrative reviews is beginning to narrow, as sometimes some of the procedures associated with systematic reviews are incorporated into a narrative review (see Thinking deeply 4.9). For example, there is a growing tendency for researchers to spell out in some detail such things as procedures for conducting a literature search and the quality criteria that guided inclusion and exclusion (e.g. Bryman 2007*c*).



Tips and skills

## Reasons for writing a literature review

The following is a list of reasons for writing a literature review:

1. You need to know what is already known in connection with your research area because you do not want to be accused of reinventing the wheel.
2. You can learn from other researchers' mistakes and avoid making the same ones.
3. You can learn about different theoretical and methodological approaches to your research area.
4. It may help you to develop an analytic framework.
5. It may lead you to consider the inclusion of variables in your research that you might not otherwise have thought about.
6. It may suggest further research questions for you.
7. It will help with the interpretation of your findings.
8. It gives you some pegs on which to hang your findings.
9. It is expected!



# Searching the existing literature and looking for business information

Usually, students will have in mind a few initial references when they begin work on a project. These will probably come from recommended reading in course modules, or from textbooks. The bibliographies provided at the end of textbook chapters or articles will usually provide you with a raft of further relevant references that can also be followed up. A literature search relies on careful reading of books, journals, and reports in the first instance. Once you have identified a few keywords that help to define the boundaries of your chosen area of research (see below), electronic databases of published literature can be searched for previously published work in the field.

## Electronic databases

Online bibliographical databases accessible on the Internet are an invaluable source of journal references. An increasing number of these will also provide access to the full text of an article in electronic format—these are usually referred to as e-journals. You will need to check what electronic resources are available at your institution. A good place to start is on your university library's homepage or you can ask a member of library staff. Here are three resources that we would recommend:

1. ABI/INFORM provides business information from a wide range of periodicals and reports, coverage is international, and it is possible to search by keyword or to *browse by topic* to search for relevant articles by subject. The database can be accessed at the following address:
   ***proquest.com*** (accessed 17 December 2010)
2. EBSCO Business Source Premier/Complete is an increasingly widely used business periodical database that now rivals ABI/INFORM in scope and coverage. Its popularity is in part due to the provision of extremely comprehensive full text access to certain key business and management journals, including titles such as *Harvard Business Review* and *Academy of Management Review*, although older issues of journals are not all included. In addition, it provides indexing and abstracts for over 3,000 business journals. In addition, it provides access to some company and market reports. It can be accessed via EBSCO Publishing at:
   ***epnet.com*** (accessed 17 December 2010)
3. We also recommend use of the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), which fully indexes over 1,700 major social science journals covering all social science disciplines dating back to 1970. It can be accessed from the ISI Web of Knowledge (home page at the following address:
   ***isiwebofknowledge.com*** (accessed 17 December 2010)

   The Citation indexes collectively are also known as Web of Science.



### Tips and skills
### Using email alerts

One way of expanding your literature search is through email alerts. These supply you with an email when an issue of a journal that you are interested in is published. You can also be sent email alerts when articles with certain keywords or written by certain authors is published. One of the main ways of setting up email alerts is through Zetoc, via the British Library. You will need to sign in with a username and password. An Athens library security system username and password will usually achieve this. To find Zetoc, go to:
***zetoc.mimas.ac.uk*** (accessed 17 December 2010)

The SSCI database is a little less easy to use than the others. However, it does provide references and abstracts, and some libraries add full-text links for articles from some 120 of the most important business and management journals published worldwide. The database also covers related fields such as accountancy and finance, economics and public administration. It is, therefore, very useful as an initial source in your literature search because, if you search the database effectively, you can be relatively confident that you have covered the majority of recent academic journals that may have published articles on your topic of interest. Here are some introductory guidelines for searching SSCI:

- Click on GO beside Web of Science;
- Choose Social Science Citation Index by unticking the Science and Arts sections;
- Click on GENERAL SEARCH. Note that the default is to search 1970 to date. You can change this by using the pull-down menus;
- You can then search by TOPIC or by AUTHOR.

A feature of SSCI is its complete coverage of journal contents, so in addition to research and scholarly articles it also contains book reviews and editorial material, which invariably can be identified through keyword searches. You will need to experiment with the use of keywords, because this is usually the way in which databases like these are searched, though author searches are also possible. Finally, a feature that is often useful is the 'Times cited' link. If you find an article that is relevant to your dissertation, then you can click to see which other articles have cited it. This does two things: first it allows you to see how an article has been used in more recent

research, and in particular whether it has been challenged; second, it also gives an impression of whether the article and the ideas in it have been developed with new data. For example, by August 2010, Alan's paper published in 1999 in the journal Sociological Review on the Disneyization of society had been cited by twenty-nine other authors in papers about related subjects, such as emotional labour and retailing.

You can also use the CITED REF SEARCH to search for articles that cite an article you know about already. This can help you find other related research and also see what other authors thought of your original article. This is particularly useful if your article is a few years old.

Since the mid-2000s some academic publishers have begun to offer their journals for full text through their own websites; Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Journals Online) and Sage (HighWire) are the two most prominent examples. Again, you will need to check with your librarian to find out which of these resources you can use and how to access them. The INGENTA website offers full text from various publishers, but you will be able to access full text only to titles to which your library subscribes. In addition to scholarly books and journals, newspaper archives can provide a valuable supplementary resource through which to review the emergence of new topics in business and management. Most newspapers require subscription to be able to search their online databases (e.g. *Financial Times*, *Daily* and *Sunday Telegraph*, *The Economist*). However, most academic libraries will have a subscription to some individual newspapers or to a service such as Proquest or Nexis UK, which allow you to search several newspapers at once; you may need a password to access them. Newspapers and periodicals can be a rich source of information about certain topics that make good stories for journalists, such as financial scandals, discrimination, or trade union disputes. The level of analysis can also be high; however, for an academic dissertation they should always be seen as secondary to published literature in books and journals. Also, it should be remembered that it takes some time for academic articles to be published, so for recent events, newspapers can be the only source of information.



## Telling it like it is
## Using newspapers and the Internet to get information on a current management topic

In addition to using academic books and journal sources, Chris found that newspaper databases provided a valuable source of information on the subject of diversity and in the debate about women in management and the 'glass ceiling' effect. The Equal Opportunities Commission website was also a useful source. He observed: 'I picked a relatively hot topic in the management field. It was interesting to learn that it isn't just the most obvious places that you do research. It's typing something into Google and looking in the newspaper daily. The *Independent* regularly had articles on this subject and so did the *Guardian*, so it wasn't just, you know, academic views that I was using.'

However, it is important not to regard these sources of information as a substitute for academic research, which should provide the basis of your literature review. It is also important to remember that fashionable topics in management research will almost certainly have connections with former managerial practices. Therefore, an established theory can provide an invaluable means of understanding what is currently happening in the managerial context.



*To find out more about Chris's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

Another valuable resource to supplement your literature searching is provided by the various non-academic institutions that publish policy-oriented research on issues related to business and management, such as the Equal Opportunities Commission, Work Foundation, World Bank, Institute for Public Policy Research, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, and Demos. Reports are often published via the Web in PDF and they can usually

be downloaded free, thereby providing a faster route to publication than more academic routes. This is particularly useful when researching a currently emerging topic in management and business, or a government-led initiative, such as Investors in People or Public Private Partnerships.

A word of warning about using Google and other search engines for research. Internet search engines are very useful for researching all sorts of things. However, they merely find sites, they do not evaluate them, so be prepared to look critically at what you've found. Remember that anyone can put information on the Web, so when looking at websites you need to evaluate whether the information you have found is useful. The following points are worth considering:

- Who is the author of the site and what is his or her motive for publishing?
- Where is the site located? The URL can help you here. Is it an academic site (.ac) or a government site (.gov), a non-commercial organization (.org) or a commercial one (.com or .co)?
- How recently was the site updated? Many sites will give you a last updated date, but you can get clues as to whether a page is being well maintained by whether or not the links are up to date and by its general appearance.

Try to confine your literature search to reliable websites, such as those mentioned in this chapter.



## Telling it like it is
## Different strategies for dealing with business and management information

From our experience as supervisors, it is clear that students develop different strategies for looking for business and management information. Some prefer to organize articles and books according to specific themes or topics, while others choose to focus on understanding the paradigm (see Chapter 1) adopted by the authors. The accounts of Nirwanthi, Tore, and Angharad are illustrative of the diverse nature of these strategies. Many students also feel that by the time they reach this stage of their degree studies they are confident of their ability to look for information, precisely because this is what a great deal of their learning has required them to do.

Nirwanthi: 'First of all I just wanted to know what past authors had written about this subject so that I had something to compare and contrast my own data with. Then I just read through the references and I selected about 15 to 20 of the topics that I thought would be relevant. I started grouping the journal articles and the textbook bits that I had under headings, making it more concise, I guess, and focusing on whichever I thought was relevant to my own data. To start off with I didn't think I was going to find so much literature on this particular research topic that I was studying, but there was so much! There was some that I didn't agree with and some that I did agree with, so I had a lot to work on.'

Tore: 'My supervisor gave me a stack of articles, so that was kind of the beginning. Then I went about cross-referencing the articles that he gave me. Then' when an article mentioned something that I found was interesting, I would look up that reference and find the article. Because most of the research in this field is published in articles, they were easy to find online. So it was very easy to get a broad literature review.'

Angharad: 'You've been to the library so you know where to get everything. A lot of it was just going to the library and I found the section and just pulled out books and had a look what was in them really. I tended to look to textbooks and things for the main arguments, ideas in the field, and then draw upon articles and journals to perhaps back that up and support what I'd already got.'



*To find out more about these students' research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

The catalogue of your own institution is an obvious route to finding books, but so too are the catalogues of other universities. COPAC contains the holdings of twenty-seven of the largest university research libraries plus the British Library. It can be found at:
***copac.ac.uk*** (accessed 17 December 2010)

You may also need to find out background information about the markets or companies in which you are interested. There are numerous database sources that can provide you with this kind of company and market research data, including the **General Market Information Database** (GMID), which contains marketing profiles, consumer market sizing for 52 countries, consumer lifestyle reports, data for over 200 countries, market forecasts to 2012, and information about 100,000 brands and 12,000 companies. **Mintel** provides comprehensive market research reports on the UK retail and leisure sectors, and conducts its own market research, and **Reuters Business Insight** provides access to hundreds of market research reports focused on energy, consumer goods, finance, health care, and technology. Depending on the library you belong to, you might also be able to access **Datastream**, **Amadeus**, or **Investext**, all of which contain company-specific information. Others such as **Creative Club** are more subject specific; it provides an archive of adverts in all media from 1997 on.

Again, you will need to check with your library to find out which of these is available to you.

Finally, the National Statistics website offers a wide range of statistics about the UK, including Social Trends, Regional Trends, Consumer Trends, and the results of the General Household Survey:
***www.statistics.gov.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

European statistics relating to specific countries, industries, and sectors can be found on Europa, the portal to the European Union website:
***europa.eu*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Both sites are freely available.



## Tips and skills
## Using information on the Web

The Internet provides an enormous and richly varied source of freely available information about business and management that can be quickly and easily accessed without the need for university agreements to gain access to it. However, there is a difficulty in relying on this, because the strength of the Internet in providing access to huge amounts of information is also its weakness, in that it can be very difficult to differentiate what is useful and reliable from that which is too simplistic, too commercially oriented, too highly opinionated, or just not sufficiently academic. The worst thing that can happen is that you end up quoting from sources from the Web that are quite simply misleading and incorrect. Therefore, it is important to be selective in your use of information on the Internet and to build up a list of favourite websites that you can check regularly for information. One useful source is Intute:
***www.intute.ac.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

which selects and evaluates websites, as well as providing tutorials on using them. Here is a list of some sites you might want to try and also a few to be wary of, compiled with the help of some of our students:

*Concepts and definitions*
The following sites were recommended for providing clear and easily understood definitions of important business and management concepts, and basic explanations of theories:
***answers.com*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
***en.wikipedia.org*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
***management.about.com*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

*Scholarly articles and business and management research*
Google has a really useful product called 'Google Scholar', which can be accessed from the Google homepage. This product provides a simple way to broadly search for academic literature. Searches are focused on peer-reviewed papers, theses, books, abstracts and articles, from academic publishers, professional societies, preprint repositories, universities, and other scholarly organizations. Google Scholar also enables you to see how often an item has been cited by other people; this can be very useful in assessing the importance of an idea or a particular scholarly writer:
***scholar.google.com*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Also worth exploring, especially for information about current research, are sites that support the development of management research, such as the Advanced Institute of Management, Academy of Management, and British Academy of Management:
***www.aimresearch.org*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
***www.aomonline.org*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
***www.bam.ac.uk/*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

*Case studies and current affairs*
For case study analyses and keeping up to date on current business issues, our students recommended the BBC News website for being reasonably well balanced and quite analytical:
***www.bbc.co.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Also useful for business-related articles and company and industry profiles is the news magazine *The Economist*. However, full access is reliant upon having a print subscription:
***economist.com*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Finally, *The Times 100 Case Studies* provides case studies and materials on well-known organizations; however, it should be noted that some of the theoretical material on this site is not of appropriate level for university study and is rather uncritical:
***thetimes100.co.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

*Sites for managers*
Information can also be found about business topics on sites aimed primarily at practitioners rather than researchers, but be aware that the information contained there will reflect an orientation towards practice rather than research. Our students found the following useful:
***www.cipd.co.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
***www.entrepreneur.com*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
***www.venturemagazine.co.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

*Sites to treat cautiously*
Our students also listed some sites that contain material not suitable for academic study, either because the theories were too simplistically presented or because the information was incorrect:
***thinkingmanagers.com*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
***www.businessballs.com/*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Their main message was to emphasize the importance of looking through each website thoroughly and ensuring that the information was relevant to their studies. They also found that many websites provided only a small amount of what they were looking for and the rest of the information was irrelevant.

(Thanks to Queen Mary students: Matthew Winwood, Shiblu Mahmadul Hassan Ali, and Darren O'Sullivan for their help in compiling this list.)

## Keywords and defining search parameters

For all of these online databases, you will need to work out some suitable keywords that can be entered into the search engines and that will allow you to identify suitable references. There are a number of business dictionaries that can help you to define your area of research and to identify changes in the language used to describe the subject. For example, the term 'personnel management' has now been largely superseded by 'HRM', and 'payment systems' are now more widely referred to under the umbrella of 'reward management'. You will also need to think of synonyms and try to match your language to that of the source you are searching. For example, performance management may be more usually referred to in practitioner publications as 'employee evaluation' or 'appraisal'. Sometimes opposites are useful—for example, employment/unemployment. You also need to think about alternative spellings—for example, organization/organisation, labor/labour. Be prepared to experiment and to amend your keywords as your research progresses—

you may find that, as you search the literature, there are other ways of describing your subject.

In most databases, typing in the title of your project, or a sentence or long phrase, as your search term is not advisable as, unless someone has written something with the same title, you are unlikely to find very much. You need to think in terms of keywords. For example, if you are interested in 'the role of women in the management of banks' your keywords would be WOMEN and MANAG* and BANK*. This would mean that you captured articles containing the words manag*er*, manag*ers*, manag*ing*, and manag*ement*, as well as bank*ing*, banks, and bank*ers*, because the asterisk acts as a wild card that searches for all words that begin in this way.

Use the HELP provided in the databases themselves to find out how to use your keywords to best effect.



## Telling it like it is
## The importance of identifying suitable keywords

Karen's experience of literature searching highlights the importance of identifying the most accurate term to describe the subject in which you are interested. 'I went to Leeds University Library then and asked them, but it was just such a small area that not many people knew anything about it and so it was just a case really of going onto databases and searching on different words and seeing if that brought anything up. I was searching on "cultural fit" and that didn't work. There was nothing. Nobody had written anything on the term "cultural fit", but then I tried "organisational fit" and that was when it opened up and there were lots of things; and then once I had one, I had lots of other references and that was how it sort of snowballed.'

Karen's metaphor of the snowball is striking here. Literature reviews frequently begin in this way—namely, by beginning with a small number of references, following up citations within those, and continuing the process until a sizeable number of items has been accumulated.



*To find out more about Karen's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

In some areas of research, there are very many references. Try to identify the major ones and work outwards from there. Move on to the next stage of your research at the point that you identified in your timetable (see Chapter 3), so that you can dig yourself out of the library. This is not to say that your search for the literature will cease, but that you need to force yourself to move on. Seek out your supervisor's advice on whether or not you need to search the literature much more. Figure 4.1 outlines one way of searching the literature. The most important thing to remember, as the note at the end says, is to keep a record of the process so that you can keep track of what you have done.



## Telling it like it is
## Learning from others

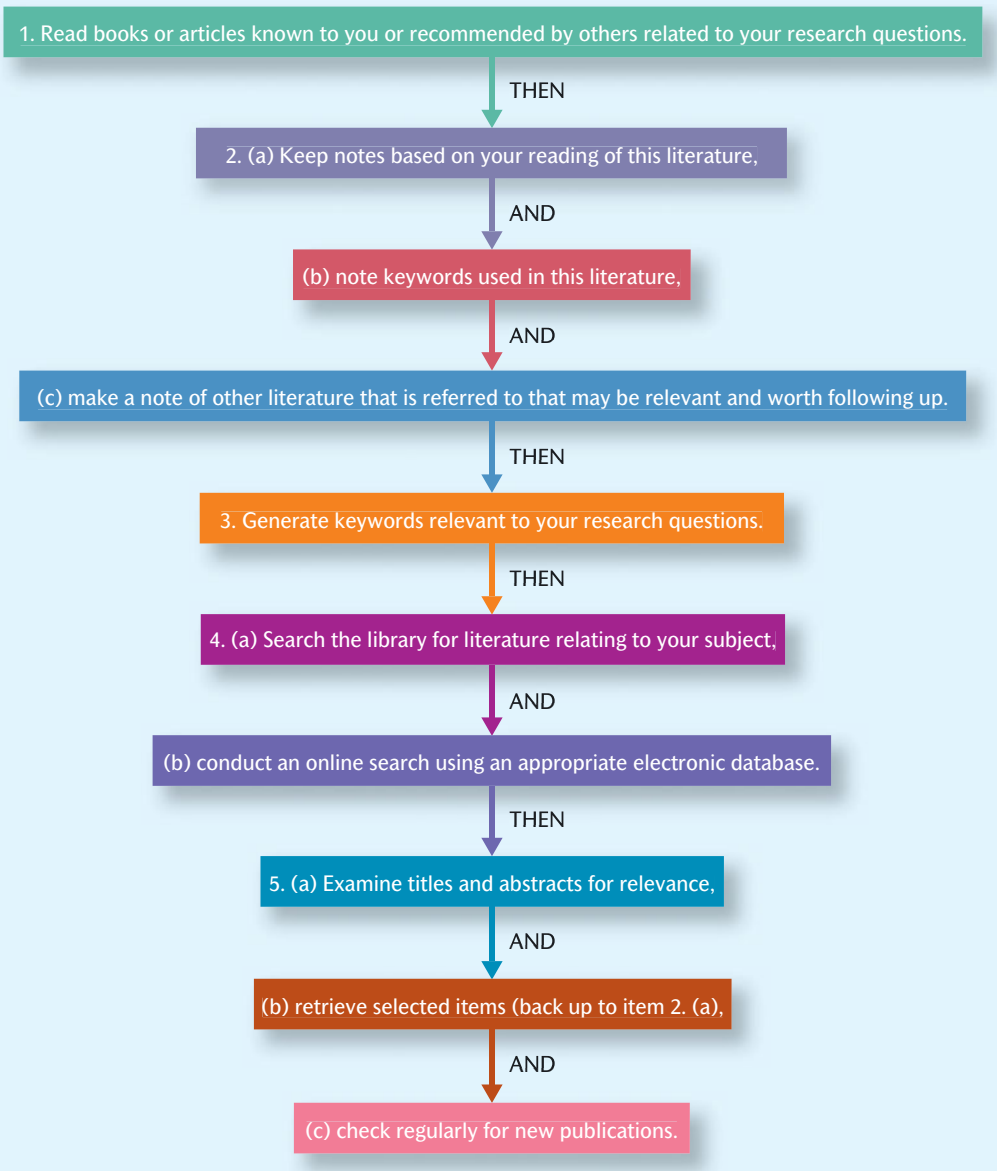
Lisa found that other students on her degree course provided a valuable source of support in addition to the feedback she gained from her supervisor. Her advice to others was to communicate 'with other people on your degree that are doing dissertations, find out how they're doing it, what their stance is, perhaps people that are doing similar subjects to you'. Lisa discussed her ideas with another student who was also doing a research project in the field of human resource management that related to the same subject as her project, looking at performance management. By talking about what literature they had read, they were able to point each other towards articles and books they had each found interesting or useful, and in this way to make the process of reviewing the literature easier.



*To find out more about Lisa's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

# Figure 4.1

## One way of searching the literature




*Note: At each stage, keep a record of what you have done and your reasons for certain decisions. This will be useful to you for remembering how you proceeded and for writing up a description and justification of your literature search strategy, which can form part of your methods section. When making notes on literature that you read, make notes on content and method, as well as relevance, and keep thinking about how each item will contribute to your critical review of the literature.*



## Tips and skills

## Using industrial classification codes to search an electronic database

When you are searching for literature related to a particular service or industry, it can be useful to refine your search strategy by using the appropriate code for the sector from an industrial classification system such as SIC or NAICS (see Tips and skills 'A guide to industry classification systems' (Chapter 7)). Ojala (2005: 43) claims that few business people know how to do this. Instead they just tend to 'put the words that describe their industry into a Web search engine and that's it. If they're researching the shoe industry, they don't think to add in the word footwear, let alone the particular type of shoe they want to know about, such as sandals, baby, or boots. It would not occur to them to look up the industry code for shoes (314).' This is particularly useful when using search engines such as Business Source Premier run by the EBSCO host, which indexes journal content using the NAICS and SIC systems. By typing the relevant code into your search string, you can obtain articles that relate to the particular service or sector that you are interested in.



# Referencing your work

Referencing the work of others is an important academic convention because it emphasizes that you are aware of the historical development of your subject, particularly if you use the Harvard method, and shows that you recognize that your own research builds on the work of others. Referencing in your literature review is thus a way of emphasizing your understanding and knowledge of the subject. In other parts of your dissertation referencing will serve somewhat different purposes. For example, it will show your understanding of methodological considerations or help to reinforce your argument. A reference is also sometimes described as a citation and the act of referencing as citing.

As we mentioned earlier on in this chapter, a key skill in writing your literature review is to keep a record of what you have read, including all the bibliographic details about the articles or books that will go into your bibliography or references. For larger research projects it can be useful to use note cards or software packages that are designed specifically for this purpose, such as Procite or Endnote. However, for a student research project it will probably be sufficient to keep an electronic record of all the items that you have read in a Word document, although you should bear in mind that you may not include all of these in your final bibliography. The main thing to make sure of is that you keep your bibliographic records up to date and do not leave this until the very end of the writing-up process, when you will probably be under significant time pressure.

Your institution will probably have its own guidelines as to which style of referencing you should use in your dissertation, and if it does you should definitely follow them. However, the two main methods used are:

- ***Harvard.*** The essence of this system is that whenever you paraphrase the argument or ideas of an author or authors in your writing, you add in parentheses immediately afterwards the surname of the author(s) and the year of publication. If you are quoting the author(s), you put quotation marks around the quotation and after the year of publication you include the page number where the quotation is from. All books, articles, and other sources that you have cited in the text are then provided in full in a reference list at the end of the dissertation in alphabetical order by author surname. This is by far the most common referencing system in business and management research and the one that we follow in this book. It is, therefore, the style that we would encourage you to use if your university does not require you to follow its own guidelines.
- ***Note or numeric.*** This approach involves the use of superscript numbers in the text that refer to a note at the foot of the page or the end of the text, where the reference is given in full, together with the page number if it is a direct quotation. If a source is cited more than once, an abbreviated version of the reference is given in any subsequent citation (which is why this is often

called the short-title system). As well as being used to refer to sources, notes are often used to provide additional detail, including comments from the writer about the source being cited. This is a particular feature of historical writing. One of the advantages of the numeric or note method is that it can be less distracting to the reader in terms of the flow of the text than the Harvard method, where sometimes particularly long strings of references can make a sentence or a paragraph difficult for the reader to follow. Furthermore, software packages like Word make the insertion of notes relatively simple, and many students find that this is a convenient way of referencing their work. However, when students use this method, they often use it incorrectly—it is quite difficult to use it well—and are sometimes unsure whether or not also to include a separate bibliography. For books and dissertations a bibliography is always recommended, and indeed this can be important in the assessment of students' work (see the section on avoiding plagiarism at the end of this chapter).



## Tips and skills
## The Harvard and note approaches to referencing

The examples below show some fictitious examples of referencing in published work. Note that in published articles there is usually a list of references at the end; books using the Harvard system usually have a list of references, whereas a bibliography is used with the short-title system of notes. The punctuation of references—such as where to place a comma, whether to capitalize a title in full or just the first word—varies considerably from source to source. For example, with Harvard referencing, in some books and journals the surname of the author is separated from the date in the text with a comma—for example (Name, 1999)—but in others, like this book, there is no comma. However, the main thing is to be consistent. Select a format for punctuating your references, such as the one adopted by a leading journal in your subject area, and then stick to it.

*An example of a Harvard reference to a book*
In the text:
As Name and Other (1999) argue, motivation is a broad concept that comprises a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors . . .
. . . and in the list of references:
Name, A., and Other, S. (1999). *Title of Book in Italics: Throughout*. Place of Publication: Publisher.

*An example of a Harvard reference with a direct quotation from a book*
In the text:
However, the importance of intrinsic factors often tends to be overlooked since 'studies of motivation have tended predominantly to focus on the influence of extrinsic factors' (Name and Other 1999: 123).
. . . and in the list of references:
Name, A., and Other, S. (1999). *Title of Book in Italics: Throughout*. Place of Publication: Publisher.

*An example of a Harvard reference to a journal article*
In the text:
Research by Name (2003) has drawn attention to the importance of intrinsic factors in determining employee motivation.
. . . and in the list of references:
Name, A. (2003). 'Title of Journal Article', *Journal Title*, 28(4): 109–38.

Refers to volume (issue) numbers

*An example of a Harvard reference to a chapter in an edited book*
In the text:
As Name (2001) suggests, individual motivation to work is affected by a range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors . . .
. . . and in the list of references:
Name, A. (2001). 'Title of Book Chapter', in S. Other (ed.), *Title of Book in Italics*. Place of Publication: Publisher, pp. 124–56.

Abbreviation for 'Editor'

*An example of a secondary reference using the Harvard Method*
In the text:
Individual motivation to work is affected by a range of intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Name 1993, cited in Other 2004).
. . . and in the list of references:
Name, A. (1993). *Title of Book in Italics*. Place of Publication: Publisher, cited in S. Other (2004). *Title of Textbook in Italics*. Place of Publication: Publisher.

*An example of a Harvard reference to an Internet site*
In the text:
BP claims to be committed to the safety and development of communities and societies in which the company operates. The company aims for 'no accidents, no harm to people and no damage to the environment' (BP 2010).
. . . and in the list of references:
BP (2010). 'Our Values, ***www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=9032622&contentId=7059874*** (accessed 14 June 2010).
Note: it is very important to give the date accessed, as some websites change frequently (or even disappear!).

*An example of a note reference to a book*
In the text:
On the other hand, research by Name[3] has drawn attention to the influence of intrinsic factors on employee motivation . . .
. . . and the corresponding note should read:
[3] A. Name, *Title of Book in Italics: Throughout*, Place of Publication, Publisher, 2000, 170–7.

*An example of a note reference to an Internet site*
In the text:
BP claims to be committed to the safety and development of communities and societies in which the company operates. The company aims for 'no accidents, no harm to people and no damage to the environment'.[39]
. . . and the corresponding note should read:
[39] BP, 'Our Values', ***www.bp.com/sectiongenericarticle.do?categoryId=9032622&contentId=7059874*** (accessed 14 June 2010).



## Tips and skills
## Using bibliographic software

ProCite, EndNote, and Reference Manager are three of the leading Windows-based software tools used for publishing and managing bibliographies. Your university may have a site licence for one of these packages. They are used by academic researchers, information specialists, and students to create bibliographic records equivalent to the manual form of index cards, which allow you to compile your own personal reference database. These records can then be automatically formatted to suit different requirements—for example, to comply with the referencing requirements of a particular scholarly journal. A further advantage to the software is that it can enable you to export references directly from databases such as the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). The software also has search options that help you to locate a particular reference, although the extent of these features varies from one package to another.

In the long run, this can save you time and effort, and reduce the possibility of errors. However, for a student research project it may not be worthwhile for you to take the time to learn how to use this software if it is only to be used for the dissertation. On the other hand, if knowledge of the software may be useful to you in the longer term, for example, if you are thinking of going on to pursue an academic career by doing a Ph.D., or if you are intending to work in a field where research skills are valued, then it may be worth learning how to use the

software. More details about these products can be found on the following websites, and a short guide to using Endnote is provided in the following section:
***www.procite.com*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
***www.endnote.com*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
***www.refman.com*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

However, if you do not have access to one of these packages, similar software is often freely available and can be downloaded from the Internet. EndNote Web is available free to students of institutions subscribing to ISI Web of Knowledge:
***www.endnoteweb.com*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

There is also BiblioExpress, a simplified version of the package Biblioscape. This package offers the main features associated with bibliographic referencing software and provides extensive user support from its website, which includes a free downloadable user manual. BiblioExpress enables you to do most of the main things that would be needed for a student research project and does not require very much computing memory, so it can even be run from a floppy disk. For more details go to:
***www.biblioscape.com/biblioexpress.htm*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Finally, Microsoft Office Word 2007 contains a reference management function that enables you to manage your sources and format reference style according to the most commonly used conventions.



## Research in focus 4.10
## A direct quotation that has been referenced for more than fifteen years

The importance of referencing and the role it plays in communicating ideas between a group of scholars is aptly illustrated by an example concerning the debate between academics in US and UK business schools about the role of management education. The now infamous quotation is from an article written by Harold Leavitt of Stanford University in the USA and published in a 1989 issue of the *California Management Review*, where he stated:

> While we teach many of the right things in our MBA programs, we don't teach some critical things we ought to teach. The major reason we don't is because if we teach those untaught things it will become more difficult to teach and to justify what we already teach. So, we have built a weird, almost unimaginable design for MBA-level education. We then lay it upon well-proportioned young men and women, distorting them (when we are unlucky enough to succeed) into critters with lopsided brains, icy hearts, and shrunken souls. (Leavitt 1989: 39)

The highly emotive and evocative tone of Leavitt's pronouncement meant that it has often been quoted, and sometimes misquoted, by other authors over the years. Moreover, progressive summarizing of the quotation means that the original context setting involved in Leavitt's argument is sometimes lost and only the pithy phrase remains. For example, in his 1996 book *The Collapse of the American Management Mystique*, R. Locke references a 1991 issue of *The Economist* as the source for his direct quotation about 'critters with lopsided brains, icy hearts, and shrunken souls' (p. 53). However, he makes no reference to the original author to whom the quotation is attributed, so this is an example of rather sloppy secondary referencing. In the article in *The Economist*, an abbreviated version of the quotation is attributed to Leavitt, who it is said was 'writing over a decade ago'. No original source is cited (although we would not really expect it to be, since *The Economist* is more journalistic than academic and so is less rigorous about referencing).

In 2002, an abbreviated version of the quotation pops up again, this time in an influential article in *Academy of Management Learning and Education* by Pfeffer and Fong, who cite Leavitt's (1989) article as the original source. After this, use of Leavitt's quotation mushrooms. A Google search on 'icy hearts and shrunken souls' produces 39 hits, all related to this particular use of the phrase, from sources as diverse as the Portland State University Magazine, Warwick Business School, The European Foundation for Management Development, and The UK Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership. In an article prompted by Pfeffer and Fong's (2002) piece, Tinker (2004) cites a version of Leavitt's quotation (although the page number for it is wrong), and so do Starkey, Hatchuel, and Tempest (2004) in an article in *Journal of Management Studies*.

The use of Leavitt's words over a time span of over fifteen years is interesting, because it illustrates how referencing allows the words of one author to continue to be invoked, appropriated, and interpreted long after their original usage. However, it is also interesting that Leavitt's phrase has come to be associated with the writers who quoted it,—i.e. Pfeffer and Fong (2002)—as well as the original author. Moreover, the example illustrates how the reputation of authors who use a powerful phrase is in part derived from the reputation of the scholar whom they reference. This is because one of the ways that academics evaluate each other's work is through judgements they make about the quality of the work that the author is citing. Perhaps the 'icy hearts and shrunken souls' quotation would not have been so widely used over the years and broadly accepted had it not been written by a well-known Stanford professor.

## The role of the bibliography

What makes a good bibliography? You might initially think that length is a good measure, since a longer bibliography containing more references might imply that the author has been comprehensive in his or her search of the existing literature. This is undoubtedly true, but only up to a point, since it is also important for the bibliography to be selectively focused—that is, not to try to include everything that has ever been written about a subject but instead to reflect the author's informed judgement of the importance and suitability of sources. This incorporates some of the judgements about quality that were discussed earlier in this chapter. One common proxy for quality is the reputation of the journal in which an article is published. However, although this is a useful indicator, we recommend that it is not one you should rely on exclusively, since there might be articles in lesser-status journals, for instance, those targeted at practitioners, that have relevance to your subject, but it is important to be aware of these judgements of quality and to seek the advice of your supervisor when making them. Another important feature of a good bibliography relates to secondary referencing. This is when you refer to an article or book that has been cited in another source such as a textbook and you do not, or cannot, access the original article or book from which it was taken. However, relying heavily on secondary references can be problematic because you are dependent upon the interpretation of the original text that is offered by the authors of the secondary text. This may be adequate for some parts of your literature review but it is a bit like the game Chinese Whispers, in that there is always the potential for different interpretations of the original text, and this increases the further removed you are from the original source. So it is a good idea to be cautious in the use of secondary references and to go back to the original source if you can, particularly if the reference is an important one for your subject. Research in focus 4.10 gives an example of how an author's work can be referenced in ways that involve reinterpretation and misquotation long after the date of publication. A further feature of a good reference list stems from the relationship between the entries and the way they are used in the main body of the text. It should go without saying that it is not very helpful to include references in the bibliography that are not even mentioned in the text. If references are integrated into the text in a way that shows that you have read them in detail and understood the theoretical perspective from which they are written, this is much more impressive than if a reference is inserted into the text in a way that does not closely relate to what is being said in the text. Finally, Barnett (1994) argues that a good bibliography gives no indication of the quality of a piece of work, pointing out that some of the most influential academic books ever written do not even include one. Drawing on the ideas of Bourdieu (1984), he suggests that the main purpose of the bibliography is to enable you to understand the habitus that the author is claiming to reside in, this being about understanding the beliefs and dispositions of the author combined with the constraints associated with his or her situation.



Tips and skills

## Helping your supervisor to understand your literature review

If you are planning to give a first draft of your literature review to your supervisor for him or her to comment on, make sure that you include your list of references in this version. Otherwise your supervisor will not know what literature you have used to compile the review, and this will make it harder for him or her to comment meaningfully on the quality of your work.



# Avoiding plagiarism

An issue to bear in mind when writing up your literature review is the need to avoid plagiarizing the work that you are reading. Plagiarism is a notoriously slippery concept. It is defined in *The Oxford Dictionary of English* (2nd edn, 2003: 1344) as 'the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own'. The Wikipedia definition refers to plagiarism as 'the passing off of another's work as if it were one's own, by claiming credit for something that was actually done by someone else' (consulted 27 July 2006). The same source refers to it as a 'serious and punishable academic offense'. Plagiarism does not just relate to the literature you read in the course of preparing an essay or report. Taking material in a wholesale and unattributed way from sources like essays written by others or from websites is also a context within which plagiarism can occur. Further, it is possible to self-plagiarize, as when a person lifts material that he or she has previously written and passes it off as original work. Plagiarism is commonly regarded as a form of academic cheating and as such differs little if at all in the minds of many academics from other academic misdemeanours such as fabricating research findings.

There is a widespread view that plagiarism among students is increasing in incidence, though whether this is in fact the case is difficult to establish unambiguously. Indeed, it is difficult to establish how widespread plagiarism is, and there are quite substantial variations in estimates of its prevalence. It is widely viewed that the Internet is one of the main—if not the main—motor behind the perceived increase in the prevalence of plagiarism. The ease with which text can be copied from websites, e-journal articles, e-books, online essays sold commercially, and numerous other sources and then pasted into essays is often viewed as one of the main factors behind the alleged rise in plagiarism cases among students in UK universities and elsewhere.

There are several difficulties with plagiarism as an issue in higher education. One is that universities vary in their definitions of what plagiarism is (Stefani and Carroll 2001). Further, they vary in their response to it when it is uncovered. They also vary in both the type and the severity of punishment. Further, within any university, academic and other staff differ in their views of the sinfulness of plagiarism and how it should be handled (Flint, Clegg, and Macdonald 2006). There is also evidence that students are less convinced than academic staff that plagiarism is wrong and that it should be punished.

In view of all these uncertainties of both definition and the response to plagiarism, students may wonder whether they should take issues of plagiarism seriously. Our answer is that they most definitely should take it seriously. Academic work places a high value on the originality of the work that is presented in any kind of output. To pass someone else's ideas and/or writings off as your own is widely regarded as morally dubious at best. Thus, while there are several grey areas with regard to plagiarism, as outlined in the previous paragraph, it is important not to overstate their significance. There *is* widespread condemnation of plagiarism in academic circles and it *is* nearly always punished when found in the work of students (and indeed that of others). You should, therefore, avoid plagiarizing the work of others at all costs. So concerned are universities about the growth in the number of plagiarism cases that come before examination boards and the likely role of the Internet in facilitating plagiarism, they are making more and more use of plagiarism detection software, which trawls the Internet for such things as strings of words. Thus, as several writers (for example,

McKeever 2006) have observed, the very technological development that is widely perceived as promoting the incidence of plagiarism—the Internet—is increasingly the springboard for its detection. Even well-known and ubiquitous search engines like Google.com are sometimes employed to detect student plagiarism through the search for unique strings of words.

The most important issue from the student's point of view is that he or she should avoid plagiarism at all costs, as the penalties may be severe, regardless of the student's own views on the matter. First, do not 'lift' large sections of text without making it clear that they are in fact quotations. This makes it clear that the text in question is not your own work but that you are making a point by quoting someone. It is easy to get this wrong. In June 2006, it was reported that a plagiarism expert at the London School of Economics had been accused of plagiarism in a paper he published on plagiarism! A paragraph was found that copied verbatim a published source by someone else and that had not been acknowledged properly as from another source. The accused person defended himself by saying that this was due to a formatting error. It is common practice in academic publications to indent a large section of material that is being quoted, thus:

> The most important issue from the student's point of view is that he or she should avoid plagiarism at all costs, as the penalties may be severe, regardless of the student's own views on the matter. First, do not 'lift' large sections of text without making it clear that they are in fact quotations. This makes it clear that the text in question is not your own work but that you are making a point by quoting someone. It is easy to get this wrong. In June 2006, it was reported that a plagiarism expert at the London School of Economics had been accused of plagiarism in a paper he published on plagiarism! A paragraph was found that copied verbatim a published source by someone else and that had not been acknowledged properly as from another source. The accused person defended himself by saying that this was due to a formatting error. It is common practice in academic publications to indent a large section of material that is being quoted. (Bryman and Bell 2011: 117)

The lack of indentation meant that the paragraph in question looked as though it was his own work. While it may be that this is a case of 'unintentional plagiarism' (Park 2003), distinguishing the intentional from the unintentional is by no means easy. Either way, the credibility and possibly the integrity of the author may be undermined. It is also important to realize that, for many if not most institutions, simply copying large portions of text and changing a few words will also be regarded as plagiarism.

Secondly, do not pass other people's ideas off as your own. This means that you should acknowledge the source of any ideas that you present that are not your own. It was this aspect of plagiarism that led to the case reported in Thinking deeply 4.11. Here, the accusers did not suggest that Dan Brown had taken large chunks of text from their work and presented it as his own. Instead, they accused him of lifting their ideas. However, Dan Brown *did* acknowledge his use of their historical work on the grail myth, though only in a general way in a list of acknowledgements, as novelists mercifully do not continuously reference ideas they use in their work. Brown's accusers lost their case, but there have been other high-profile cases of plagiarism that *have* been proved. For example, in 2003, the UK Prime Minister's Director of Communications and Strategy issued a briefing to journalists on the concealment of weapons in Iraq. This was found to have been copied from several sources and became known as the 'dodgy dossier'. The fact that so much of it had been taken from the work of others undermined its credibility in the eyes of others.

One of the most important messages of this section will hopefully be that you should guard against plagiarism at all costs. But it should also be clear that you should find out what your university and possibly departmental guidelines on the matter are. Quite aside from the rights and wrongs of plagiarism, it is not likely to impress your tutor if it is clear from reading the text that large chunks of your essay or report have been lifted from another source with just your own words interspersing the plagiarized text. In fact, that is often in our experience a giveaway—the contrast in styles is frequently very apparent and prompts the tutor to explore the possibility that some or much of the assignment you submit has in fact been plagiarized. Nor is it likely to impress most tutors if much of the text has been lifted but a few words changed here and there, along with a few sprinkled words written by you. However, equally it has to be said that frequent quoting with linking sentences by you is not likely to impress either. When we have been presented with essays of that kind, we have frequently said to the student concerned that it is difficult to establish what his or her own thoughts on the issue are.



## Thinking deeply 4.11
## Plagiarism and copyright in *The Da Vinci Code*

The best-selling novel by Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, was the focus of a ground-breaking High Court trial in 2006 that had significant implications for the understanding of plagiarism and copyright within the publishing industry. Brown was accused by two historians, Baigent and Leigh, who are the authors of an earlier non-fiction book entitled *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, of infringement of copyright by having plagiarized the central theme that forms the basis of his plot. However, Brown's defence argued that authors have for centuries recycled ideas from other books and that the ideas in dispute are too general to be protected by copyright law. The case was further complicated by the fact that the publisher, Random House, was responsible for the publication of both books. Commenting on the case, Professor Lisa Jardine, from Queen Mary, University of London, was quoted as saying: 'They are not going to win. I don't think plagiarism any longer holds up. We live in a world of cut and paste.' In a witness statement to the court, Brown claimed he had read the claimants' book but not until he had already formulated the ideas and storyline for his novel. The judge rejected claims that Dan Brown's book was in breach of copyright, although he did concede that a comparison of the two books did show some limited copying of the text. Sales of both books rose during the trial, which took place shortly before the release of a feature film based on Brown's book.

However, there have also been other recent cases where charges of plagiarism in novels have been made with an outcome less favourable to the author accused. For example, teenage American novelist Kaavya Viswanathan, author of *How Opal Mehta Got Kissed, Got Wild, and Got a Life*, was accused of plagiarizing sections of passages from another novel by Sophie Kinsella called *Can you Keep a Secret?* , including entire sentences that were found to be virtually identical. Viswanathan claimed that the similarity was unintentional and attributed it to her photographic memory. The book was subsequently withdrawn from sale and the author's $500,000 contract with the publisher Little, Brown & Company cancelled after it was found that there were also passages by other writers, including work by Salman Rushdie and Megan McCafferty. The key question is whether the young novelist knew what she was doing and whether she accepts it was plagiarism. He also contends that the case highlights some of the pressures that novelists are placed under by publishers to make their mark in a market where they are competing against other forms of entertainment.

Although both these cases highlight the contested nature of charges of plagiarism, including the importance of ascertaining the author's intent, which is very difficult to do, they also draw attention to the moral judgement and significant penalties that may be levelled at an author if plagiarism is shown to have occurred. Although university students are not in a situation of risking multi-million dollar deals in the same way as these novelists, the impact of plagiarism if it is shown to be significant can be highly detrimental in terms of their education and career prospects.

*Sources*: D. Smith, 'Da Vinci Trial Pits History against Art', *Observer*, 26 Feb. 2006; Anon., 'Brown Wins Da Vinci Code Case', *Guardian*, 7 April 2006; S. Goldenberg, 'Star Young Author Admits Unconscious Plagiarism', *Guardian*, 26 April 2006; M. Lawson, 'Fingers in the Word Till', *Guardian*, 6 May 2006.

Try, therefore, to express your ideas in your own words and acknowledge properly those ideas that are not your own. Plagiarism is something you may get away with once or twice, but it is so imprinted on the consciousness of many of us working in universities nowadays that you are unlikely to get away with it regularly. It is also extremely irritating to find that your work has been plagiarized. Bryman was asked to act as an external examiner of a doctoral thesis and found that large sections of one of his books had been taken and presented as the student's own work. He found this extremely annoying. A colleague he mentioned the incident to remarked that the only thing worse than plagiarism is incompetent plagiarism—incompetent because the student had plagiarized the work of someone he or she knew would be the external examiner. However, on reflection, the colleague was mistaken. Plagiarism is wrong—regardless of whether it is competently implemented or not.

One final point to note is that plagiarism is like a moving target. What it is, how it should be defined, how it can be detected, how it should be penalized: all of these issues and others are in a state of flux as we write this chapter. It is very much a shifting situation precisely because of the perception that it is increasing in frequency. The penalties can be severe, and, as we have witnessed when students have been presented with evidence of their plagiarism, it can be profoundly embarrassing and distressing for them. The message is simple: do not do it and make sure that you know exactly what it is and how it is defined at your institution so that you do not inadvertently commit the sin of plagiarism.



# Checklist

## Questions to ask yourself when reviewing the literature

- ◯ Is your list of references up to date in your current areas of interest? Are there new areas of interest that you need to search for?
- ◯ What literature searching have you done recently?
- ◯ What have you read recently? Have you found time to read?
- ◯ What have you learned from the literature? Has this changed your understanding of the subject in which you are working in any way?
- ◯ Is what you have read going to influence your research design in any way? Has it given you ideas about what you need to consider and incorporate?
- ◯ Have you been writing notes on what you have read? Do you need to reconsider how what you have read fits into your research?

(Adapted from Bruce 1994.)



# Key points

- Writing a literature review is a means of reviewing the main ideas and research relating to your chosen area of interest.
- A competent literature review confirms you as someone who is competent in the subject area.
- A great deal of the work of writing a literature review is based upon reading the work of other researchers in your subject area; key skills can be acquired to help you get the most from your reading.
- Systematic review is a method that is gaining in popularity in business research as a way of enhancing the reliability of literature searching and review.
- Narrative review is a more traditional approach that has advantages of flexibility that can make it more appropriate for inductive research and qualitative research designs.



# Questions for review

***Reviewing the existing literature***

- What are the main reasons for writing a literature review?
- How can you ensure that you get the most from your reading?
- What are the main advantages and disadvantages associated with systematic review?
- What type of research question is systematic review most suited to addressing?
- What are the main reasons for conducting a narrative literature review?
- In what type of research is narrative review most appropriate?

### *Searching the existing literature*

- What are the main ways of finding existing literature on your subject?
- What is a keyword and how is it useful in searching the literature?

### *Referencing your work*

- Why is it important to reference your work?
- What are the three main referencing styles used in academic work and which of these is preferred by your institution?
- What is the role of the bibliography and what makes a good one?

### *Avoiding plagiarism*

- What is plagiarism?
- Why is it taken so seriously by researchers?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Getting Started: Reviewing the Literature.*

5

# Ethics in business research

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 122

**Ethical principles** 128

- Harm to participants 128
- Lack of informed consent 132
- Invasion of privacy 136
- Deception 136

**Other ethical and legal considerations** 138

- Data management 139
- Copyright 140
- Reciprocity and trust 141
- Affiliation and conflicts of interest 142

**The difficulties of ethical decision-making** 143

***Checklist*** 144
***Key points*** 145
***Questions for review*** 145






## Chapter outline

Ethical issues arise at a variety of stages in business and management research. This chapter is concerned with the concerns about ethics that might arise in the course of conducting research. The professional bodies concerned with the social sciences have been keen to spell out the ethical issues that can arise, and some of their statements will be reviewed in this chapter. Ethical issues cannot be ignored, in that they relate directly to the integrity of a piece of research and of the disciplines that are involved. This chapter explores:

- some famous, even infamous, cases in which transgressions of ethical principles have occurred, though it is important not to take the view that ethical concerns arise only in relation to these extreme cases;
- different stances that can be and have been taken on ethics in business research;
- the significance and operation of four areas in which ethical concerns particularly arise: whether or not harm comes to participants; **informed consent**; invasion of privacy; and deception;
- some of the difficulties associated with ethical decision-making.

# Introduction

Discussions about the ethics of business and management research bring us into a realm in which the role of values in the research process becomes a topic of concern. Ethical issues revolve around such concerns as the following:

- How should we treat the people on whom we conduct research?
- Are there activities in which we should or should not engage in our relations with them?

Questions about ethics in business and management research also bring in the role of professional associations, such as the American Academy of Management (AoM) and the Market Research Society (MRS), which have formulated codes of ethics on behalf of their members. Statements of professional principles are frequently accessible from the Internet. Some useful codes of ethics for business and management researchers can be found at the following Internet addresses:

Academy of Management (AoM), *Code of Ethical Conduct*: ***www.aomonline.org/governanceandethics/aomrevisedcodeofethics.pdf*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Association of Business Schools/British Academy of Management/Higher Education Academy: Business Management Accountancy and Finance, *Ethics Guide* (2009): ***www.the-abs.org.uk/?id=560*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Market Research Society (MRS), *Code of Conduct and Guidelines*: ***www.mrs.org.uk/standards/codeconduct.htm*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
(also includes specific MRS guidelines on qualitative and quantitative research, doing Internet and employee research).

However, it is also useful to look at the way that researchers within the social sciences more generally have dealt with ethical research issues—for example, the Social Research Association (SRA), the British Sociological Association (BSA), and the American Psychological Association. In this chapter, the codes of these professional associations will also be referred to on several occasions.

Social Research Association (SRA), *Ethical Guidelines*: ***www.the-sra.org.uk/guidelines.htm*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

British Sociological Association (BSA), *Statement of Ethical Practice*: ***www.britsoc.co.uk/equality/Statement+Ethical+Practice.htm*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

American Sociological Association (ASA), *Code of Ethics*: ***www2.asanet.org/members/ecoderev.html*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

American Psychological Association (APA), *Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct*: ***www.apa.org/ethics*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Writings about ethics in business and other social science research are frequently frustrating for four reasons.

1. Writers often differ quite widely from each other over ethical issues and questions. In other words, they differ over what is and is not ethically acceptable.
2. The main elements in the debates do not seem to move forward a great deal. The same kinds of points that were made in the 1960s were being rehashed in the late 1990s and at the start of the present century.
3. Debates about ethics have often accompanied well-known cases of alleged ethical transgression. Some of them, such as Dalton's (1959) covert ethnography of unofficial managerial activity, will also be encountered later on in this book (see Chapter 17). One of the central issues that Dalton addresses in his study is the unofficial use of company resources, including pilfering or corporate theft (see Research in focus 5.1). There is considerable debate as to whether it was ethical to obtain such data through the method of covert observation (see Key concept 5.2). There are also several well-known psychological studies (e.g. Milgram 1963; Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo 1973) that continue to be widely cited in the field of organizational behaviour, despite the fact that they were based on research designs that would now be widely considered extremely unethical (see Research in focus 5.3). However, the problem with this emphasis on notoriety is that it can be taken to imply that ethical concerns reside only in such extreme cases, when in fact the potential for ethical transgression is much more general than this.
4. Related to this last point is that these extreme and notorious cases of ethical violation tend to be associated with particular research methods—notably disguised observation and the use of deception in experiments. Again, the problem with this association of ethics with certain studies (and methods) is that it implies that ethical concerns reside only or even primarily in some methods but not others. As a result, the impression can be gleaned that other methods, such as questionnaires or overt ethnography, are immune from ethical problems. Moreover, as the recent popularization of television experiments suggests (see Research in focus 5.4), disguised observation is as popular today as it was when researchers like Milgram and Zimbardo carried out their classic studies.



## Research in focus 5.1
## A covert study of unofficial rewards

One of Dalton's (1959) central themes in his study of American managers and unofficial action revolves around the use of company materials and services as supplementary rewards for the variable contributions of individuals. He presents several cases, including the Milo carpenter, Ted Berger, who was rewarded for his loyalty by not being required to operate machines, instead making such things as baby beds, tables, and rocking horses—custom-built objects for various managers—in exchange for which he was given 'gifts'. Another case concerns staff who routinely filled their car fuel tank from the company garage and with this obtained free washing and waxing. Similarly, there is the case of Jim Speier, a factory foreman, who made use of machinery and materials to have constructed a rose arch, storm windows, and a set of wooden lawn sprinklers cut in the form of dancing girls and brightly painted!

Dalton's main strategy for preventing harm to his participants is to protect their anonymity, but the reader is left in no doubt as to the seriousness of consequences for individuals concerned if their identities were to have been discovered. As Dalton explains, these individuals 'gave information and aid that, if generally known, would have jeopardized their careers' (1959: 275). One of the key ethical issues in this study concerns the lack of informed consent, as participants were in no position to be able to judge whether or not to become involved in the research, as they were only vaguely aware of the nature of Dalton's interest. Furthermore, they were almost certainly unaware of the risk of harm that could result from the study in relation to their employment prospects. In his defence, Dalton adopts a situational stance (see Key concept 5.2), arguing that it is impossible to study unofficial action, other than by using covert methods that enable the researcher to get sufficiently close to the subject. As there has been very little study of this subject, it is difficult to see how we could compare Dalton's findings with those produced using overt methods, and therefore we have little choice but to take his word for this.



# Key concept 5.2
# Stances on ethics

Authors on social research ethics can be characterized in terms of the stances they take on the issue. The following stances can be distinguished:

- *Universalism*. A universalist stance takes the view that ethical precepts should never be broken. Infractions of ethical principles are wrong in a moral sense and are damaging to social research. This kind of stance can be seen in the writings of Erikson (1967), Dingwall (1980), and Bulmer (1982). Bulmer does, however, point to some forms of what appears to be disguised observation that may be acceptable. One is retrospective covert observation, which occurs when a researcher writes up his or her experiences in social settings in which he or she participated but not as a researcher. An example would be Van Maanen (1991*b*), who wrote up his experiences as a ride operator in Disneyland many years after he had been employed there in vacation jobs. Even a universalist like Erikson (1967: 372) recognizes that it 'would be absurd . . . to insist as a point of ethics that sociologists should always introduce themselves as investigators everywhere they go and should inform every person who figures in their thinking exactly what their research is all about'.
- *Situation ethics*. Goode (1996) has argued for deception to be considered on a case-by-case basis. In other words, he argues for what J. Fletcher (1966: 31) has called a 'situation ethics', or more specifically 'principled relativism', which can be contrasted with the universalist ethics of some writers. This argument has two ways of being represented:
  1. *The end justifies the means*. Some writers argue that, unless there is some breaking of ethical rules, we would never know about certain social phenomena. Dalton (1959) essentially argues for this position in relation to his study of managers and the differences between official and unofficial action. Without some kind of disguised observation, this important aspect of organizational life would not have been studied. This is usually linked to the second form of a situationist argument in relation to social research ethics.
  2. *No choice*. It is often suggested that we have no choice but to engage in dissimulation on occasions if we want to investigate the issues in which we are interested.
- *Ethical transgression is pervasive*. It is often observed that virtually all research involves elements that are at least ethically questionable. This occurs whenever participants are not given absolutely all the details on a piece of research, or when there is variation in the amount of knowledge about research. Punch (1994: 91), for example, observes that 'some dissimulation is intrinsic to social life and, therefore, to fieldwork'. He quotes Gans (1962: 44) in support of this point: 'If the researcher is completely honest with people about his activities, they will try to hide actions and attitudes they consider undesirable, and so will be dishonest. Consequently, the researcher must be dishonest to get honest data.'
- *Anything goes* (*more or less*). The writers associated with arguments relating to situation ethics and a recognition of the pervasiveness of ethical transgressions are not arguing for an 'anything-goes' mentality, but for a certain amount of flexibility in ethical decision-making. However, Douglas (1976) has argued that the kinds of deception in which social researchers engage are trivial compared to those perpetrated by powerful institutions in modern society (such as the mass media, the police, and industry). His book is an inventory of tactics for deceiving people so that their trust is gained and they reveal themselves to the researcher. Very few researchers subscribe to this stance. Denzin (1968) comes close to an anything-goes stance when he suggests that social researchers are entitled to study anyone in any setting provided the work has a 'scientific' purpose, does not harm participants, and does not deliberately damage the discipline. The harm-to-participants criterion can also be seen in the cases reported in Research in focus 5.3.



## Research in focus 5.3
# Two infamous studies of obedience to authority

Milgram's (1963) electric-shock experiments and Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo's (1973) prison studies have come to be seen as infamous because of the ethical issues they raise. Both studies were concerned to measure the effects of group norms on the behaviour of the individual, and they have been widely applied in the field of organizational behaviour. Milgram was concerned with the processes whereby a person can be induced to cause extreme harm to another by virtue of being ordered to do so. To investigate this issue further, he devised a laboratory experiment. Volunteers were recruited to act out the role of teachers who punished learners (who were accomplices of the experimenter) by submitting them to electric shocks when they gave incorrect answers to questions.

The shocks were not, of course, real, but the teachers/volunteers were not aware of this. The level of electric shock was gradually increased with successive incorrect answers until the teacher/volunteer refused to administer more shocks. Learners had been trained to respond to the rising level of electric shock with simulated but appropriate howls of pain. In the room was a further accomplice of Milgram's, who cajoled the teacher/volunteer to continue to administer shocks, suggesting that it was part of the study's requirements to continue and that they were not causing permanent harm, in spite of the increasingly shrill cries of pain. However, in a later adaptation of the experiment, the teacher/volunteer was accompanied by a colleague who acted out the part of someone who refused to administer the shocks beyond a certain level. In this situation, the real subject continued to administer the shocks for a shorter period and then declined as the first teacher/volunteer had done. Milgram's study demonstrates the extent to which individuals display obedience to authority even if this involves causing considerable pain to others. It also shows how peer rebellion can be a powerful means of resisting the experimenter's authority.

Experiments conducted by Zimbardo and his graduate students from the Department of Psychology at Stanford University, California, involved creating a mock prison, in order to examine the roles played by prisoners and guards. Twenty-one male participants were selected from a group of seventy-five who responded to an advertisement in a local newspaper. Individuals were selected on the basis that they were mature, emotionally stable, middle class, well educated, and had no criminal record. Each was paid $15 per day to participate in the study. A coin was flipped in order to decide if the participant was to play the role of prisoner or guard. There were ten prisoners and eleven guards. However, only a few days into the planned fourteen-day study, the experiment took an unexpected turn. The relationship between prisoners and guards deteriorated to such an extent that guards began to subject prisoners to psychological cruelty. Within the first few days several of the prisoners had been released, suffering from severe depression and mental breakdown. Only six days into the study the experiment was abandoned owing to the extreme symptoms experienced by the prisoners. Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo's study shows that individual behaviour is determined by social and environmental conditions to a far greater extent than is commonly assumed.

Both studies raise complex ethical issues, particularly in relation to the potential harm incurred by participants as a result of the experiments. It is worth noting that both studies were conducted over forty years ago, and it is extremely unlikely that either would be considered acceptable to a university human subjects committee or indeed to most social researchers today. However, in 2006 Burger (2009) conducted what he refers to as a 'partial replication' of the Milgram experiment. Burger hypothesized that there would be little or no difference between Milgram's findings and his own some forty-five years later. The replication is 'partial' for several reasons such as: participants did not proceed beyond the lowest simulated voltage level that Milgram used (150 volts; 79 per cent of Milgram's teachers went beyond this point); participants were intensively screened for emotional and psychological problems and excluded if there was evidence of such problems; people who had studied some psychology were excluded (because the Milgram studies are so well known); and participants of all adult ages were included, rather than up to the age of 50, as in the original studies. Burger also reckons that his sample was more ethnically diverse than Milgram's would have been. The replication had to be partial because, as Burger puts it, 'current standards for the ethical treatment of participants clearly place Milgram's studies out of bounds' (Burger 2009: 2). Burger found that the propensity for obedience was only slightly lower than forty-five years previously, though, as Miller (2009) observes, the adjustments Burger had to make probably render comparisons with Milgram's findings questionable.

Researchers' ethical qualms do not extend to television, however. In March 2010, newspapers reported a French documentary based on a supposed game show called Game of Death and broadcast on prime-time television. Eighty contestants signed contracts agreeing to inflict electric shocks on other participants. Shocks were administered when the other contestant failed to answer a question correctly. The shocks continued up to the highest voltage with the contestants being egged on by an audience and a presenter. Only sixteen contestants stopped before administering the highest shock level, which would have been fatal. As in the Milgram experiment, the participants receiving the shocks were actors who simulated howls of agony and the shocks themselves were, of course, also fake. An account of this programme, which refers to Milgram, can be found at: ***news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/8573755.stm*** (accessed 18 March 2010)

Also, the following is a CNN news item on the programme, which includes some brief footage as well as a brief commentary from Burger, who carried out the aforementioned partial replication: ***www.cnn.com/video/data/2.0/video/bestoftv/2010/03/17/cb.game.show.death.cnn.html*** (accessed 18 March 2010)



## Tips and skills
## Ethics committees

In addition to needing to be familiar with the codes of practice produced by several professional associations such as the Academy of Management, the Market Research Society, and the Social Research Association, you should be acquainted with the ethical guidelines of your university or college. Most higher education organizations have ethics committees that issue guidelines about ethical practice. These guidelines are often based on or influenced by the codes developed by professional associations. Universities' and colleges' guidelines will provide indications of what are considered ethically unacceptable practices. Sometimes, you will need to submit your proposed research to an ethics committee of your university or college. As part of this you may need to complete a form to show that you have considered potential ethical issues that might arise from your study (see Tips and skills 'A sample university ethics form'). Ethical guidelines and ethics committees are there to protect research participants, but they are also involved in protecting researchers and institutions from the possibility of adverse publicity or legal action being taken against them.



## Tips and skills
## A sample university ethics form

This form is intended to help researchers consider the ethical implications of research activity. Researchers are responsible for deciding, guided by University guidelines and professional disciplinary standards, whether a more extensive review is necessary.

Title of study:

| Names of investigators: | Yes | No (please tick) |
|---|---|---|
| **1.** Is the study funded (if yes, name the source)? | | |
| **2.** Is the research compromised by the source of funding? | ☐ | ☐ |
| **3.** Are there potential conflicts of interest in the financial or organizational arrangements? | ☐ | ☐ |

| | Yes | No (please tick) |
|---|---|---|
| **4.** Will confidentiality be maintained appropriately at all stages of enquiry: at collection, storage, analysis, and reporting? | ☐ | ☐ |
| **5.** Will human rights and dignities be actively respected? | ☐ | ☐ |
| **6.** Will highly personal, intimate, or other private or confidential information be sought? | ☐ | ☐ |
| **7.** Will there be any harm, discomfort, physical, or psychological risks? | ☐ | ☐ |
| **8.** Will participants be involved whose ability to give informed voluntary consent may be limited? | ☐ | ☐ |
| **9.** Will the study involve obtaining or processing personal data relating to living individuals (e.g. recording interviews with subjects even if the findings will subsequently be made anonymous)? (*Note: if the answer to this question is 'yes' you will need to ensure that the provisions of the Data Protection Act (1988) are complied with. In particular you will need to ensure that subjects provide sufficient consent and that personal data will be properly stored for an appropriate period of time.*) | ☐ | ☐ |
| **10.** Please provide a paragraph explaining any additional ethical issues that are relevant to the study. If none, explain why. | | |

I confirm that the ethical issues pertaining to this study have been fully considered.

Signed (lead investigator): _____Date:

On behalf of University Research Ethics Committee: _____Date:



## Research in focus 5.4

## Ethical issues in the television series *The Experiment*

The BBC television series *The Experiment* (2002) was devised with the assistance of two British social psychologists, Professor Steve Haslam and Dr Steve Reicher. The aim was to create a laboratory experiment that replicated the prison experiments conducted by Zimbardo in 1971 (see Research in focus 5.3). Researchers and television producers were forced to confront a series of challenging ethical issues relating to the televising of the research. As Haslam and Reicher explained, 'problems stemmed from the difficulty of getting people to be fully aware of the consequences of being on television. For instance, there are many behaviours which are perfectly fair in the context of one relationship but which violate the norms of a different relationship. Where one puts the two together, it can be deeply embarrassing. For instance, would a teacher want their behaviour with their parents or their children to be shown to their students?' There were also difficulties related to media representations. 'There were many cases when papers misreported what one participant had said (or what we had said) and such comment had the capacity to cause concern to other participants.' However, the biggest ethical problem, according to the researchers, was 'What happens when participants do things they genuinely regret—or else learn things about themselves they would rather not know—and these are then broadcast widely?' Their 'solution was to try to involve the participants in the analysis so that they could agree that the resultant account was truthful, fair and had analytic integrity'. Clinical psychologists were involved in the selection of participants, alerting them to potential risks and assessing their ability to cope with them, and they were also available to talk through the concerns of research participants during the project. The study was overseen by an ethics committee that included a Holocaust survivor, a member of the Howard League, and an MP.

Despite the precautions taken, the decision was made to terminate the project earlier than expected because of concerns that participants' emotional and physical well-being was in danger of being compromised. The BBC was forced to delay transmission of the series when participants expressed concerns that they had been made to look stupid and psychologists voiced concerns that the scientific integrity of the programme had been compromised through the editing process.

*Sources*: M. Wells, 'BBC Halts "Prison Experiment"', *Guardian*, 24 Jan. 2002; M. Wells, 'BBC2 Delays "Unfair" Prison Experiment', *Guardian*, 10 April 2002; J. Crace, 'The Prison of TV', *Guardian*, 14 May 2002).

In this chapter, we will introduce the main issues and debates about ethics. We are not going to try to resolve them, because they are not readily capable of resolution. This is why the ethical debate has scarcely moved on since the 1960s. What *is* crucial is to be aware of the ethical principles involved and of the nature of the concerns about ethics in business research. It is only if researchers are aware of the issues involved that they can make informed decisions about the implications of certain choices. If nothing else, you should be aware of the possible opprobrium that will be coming your way if you make certain kinds of choice (see, for example Research in focus 5.4). Our chief concern lies with the ethical issues that arise in relations between researchers and research participants in the course of an investigation. This focus by no means exhausts the range of ethical issues and dilemmas that arise, such as those that might arise in relation to the funding of business research or how findings are used by non-researchers. However, the ethical issues that arise in the course of doing research are the ones that are most likely to impinge on students. Writers on research ethics adopt different stances concerning the ethical issues that arise in connection with relationships between researchers and research participants. Key concept 5.2 outlines some of these stances.



# Ethical principles

Discussions about ethical principles in business research, and perhaps more specifically transgressions of them, tend to revolve around certain issues that recur in different guises. However, they have been usefully broken down by Diener and Crandall (1978) into four main areas:

- whether there is *harm to participants*;
- whether there is a *lack of informed consent*;
- whether there is an *invasion of privacy*;
- whether *deception* is involved.

We will look at each of these in turn, but it should be appreciated that these four principles overlap somewhat. For example, it is difficult to imagine how the principle of informed consent could be built into an investigation in which research participants were deceived. However, there is no doubt that these four areas form a useful classification of ethical principles in and for business research.

## Harm to participants

Research that is likely to harm participants is regarded by most people as unacceptable. But what is harm? Harm can entail a number of facets: physical harm; harm to participants' development or self-esteem; stress; harm to career prospects or future employment; and 'inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts', as Diener and Crandall (1978: 19) put it. In several studies that we have encountered in this book, there has been real or potential harm to participants.

- In Dalton's (1959) study, his 'counselling' relationship with the female secretary in exchange for access to valuable personnel files (see Research in focus 17.2) was potentially harmful to her, both in terms of the personal relationship and in jeopardizing the security of her employment.
- In Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo's (1973) prison experiments (see Research in focus 5.3), several participants experienced severe emotional reactions, including mental breakdown.
- Many of the participants in the Milgram experiment (1963) on obedience to authority (see Research in focus 5.3) experienced high levels of stress and anxiety as a consequence of being incited to administer electric shocks. It could also be argued that Milgram's observers were 'inducing subjects to perform reprehensible acts'. Indeed, yet another series of studies in which Milgram was involved placed participants in positions where they were being influenced to steal (Milgram and Shotland 1973).

The AoM *Code of Ethical Conduct* states that it is the responsibility of the researcher to assess carefully the possibility of harm to research participants, and, to the extent that it can be, the possibility of harm should be minimized. Similar sentiments are expressed by the MRS's *Code of Conduct*, which advocates that 'the researcher must take all reasonable precautions to ensure that respondents are in no way directly harmed or adversely affected as a result of their participation in a marketing research project'. However, some commentators cast the scope of ethical consideration far wider, suggesting that it is also necessary

to consider non-participants in evaluating the risk of harm (see Thinking deeply 5.5). This is consistent with recent changes in social research guidelines that extend the definition of what constitutes an ethical issue (see pp. 137–8 for more discussion of these changes).

A further area of ethical consideration relates to the possibility of harm to the researcher, an issue that was introduced in Tips and skills 'Safety in research' (Chapter 3). In addition to the possibility of physical or emotional harm through exposure to a fieldwork setting, certain research methods, such as auto-ethnography (see Key concept 27.13), may carry a greater risk of emotional or professional harm to the researcher because the researchers' own personal self-disclosures constitute the basis for the analysis (Doloriert and Sambrook 2009). If this analysis is made public, a great deal of sensitive, personal information pertaining to the researcher is placed in the public domain. The anonymity of the researcher thus cannot be maintained. Doloriert and Sambrook (2009) argue that this is a particular concern for student researchers whose work will be examined by more experienced and more powerful senior researchers.



## Thinking deeply 5.5
## Harm to non-participants?

Gorard (2002) argues that, although much ethical guidance focuses on the responsibilities of the researcher in relation to research participants, there is also a need to consider the interests of non-participants in the research who constitute the majority, especially when research has practical implications in determining social policies such as those relating to health, housing, transport, and education. He argues that 'most discussions of ethical considerations in research focus on possible harm to the research participants, to the exclusion of the possible harm done to future users of the evidence which research generates. They almost never consider the wasted resources, and worse, used in implementing treatments and policies that do not work' (2002: 3).

The issue of harm to participants is further addressed in ethical codes by advocating care over maintaining the confidentiality of records and anonymity of accounts. This means that the identities and records of individuals and organizations should be maintained as confidential. For example, the AoM *Code of Ethical Conduct* recommends that issues relating to confidentiality and anonymity should be negotiated and agreed with potential research participants, and, 'if confidentiality or anonymity is requested, this must be honored'. This injunction also means that care needs to be taken when findings are being published to ensure that individuals and organizations are not identified or identifiable, unless permission has been given for data to be passed on in a form that allows them to be identified. The MRS *Code of Conduct* states that, as a general rule, anonymity must be preserved. If a respondent's identity is to be revealed, '(*a*) the respondent must first have been told to whom the information would be supplied and the purposes for which it will be used, and also (*b*) the researcher must ensure that the information will not be used for any non-research purpose and that the recipient of the information has agreed to conform to the requirements of the Code'.

In quantitative research, it is often easier to anonymize records and to report findings in a way that does not allow individuals to be identified. However, even in quantitative studies there are sometimes instances where it is virtually impossible to make a company anonymous. The use of pseudonyms is a common recourse, but it may not eliminate entirely the possibility of identification. For example, in the case of Hofstede's (1984) research, although a company pseudonym was used throughout the published study, it was virtually impossible to conceal the company's identity without completely distorting the original data, partly because IBM is such a large and well-known organization. Similarly, although W. Scott et al. (1956) did not actually name their case study organization, the details they provided in their analysis about the firm's size, location, history, and activities made it clear to Bacon and Blyton (2001; see Research in focus 2.18), and to other researchers, exactly which large steelworks in North Wales they studied. Issues of anonymity are particularly complex in relation to visual data. Sometimes researchers who use visual data have to go to quite extreme lengths in order to protect the anonymity of their research participants (see Research in focus 5.7).



## Tips and skills
## Confidentiality agreements

As part of the process of negotiating access, it is becoming increasingly common for companies to ask their legal departments to prepare a Confidentiality agreement, which you may be asked to sign on your own behalf, or someone from your university may be asked to sign on behalf of the institution. The main purpose of this is to define what type of information you can have access to and to establish what information you are and are not able to disclose about the company. This usually involves agreeing that you will not pass on information to a third party, particularly that which pertains to commercially sensitive or valuable issues, such as new product development. In addition, there may be a clause that specifies that the company must have sight of the research once it has been written up, so that it can comment on the findings, particularly if they are going to be published. This legally binding agreement can thus grant a considerable amount of power to the company, and it has the potential to cause considerable difficulties if your research throws up issues that the company would rather were kept out of the public domain. If you are asked to sign a Confidentiality agreement, before signing it, take it to your supervisor to ask for advice and get it checked by someone who deals with legal issues on behalf of the university. It may be that there is some room for negotiation in relation to the exact wording of the agreement and the company may be reassured if there is an undertaking that the research will guarantee its anonymity.

The issues of confidentiality and anonymity raise particular difficulties for many forms of qualitative research, where particular care has to be taken with regard to the possible identification of persons, organizations, and places. Moreover, as Thinking deeply 5.6 illustrates, in some qualitative research projects research participants may not wish to remain anonymous. The consequences of failing to protect individual anonymity are illustrated by M. Parker (2000: 238; see Chapter 17), who describes how a quotation in his report about the managing director was traced to an 'insufficiently anonymized source', whose reputation was damaged as a result of the incident. As the MRS guidelines on employee research note:

> Sample sizes in specialised areas may be very small to the point where employees themselves could be identified. If there is a reasonable risk of an employee being identified, due to the sample size of the population or sub-population being covered, the employee *must* be informed of this risk at the beginning of the interview and given the opportunity to withdraw.

The guidelines therefore recommend that researchers examine the results of subgroups only in situations where there are ten or more respondents involved.



## Thinking deeply 5.6
## The assumption of anonymity

Grinyer (2002) argues that, although protecting the anonymity of research participants is assumed to be an integral feature of ethical research, there may be certain circumstances where research participants do not wish to remain anonymous because making their identity explicit is an important way of retaining ownership of their stories. The legal requirements of the Data Protection Act mean there is also a legal requirement to protect anonymity, since the Act states that anonymization should be maintained wherever possible to increase the security of data processing. These guidelines are based on the assumption that research participants 'not only deserve the protection of anonymity, but that they actively desire it' (Grinyer 2002: 2). She argues that the allocation of pseudonyms to protect anonymity can cause unanticipated stress, since research participants sometimes feel that keeping their real names is an important recognition of their involvement in the research project. This, according to Grinyer, makes clear 'how problematic it is to make judgments on behalf of others, however well intentioned' (2002: 3). Grinyer recommends that this issue is dealt with on a case-by-case basis, through consultation with research participants throughout the research and publication process so that individuals have the freedom to make a more informed choice and are less likely to feel that they have lost ownership of their stories.



## Telling it like it is
## Ethical considerations in a student research project

Tom was encouraged by his university to consider the ethical implications of his study of well-being among call-centre workers. His main focus was on protecting the anonymity of interviewees so that managers could not trace back comments to specific individuals. 'Birkbeck are very concerned with encouraging an ethical approach to research and considering the implications of it. Given what I was doing, I didn't think there were huge ethical implications. I suppose my main concern was to make sure that I wasn't in any way harming the well-being of the people I was talking to and I suppose there was a vague possibility that, you know, we might have talked about very traumatic stuff in the interview, which might make them very stressed and so on, but I didn't think that was very likely. What was more likely was that they'd somehow feel that I'd kind of betrayed their confidentiality by feeding back to management what they were saying, even if it was in some sort of anonymized format. Because I only had a small sample size, you know, the boss could have said "Right, who said this? I want to see all of you in my office." So I wanted to set out as clearly as I could how I was going to use their data. What I did was when I transcribed my tapes I called them Interviewee A, Interviewee B, or whatever, and then I destroyed the tapes, so all I had was an anonymized interview. I did use quotes from interviews in my dissertation, but these were attributed to Interviewee A or Call handler B or whatever, but that report was confidential to Birkbeck. It didn't go to the organization that I did my research in.' In the report that went back to the organization Tom 'made sure that there was nothing in there that could be linked back to any individual. So it didn't say "A middle aged, Asian call handler said" because that could have been attributable back to individuals.'

However, Tom also became aware that employees could also be pursuing their own political agendas through the research process. 'Although I made it clear that I wasn't there to check up on call handlers on behalf of the management and that it was all confidential and I wasn't going to make recommendations which would be traceable back to any individual, there'd still be a question about to what extent people thought that it was safe to talk to me or that all sorts of stuff was going on. People were asking themselves: "Was it safe to talk to me?" Actually, I was possibly a mouthpiece for them to make comments back to management and they could say things that hopefully might get relayed onto management about working conditions or whatever.'



*To hear more about Tom's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

The issues of confidentiality and anonymity involve legal as well as ethical considerations. For example, in Cavendish's (1982) study of women factory workers on an assembly line, great care was taken by the researcher to invent names for all the women so that they could not be identified, to protect them from possible victimization by the company. However, Cavendish deliberately left the name of the firm unchanged in order to preserve the realism of the study and to provide 'concrete facts about the factory' (1982: vi). However, as Cavendish explains, this proved very naive: 'if the firm was named, here was a risk both to me and to the publisher that the firm might bring a libel action against us' (1982: vi). For this reason, after consultation with lawyers, she decided to rewrite the account prior to publication in order to make the firm unidentifiable. This involved changing not only the name of the firm, but also its location, the details of the components manufactured, and the name of the trade union representing the women. In contrast, there are other instances where organizations do consent to be named in publications, for example in Pettigrew's (1985) study of changing culture at Imperial Chemical Industries.

The issues of confidentiality and anonymity also raise particular problems with regard to the secondary analysis of qualitative data (see Chapter 22), since it is very difficult, though by no means impossible, to present field notes and interview transcripts in a way that will prevent people and places from being identified. As Alderson (1998) has suggested, the difficulty is one of being able to ensure that the same safeguards concerning confidentiality can be guaranteed when secondary analysts examine such records as those provided by the original primary researcher.

One of the problems with the harm-to-participants principle is that it is not possible to identify in all circumstances whether or not harm is likely, though that fact should not be taken to mean that there is no point in seeking to protect them. For example, in the prison experiments conducted by Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo (see Research in focus 5.3) the extreme reactions of participants surprised the researchers. Arguably they did not anticipate this level of harm to be incurred when they planned the study. This is partly why the AoM *Code of Ethical Conduct* recommends third-party review as a means of protecting the interests of research participants, stating that 'research plans involving human participants should be reviewed by an appropriate third party such as a university human subjects committee or a **focus group** of potential participants'. In addition, the ASA *Code of Ethics* suggests that, if there is any prospect of harm to participants, informed consent, the focus of the next section, is essential: 'Informed consent must be obtained when the risks of research are greater than the risks of everyday life. Where modest risk or harm is anticipated, informed consent must be obtained.'

## Lack of informed consent

The issue of informed consent is in many respects the area within business research ethics that is most hotly debated. The bulk of the discussion tends to focus on what



Telling it like it is

### Maintaining anonymity in a small-scale research project

Karen devised an innovative way of keeping her research participants anonymous that still enabled her to reveal important details about a participant's position within the organization. She said, 'I didn't put any names in the dissertation. It was very difficult to actually work out what I was going to do. With the questionnaire it was just a tick box so it was a lot easier, but with the actual interviews I wanted to use quotes and that type of thing. So it was a lot more difficult so in the appendix I had a table which was a profile of all the people that I questioned, but with no names on it. So it just had the department that they were from and their level in the organization—not the job title—and then some other information like the length of the time they'd been there in the organization because I used that in the analysis. I could cross-reference that with the quotes that I used and. say "This person from the HR department or from another department said this." So it maintained their anonymity.'

Chris agreed to protect the anonymity of the bank where he did his research and he sought informed consent from each of the interviewees who agreed to take part in the study, by giving the company and each of the people interviewed a pseudonym. 'The individuals knew from the beginning what I was doing and why I was doing it. I asked them would they want me to keep their names anonymous or not. One person said she did want to be kept anonymous, two said they weren't really bothered. So I thought if I'm going to do it with one, I'd best do it with the other two as well, which I did. I also had to get permission from the organization because I had information about the percentage of women at different levels of management within the organization, which I was freely given, but obviously I sought permission about actually putting that in my dissertation. They said they were fine about it as long as it's sort of not going to be published.'

After having completed his degree, Chris was offered a job with the bank as a graduate management trainee. Since then he has become involved in diversity management within the company. Chris's experience shows how the need to act ethically in a research project cannot be separated from one's other roles, as his colleagues' impressions of him now will have undoubtedly been influenced by the way in which he conducted the research project. More generally, the importance of ethics in building trust through the research relationship is something that Chris feels strongly about, as he explains: 'It's who you know and not what you know—and if you can get organizations to trust you and let you in, then you never know what that might lead to in the end.'

*To hear more about Karen's and Chris's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brmanbrm3e/***

is variously called disguised or covert observation. Such observation can involve covert participant observation (see Key concept 17.5), or simple or contrived observation (see, for example, Thinking deeply 11.9 and Research in focus 11.10), in which the researcher's true identity is unknown. The principle means that prospective research participants should be given as much information as might be needed to make an informed decision about whether or not they wish to participate in a study. Covert observation transgresses that principle, because participants are not given the opportunity to refuse to cooperate. They are involved whether they like it or not.

Lack of informed consent is a feature of Research in focus 5.1 and Research in focus 5.3. For example, in Dalton's research, informed consent is almost entirely absent. Dalton went to great lengths in order to keep the purpose of his research from participants, presumably to maximize his chances of obtaining specific information about such things as unofficial use of resources or pilfering. Even those who became key informants, or 'intimates', knew only of Dalton's general interest in 'personnel problems', and great care was taken not to arouse suspicion. Dalton describes his undercover role as similar in indirect actions to that of an espionage agent or spy, although he stresses that his interest was in scientific rather than criminal evidence. The principle of informed consent also entails the implication that, even when people know they are being asked to participate in research, they should be fully informed about the research process. As the AoM *Code of Ethical Conduct* suggests:

> It is the duty of Academy members to preserve and protect the privacy, dignity, well being, and freedom of research participants. This duty requires both careful research design and informed consent from all participants . . . Informed consent means explaining to potential participants the purposes and nature of the research so they can freely choose whether or not to become involved. Such explanations include warning of possible harm and providing explicit opportunities to refuse to participate and to terminate participation at any time. Because students and employees are particularly subject to possible coercion, even when unintended, special care must be taken in obtaining their informed consent.

Similarly, the MRS *Code of Conduct* states that informed consent means that respondents should be told, normally at the beginning of the interview, if observation techniques or recording equipment are to be used. Thus, while Milgram's and Haney, Banks, and Zimbardo's experimental subjects (see Research in focus 5.3) were volunteers and therefore knew they were going to participate in research, there is a lack of informed consent, because they were not given full information about the nature of the research and its possible implications for them.

However, as Homan (1991: 73) has observed, implementing the principle of informed consent 'is easier said than done'. At least two major points stand out here.

- It is extremely difficult to present prospective participants with absolutely all the information that might be required to make an informed decision about their involvement. In fact, relatively minor transgressions probably pervade most business research, such as deliberately underestimating the amount of time that an interview is likely to take so that people are not put off being interviewed, and not giving absolutely all the details about one's research for fear of contaminating people's answers to questions.
- In ethnographic research, the researcher is likely to come into contact with a wide spectrum of people, and ensuring that absolutely everyone has the opportunity for informed consent is not practicable, because it would be extremely disruptive in everyday contexts. Also, even when all research participants in a certain setting are aware that the ethnographer is a researcher, it is doubtful whether they are all similarly (let alone identically) informed about the nature of the research. For example, in C. K. Lee's (1998) study of women factory workers in Hong Kong and China, she found it difficult to convey her 'version' of what she was doing to her co-workers. This was partly because the academic term 'thesis' did not make sense to them, so the women developed an alternative explanation, which involved the idea that Lee was writing a novel based on her experiences as a worker 'toiling side by side with "real" workers'. Lee explains: 'I had to settle for that definition too . . .' (1998: 173). This example aptly illustrates how it is not always possible for the researcher fully to explain the purposes and nature of the research, and so sometimes a compromise understanding is reached.

In spite of the widespread condemnation of violations of informed consent and the view that covert observation is especially vulnerable to accusations of unethical practice in this regard, studies such as Dalton's (1959) are still regarded as important in providing insight into subversive

or illegitimate organizational behaviour. The defence is usually of the 'end-justifies-the-means' kind, which is further discussed below. What is interesting in the context of this discussion is that some ethical codes essentially leave the door ajar for covert observation. The BSA *Statement of Ethical Practice* does suggest that researchers should 'as far as possible' seek to achieve informed consent, but it then goes even further in relation to **covert research**:

> There are serious ethical dangers in the use of covert research but covert methods may avoid certain problems. For instance, difficulties arise when research participants change their behaviour because they know they are being studied. Researchers may also face problems when access to spheres of social life is closed to social scientists by powerful or secretive interests. However, covert methods violate the principles of informed consent and may invade the privacy of those being studied. Participant or non-participant observation in non-public spaces or experimental manipulation of research participants without their knowledge should be resorted to only where it is impossible to use other methods to obtain essential data. In such studies it is important to safeguard the anonymity of research participants. Ideally, where informed consent has not been obtained prior to the research it should be obtained post-hoc.

While this statement hardly condones the absence of informed consent associated with covert research, it is not unequivocally censorious either. It recognizes that covert research 'may avoid certain problems' and refers, without using the term, to the possibility of **reactivity** associated with overt observational methods. It also recognizes that covert methods can help to get over the difficulty of gaining access to certain kinds of setting. The passage entails an acknowledgement that informed consent is jeopardized, along with the privacy principle (see below), but implies that covert research can be used 'where it is impossible to use other methods to obtain essential data'. The difficulty here clearly is how a researcher is to decide whether or not it is in fact impossible to obtain data other than by covert work. We suspect that, by and large, covert observers typically make their judgements in this connection on the basis of the *anticipated* difficulty of gaining access to a setting or of encountering reactivity problems, rather than as a response to difficulties they have actually experienced. For example, Dalton (1959) has written that it is impossible to get sufficiently close to unofficial managerial activities to access the meanings assigned to them by participants, other than through covert observation. The issue of the circumstances in which violations of ethical principles, like informed consent, are deemed acceptable will reappear in the discussion below.

The principle of informed consent is also bound up to some extent with the issue of harm to participants. Erikson (1967) has suggested that, if a researcher fails to seek informed consent and if participants are harmed as a result of the research, the investigator is more culpable than if there was no informed consent. For example, he writes: 'If we happen to harm people who have agreed to act as subjects, we can at least argue that they knew something of the risks involved . . .' (1967: 369). While this might seem like a recipe for seeking a salve for the researcher's conscience, it does point to an important issue—namely, that the business researcher is more likely to be vilified if participants are adversely affected when they were not willing accomplices than when they were. However, it is debatable whether that means that the researcher is any less culpable for that harm. Erikson implies that researchers are less culpable, but this is a potential area for disagreement.

The need to take precautions to ensure that respondents are in no way harmed as a result of their participation in research is of particular concern in situations involving vulnerable persons who may not be in a position to give their fully informed consent. An example of this might be marketing research that explores the effect of advertising on children. For example, Lawlor and Prothero (2007) conducted focus groups and individual interviews involving fifty-two children aged between 7 and 9 to explore their understanding of television advertisements. They carried out their data collection in two Irish primary schools during school hours. Consent to participate in the study was requested from the parents of the children, who expressed a preference that the interviews be conducted in the neutral setting of the school, rather than in the children's homes. Permission was also requested for the interviews to be tape recorded. In cases such as this one, extreme diligence must be exercised over the gaining of informed consent because of the greater vulnerability of children as research participants and the difficulties in ensuring that they fully understand the implications of their agreement to participate in research.



## Tips and skills
# A sample interview consent form

- I, the undersigned, have read and understood the Study Information Sheet provided.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the Study.
- I understand that taking part in the Study will include being interviewed and audio recorded.
- I have been given adequate time to consider my decision and I agree to take part in the Study.
- I understand that my personal details such as name and employer address will not be revealed to people outside the project.
- I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, but my name will not be used.
- I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any material related to this project to [name of researcher].
- I understand that I can withdraw from the Study at any time and I will not be asked any questions about why I no longer want to take part.

Name of Participant: _____ Date:

Researcher Signature: _____ Date:

*[Based on examples from UK Data Archive (2009) and several UK universities.]*



## Tips and skills
# A sample study information sheet

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. This Information Sheet explains what the study is about and how we would like you to take part in it.

The purpose of the study is to [give a short explanation of the study].

In order to elicit your views, we would like you to come for an interview with one of the researchers involved in the study at the University of [University name]. If you agree to this, the interview will be audio recorded and will last approximately one hour. You will also be asked to keep a workplace diary for four weeks. For you to take part in this aspect of the study, the consent of your line manager will be required. Details of how to go about this will be given when you attend for interview.

The information provided by you in the interview and workplace diary will be used for research purposes. It will not be used in a manner that would allow identification of your individual responses.

At the end of the study, anonymized research data will be archived at the UK Data Archive in order to make it available to other researchers in line with current data-sharing practices.

The study has been considered by an Institutional Ethics Committee at the University of [University name] and has been given a favourable review.

All reasonable travel and subsistence expenses that you incur through taking part in the study will be reimbursed, but please keep all receipts.

Once again, we would like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. If you have any questions about the research at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact us.

[Researcher contact addresses, telephone, email addresses]

It is increasingly common for researchers to be advised by their universities, via their Research Ethics Committees, to gain written, rather than verbal, consent from research participants by asking them to fill out and sign a form, particularly if the research involves the collection of personal data (see the section later in this chapter on Data Management). This is typically accompanied by an information sheet, which explains what the research is about and how the researchers plan to use the data. If data are collected using audio or video recording equipment, informed consent can also be formally recorded in this way, by asking the participant for their informed consent at the start of the process, rather than by completing a form. However, some researchers have expressed concerns about what they see as a 'tick-box approach' to informed consent, saying that it encourages ethical issues to be seen as a one-off consideration, rather than as something that needs to be considered throughout the research process (Sin 2005). The form-filling method of gaining informed consent is particularly problematic in certain qualitative research designs, where data collection can extend over a period of time and involve methods such as participant observation (see Chapter 17) for which it would be inappropriate to ask research participants to sign a form. Also, the direction of qualitative studies can be somewhat less predictable than with quantitative ones, so it is difficult to be specific within forms about some issues.

## Invasion of privacy

This third area of ethical concern relates to the issue of the degree to which invasions of privacy can be condoned. The right to privacy is a tenet that many of us hold dear, and transgressions of that right in the name of research are not regarded as acceptable. The MRS guidance is clear: 'the objectives of any study do not give researchers a special right to intrude on a respondent's privacy nor to abandon normal respect for an individual's values'. Privacy is very much linked to the notion of informed consent, because, to the degree that informed consent is given on the basis of a detailed understanding of what the research participant's involvement is likely to entail, he or she in a sense acknowledges that the right to privacy has been surrendered for that limited domain. Of course, the research participant does not abrogate the right to privacy entirely by providing informed consent. As we have seen, when people agree to be interviewed, they will frequently refuse to answer certain questions on whatever grounds they feel are justified. Often, these refusals will be based on a feeling that certain questions delve into private realms or cover topic areas that they find sensitive and they do not wish to make these public, regardless of the fact that the interview is conducted in private. However, the MRS acknowledges that, although there are some topics that can be judged sensitive to everyone, because of the nature of the subject, it is impossible for the researcher to know beforehand which topics may be sensitive to a particular individual. It therefore recommends that the researcher 'treat each case sensitively and individually, giving respondents a genuine opportunity to withdraw'.

Covert methods are usually deemed to be violations of the privacy principle on the grounds that participants are not being given the opportunity to refuse invasions of their privacy. Such methods also mean that they might reveal confidences or information that they would not have revealed if they had known about the status of the confidant as researcher. The issue of privacy is invariably linked to issues of anonymity and confidentiality in the research process, an area that has already been touched on in the context of the question of whether or not harm comes to participants. The BSA *Statement* forges this kind of connection: 'The anonymity and privacy of those who participate in the research process should be respected. Personal information concerning research participants should be kept confidential. In some cases it may be necessary to decide whether it is proper or appropriate to record certain kinds of sensitive information.' Invasion of privacy can also be a particular issue when dealing with certain kinds of data, such as photographs (see Research in focus 5.7).

Raising issues about ensuring anonymity and confidentiality in relation to the recording of information and the maintenance of records relates to all methods of business research. In other words, while covert research may pose certain kinds of problem regarding the invasion of privacy, other methods of business research are implicated in possible difficulties in connection with anonymity and confidentiality.

## Deception

Deception occurs when researchers represent their research as something other than what it is. The obedience-to-authority study by Milgram referred to in Research in focus 5.3 involves deception, because participants are led to believe they are administering real electric shocks.



## Research in focus 5.7
## Invasion of privacy in visual research

As S. Warren (2002: 240) notes, 'the very act of holding a camera up to one's eye and pointing it at someone is an obvious and potentially intrusive activity which cannot be "disguised" in the same way as making field-notes in a journal or even tape-recording an interview'. Ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality are thus potentially more problematic because of the instant recognizability of photographic images. Legal issues can also be more complex, especially those pertaining to copyright ownership (Pink 2001). As a precaution, in her study of organizational aesthetics (see Research in focus 16.13), Warren did not use any photographs that revealed distinguishing organizational features, such as logos. She also used digital image manipulation software to obscure the faces of the few people in the photographs in order to protect their anonymity.

Another example of the consequences of the ethical sensitivity of using photographs in research is found in Bolton, Pole, and Mizen's (2001) research into child employment (see Research in focus 16.13), where the researchers gave the young people involved in the study a disposable camera for them to take photographs of their place of work. Several of the young people chose to opt out of the photographic part of the study because they were worried that taking photographs might jeopardize their employment, while others, who had wanted to participate in the photographic study, found that when they took the camera into work they were able to take only one or two shots before being asked not to take photographs by their employer. The researchers conclude: 'in these situations it is the absence of photographs that begins to tell us something about the work experiences of the children by providing an insight into the power relations that govern their employment' (2001: 512).

Another less extreme example is provided by Holliday (1995) in her ethnographic study of small firms (see Research in focus 5.8). In pretending to be a student interested in small firms in order to get information about a competitor's product, Holliday was clearly engaged in an element of deception. The AoM *Code of Ethical Conduct* states:

> Deception should be minimized, and, when necessary, the degree and effects must be mitigated as much as possible. Researchers should carefully weigh the gains achieved against the cost in human dignity. To the extent that concealment or deception is necessary, the researcher must provide a full and accurate explanation to participants at the conclusion of the study, including counselling, if appropriate.

Deception in various degrees is probably quite widespread in much research, because researchers often want to limit participants' understanding of what the research is about so that they respond more naturally to the experimental treatment. Indeed, some ethical codes appear to condone the strictly bounded use of deception, in order to preserve the naturalness of the data. For example, in the section on informed consent it was mentioned that the MSR *Code of Conduct* states that respondents should be told at the *beginning* of an interview if observation techniques or recording equipment are to be used. However, if it is felt that this knowledge might bias the respondent's subsequent behaviour, the respondent may be told about the recording at the *end* of the interview. They should then be given the opportunity to see or hear the relevant section of the record, and, if they so wish, 'the record or relevant section of it must be destroyed or deleted'.

The ethical objection to deception seems to turn on two points. First, it is not a nice thing to do. While the SRA *Guidelines* recognizes that deception is widespread in social interaction, it is hardly desirable. Secondly, there is the question of professional self-interest. If business researchers became known as snoopers who deceived people as a matter of professional course, the image of our work would be adversely affected and we might experience difficulty in gaining financial support and the

## Research in focus 5.8
## An example of an ethical fieldwork dilemma

Holliday (1995: 17–18) describes an ethical dilemma that she faced during her fieldwork.

> I arranged to visit a small electronics company owned by a friend of a colleague. The night before I was due to visit the company my temperature soared to 103 degrees and I went down with 'flu. However, I felt that I could not break the arrangement at such short notice, so I decided to go to the factory anyway . . . I got to the factory at 10 am. Eventually Raj, the owner-manager, arrived. We had spent 10 minutes touring the factory when he asked me if I could drive. I said that I could, so he asked me if I would drive him to another factory about fifteen miles south . . . Business and lunch over we walked back to the car (to my great relief—at last I could go home) . . . As we pulled out of the car park, Raj turned to me and said, 'I'd just like to pop down to an exhibition in Birmingham—is that okay?' My heart sank, but I didn't have the strength to protest, so off to Birmingham we went.
>
> During the journey down, Raj told me about a crisis which had occurred very recently within his company. Another small firm had ordered a very substantial piece of equipment from him, which had required a huge amount of development work. Once the item was supplied the company which placed the order promptly declared itself bankrupt and refused to pay . . . By the time we reached Birmingham my sense of injustice was well and truly inflamed . . . 'So', Raj continued, 'this company has a display of *our product* here today and I want to get their brochure on it. The trouble is they'll know me, so you'll have to get it. We'll split up at the door and I'll meet you in an hour. Tell them you're a customer or something . . .' I couldn't believe it. I was being asked to commit industrial espionage in my first few hours of fieldwork . . .
>
> I got the brochure pretending to be a student—from Southampton, interested in researching small firms. I even got an invitation to the factory to come and research them. Then I passed the intelligence to Raj and began the long drive back. I arrived home at 8.30 pm exhausted and feverish, and with a very guilty conscience.

cooperation of future prospective research participants. As the SRA *Guidelines* puts it:

> It remains the duty of social researchers and their collaborators, however, not to pursue methods of inquiry that are likely to infringe human values and sensibilities. To do so, whatever the methodological advantages, would be to endanger the reputation of social research and the mutual trust between social researchers and society which is a prerequisite for much research.

One of the chief problems with the discussion of this aspect of ethics is that deception is, as some writers observe, widespread in business research (see the stance Ethical transgression is pervasive in Key concept 5.2). As the example from C. K. Lee's (1998) research illustrates, it is rarely feasible or desirable to provide participants with a totally complete account of what your research is about. Bulmer (1982), whose stance is predominantly that of a universalist in ethics terms (see Key concept 5.2), nonetheless recognizes that there are bound to be instances such as this and deems them justifiable. However, it is very difficult to know where the line should be drawn here.

# Other ethical and legal considerations

However, in addition to the four main ethical principles identified by Diener and Crandall (1978), there are other ethical considerations that need to be taken into account in planning a research project that have been made more prominent as the result of recent changes within the social science research community. These relate to work carried out by research funding bodies such as the ESRC and the European Union, which have been active in

recent years in developing ethical frameworks that apply to all social science researchers, including those in the field of business and management. The ESRC *Research Ethics Framework* is the result of discussion and consultation with the social science community and other key stakeholders. Although the guidelines apply specifically to research projects funded by these organizations, which will eventually have to show that they have met the requirements set out in the framework in order to receive funding, it is likely that they will also in due course affect awareness of all university social science researchers about ethical matters. These codes and the discussions surrounding their development can be found at:
***www.respectproject.org/main/index.php*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
***www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/ESRCInfoCentre/opportunities/research_ethics_framework*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Another example of the heightened awareness of ethical issues in university-based research relates to the development of the Missenden Code, which aims to address the challenges posed by the increased commercialization of research and shifts in the source of research funding. This code is also available on the Internet at:
***www.missendencentre.co.uk/Ethics_report.pdf*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

However, rather than being intended as a replacement for the ethics codes developed by professional associations such as those described earlier in this chapter, these frameworks are intended to supplement existing codes and to encourage their further development. Because of this, it is worthwhile reviewing here the main areas that they cover in addition to the four main ethical principles that we have already discussed. These relate to:

- the impact of data protection legislation;
- the role of reciprocity in determining the relationship between the researcher and research participants;
- the need to declare sources of funding and support that may affect the affiliations of the researcher, causing conflicts of interest.

A further issue that you may encounter if you intend to conduct research in a National Health Service organization, such as a hospital, or a local authority social care organization is that it will come within the terms of reference of the *Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care* issued by the Department of Health in 2005. This document can be found at:
***www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4108962*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

This document includes recommendations about ethics and ethics-related issues. In the views of many commentators, the *Framework* considerably expands the range of issues covered by ethical considerations. For example, in paragraph 2.3.1, it is suggested that: 'Research which duplicates other work unnecessarily or which is not of sufficient quality to contribute something useful to existing knowledge is in itself unethical.' Such a position enlarges the scope of ethical considerations well beyond the kinds of issues addressed by Diener and Crandall (1978). Further information on the ethics of research in the NHS can also be found at:
***www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

## Data management

The routine collection and storing of digital data and the practices of data sharing raise new concerns about confidentiality and other ethical issues. They raise questions about the extent to which information can legitimately be used for research purposes that may be different from the original reason for collecting the data. This issue focuses on who owns the data and under what circumstances people are entitled to use it. In obtaining informed consent from research participants, any long-term preservation and sharing plans should be made explicit, so these decisions need to be made at the outset of a project. A good source of advice on the management and sharing of data is the UK Data Archive (2009), which states:

> The ease with which digital data can be stored, disseminated and made accessible to secondary users via the internet means that many institutions embrace the sharing of research data to increase the impact and visibility of their research. (UK Data Archive 2009: 3)

As this statement highlights, it is increasingly common for researchers to be encouraged to make their data available to the wider scientific community so that maximum potential benefit may be gained from it. This raises issues relating to data security, the extent to which data need to be protected from unauthorized access or usage, particularly if they contain personal information relating to individuals, such as individuals' names, addresses, occupations, or

photographs. The specific piece of legislation that determines the extent to which personal data may be used for research purposes in the UK is the 1998 Data Protection Act. Common techniques for enhancing security include separating personal identifiers from expressions of opinion and storing them separately. The physical as well as technical security of data should be attended to—for example, by keeping filing cabinets and offices containing data locked and having password-protected databases.

There is a further category in the Data Protection Act that relates to sensitive personal data, such as information about a data subject's political or religious beliefs, ethnic origin, or whether he or she belongs to a trade union. This type of data is more rigorously protected, and there is greater onus on the researcher to obtain explicit, usually written, consent from data subjects for the processing of this type of personal data. However, the Act does provide for certain exemptions in the case of personal data that are collected for research purposes—namely, that, where personal data are processed for research that is not likely to cause damage or distress to any of the data subjects concerned, they may be kept and further processed at a later stage for other purposes. Additionally, as long as the results of the research are not published in any form that identifies any particular data subject, respondents do not have right of access to the data.

Because the legislation surrounding data protection varies from country to country, the RESPECT project set out to identify some common principles for European researchers to bear in mind when dealing with data-protection issues. This involved a group of legal specialists who reviewed the existing EU legislation and came up with a common set of guidelines for researchers to follow in dealing with this issue. These guidelines, which are extremely detailed and run for over eighty pages, can be viewed in full at the following address: ***www.respectproject.org/data/415data.pdf*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

The length and detail of this report highlights the complexity of this issue, for which researchers may be advised to take legal advice. However, it is worth highlighting three of the recommendations that the authors of the report make. These include:

- that researchers draft an outline of the processing operations (this is not limited to electronic processing) involved in their use of the data *before* they start to process it, so they can assess the legality of their usage in advance, rather than perform the operations and then find out afterwards whether or not they are permitted to use the data in this way. This point highlights the potential seriousness of using data unlawfully, for which criminal or administrative sanctions may be applied;
- that researchers should decide who is the controller of the data and thus responsible for its usage, and on the basis of this determine which national legislation applies to their study. This is a particular issue in situations involving a group of researchers working together on a research project but based in different countries. This decision also depends on where the data processing will be carried out;
- that prior to the processing the researcher should define who will be the data subjects and take precautions to respect their rights in relation to the data.

## Copyright

A further issue affected by legal considerations is copyright. Copyright is an intellectual property right that protects the owner of copyright from unauthorized copying. Most research publications, reports, and books, as well as raw data such as spreadsheets and interview transcripts, are protected by copyright. For employed researchers, the first owner of copyright is usually the employer. However, many universities waive this right in relation to research data and publications and give it to the researcher. Some researchers use Creative Commons licences, which allow the creators of works to waive some of their rights in order to allow their work to be used more freely. The UK Data Archive provides a very helpful explanation of the situation regarding copyright:

> In the case of interviews, the interviewee holds the copyright in the spoken word. If a transcription is a substantial reproduction of the words spoken, the speaker will own copyright in the words and the transcriber will have separate copyright of the transcription. (UK Data Archive 2009: 23)

The important thing to remember is that, if you want to share your data with other researchers, you will need to get copyright clearance from the interviewee for this at the time of the interview. There are also particular copyright issues pertaining to the use of visual data. For example, in order to reproduce a photograph in publication, consent may be required from the subject in the photograph as well the person who took it, who is usually the

first owner of copyright; in such cases copyright is jointly shared.

## Reciprocity and trust

We have argued elsewhere (Bell and Bryman 2007, Bell and Wray Bliss 2007) that ethics codes increasingly emphasize the importance of openness and honesty in communicating information about the research to all interested parties. Although this issue is related to the ethical principles of informed consent and avoiding deception discussed above, it goes further than these existing principles in placing the responsibility on researchers for taking action that helps to overcome the power inequalities between themselves and research participants, and for ensuring that the research has benefits for them both. For example, the ESRC *Research Ethics Framework* makes frequent mention of the need to communicate benefits to research participants. At its most advanced, this incorporates the concept of reciprocity, the idea that the research should be of mutual benefit to researcher and participants and that some form of collaboration or active participation should be built into the research project from the outset. This encourages a view of the research relationship as a mutually beneficial exchange between researcher and participants who see each other as moral beings and enforce on each other adherence to a set of agreed-upon moral norms (Wax 1982). It also resonates with developments in qualitative research that have sought to reconceptualize researcher–subject relationships (see Chapter 16).



### Telling it like it is
### Seeking to establish reciprocity by sharing research findings

One of the ways in which students can establish a degree of reciprocity within a small-scale research project is through agreeing to share their findings with research participants by sending them a report based on the dissertation project or a copy of the dissertation. As Karen explained: 'There were a lot of people while I was doing the research who said, "Oh, I'd love to see what your findings are and what your conclusions are" and that sort of thing. 'Cos it brings up a lot of issues sort of even more broadly than just recruitment as to, you know, "Well, is it a good idea that we're doing this sort of thing?" and "What is it doing to the whole organizational culture?" So there were lots of people who were very interested in it. So I sent them a copy [of the dissertation once I had] finished it. I don't know what they'll do with it! [*chuckles*] Whether anybody'll actually sit down and read all fifty pages of it I don't know.'

In Tom's study of call centres he agreed to produce a report for the organization as a condition of his access arrangements. However, it was not entirely clear from the start whether or not this report was principally for management or call-centre employees. 'There [was] an interesting question about who was I working for. Was I reporting back to the management or to the work force or to both? I kind of fudged it and said I was reporting back to both of them and I came back and I tried to produce an even-handed report which would say, "Here are some things that you could think about doing which might be useful." My job was made a lot easier because I got the sense that relationships between the management and the work force were pretty good. If I'd gone in and found a lot more antagonism or a much more difficult relationship, it would have been much more difficult to think how I was going to pitch that. I could easily have fallen into a trap on that and I didn't think about it very carefully beforehand. As it was, it turned out okay, and the circumstances meant that it wasn't a contentious issue.'

The decision to share findings with research participants also raises particular ethical issues relating to the protection of anonymity, since it is especially important that individuals cannot be identified if decisions might be made by the organization based on the information collected through your research (see Chapter 16 for some examples of this). If you have agreed to provide feedback findings from your research to people within the organization, especially if these are people with decision-making authority, you need to be very clear in explaining this when seeking the fully informed consent of individuals involved in the study.

On the other hand, sharing your findings with research participants can also help to make the research process a more open exchange, because it helps to take account of the power relations between the researcher and the

people being studied (see the section on researcher–subject relationships in Chapter 16 for further discussion of this). This is particularly so if you share your findings during the research rather than at the end of it, so that research participants have the opportunity to question and add to your interpretations of the data. The views of research participants in response to your initial findings can then be written into the dissertation project. This helps to overcome the tendency towards interpretative omnipotence—a common feature of academic writing (see Chapter 27). However, these practices are more common in qualitative than quantitative research, because the former is less concerned with the possibility that this might introduce bias into the study.



*To hear more about Karen's and Tom's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

## Affiliation and conflicts of interest

In all areas of scientific study, it is recognized that affiliations, particularly those related to funding, have the potential to influence the way that research issues are defined and findings presented. The Missenden Code aims to address the challenges posed by the increased commercialization in universities and shifts in the source of research funding. The code, which was set up following a number of high-profile ethical controversies (see Thinking deeply 5.9), recommends that universities set up ethics committees to monitor the sources of sponsorship and funding, and to ensure that the source of funding is acknowledged in any publication. The code claims that ethical implications arise when research is financially underwritten by a source that has a vested interest in the results. However, this does not mean that it is automatically biased, rather that it may be perceived to be biased, for example, by the media, and therefore it is able to be discredited. Moreover, no research is truly independent. Even if it is not in receipt of funding from commercial sources, it is clear that the money must come from somewhere, such as a government source, which will also have interests in funding certain kinds of research and coming up with particular findings. Similarly, in many postgraduate MBA student research projects, the study forms part of a dissertation for a degree that is at least partly funded by the student's employer. Therefore, the main thing for researchers to be conscious of is the possibility that questions about funding have the potential to affect the credibility of the research and that they should be explicit and open about the resources that enabled their research in any publication.



### Thinking deeply 5.9
### A funding controversy in a university business school

In December 2000, Nottingham University accepted £3.8 million from British American Tobacco to set up the International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility within Nottingham University Business School. This prompted the professor leading one of Nottingham's top research teams working in the field of cancer research to leave, taking fifteen of his staff with him. Cancer Research UK, which was funding medical research at the university, subsequently withdrew its £1.5 million grant and launched a new code of conduct that recommended research support not be provided to any university faculty that is in receipt of tobacco industry funding. However, Nottingham University insisted that it had been following these guidelines, because the money that funded the International Centre for Corporate Social Responsibility was kept completely separate from any area of research funded by Cancer Research UK. The case prompted a heated exchange among academics, one letter angrily commenting that it must only be a matter of time before someone founded a Pinochet Centre for the study of human rights. Because the tobacco industry has a history of subverting scientific research that does not support its commercial interests, as portrayed in the feature film *The Insider*, it was seen as unacceptable by some that Nottingham University should accept financial support from this source.

(C. Clark, 'Letter: Stub out BAT Cash', 8 Dec. 2000; T. Tysome, 'Tobacco Link Causes Cancer Team to Leave', 23 March 2001, *Times Higher Education Supplement.*)



## Tips and skills

## ESRC recommendations for ethical review of student research projects

In line with Kent et al.'s (2002) prediction that recent developments within the social sciences will mean that ethical oversight regimes will be less 'light touch' in orientation than current structures, the new ESRC *Research Ethics Framework* has a section entitled 'Arrangements should be made for research students', which deals specifically with undergraduate and postgraduate students. It states:

> 1.13.1 The ESRC wants social scientists to engage with ethical issues from the start of their research careers. . . .
>
> 1.13.2 Universities and research organizations should establish procedures specifically for reviewing research projects undertaken by undergraduate students and students on taught postgraduate courses. Student research poses particular challenges in relation to ethical review because of the large numbers, short timescales and limited scope of the projects involved . . . It should be made clear to potential research participants that the study is a student project.
>
> 1.13.3 While the same high ethical standards should be expected in student research, the process of ethical review may be more appropriately managed at department level and overseen by research supervisors. This does not lessen the requirement for universities to ensure that students are not exposed to undue risk in conducting their research. (ESCR, *Research Ethics Framework* 2010: 16)

A case could be made for considering student research through a particular form of expedited review. Undergraduate and taught postgraduate research might be reviewed by multidisciplinary committees with a proportion of the members from outside the school or faculty but within the University. As student projects are not externally funded individually, there is less of a conflict of interests within the University.



# The difficulties of ethical decision-making

The difficulty of drawing the line between ethical and unethical practices can be revealed in several ways. The issue of some members of social settings being aware of the researcher's status and the nature of his or her investigation has been mentioned on several occasions. Manuals about interviewing are full of advice about how to entice interviewees to open up about themselves. Researchers using Likert scales reword items to identify 'yeasayers' and 'naysayers'. Interviewers frequently err on the low side when asked how long an interview will take. Women may use their identity as women to influence female interviewees in in-depth interviews to probe into their lives and reveal inner thoughts and feelings, albeit with a commitment to feminist research (Oakley 1981; Finch 1984; Freeman 2000). Qualitative research is frequently very open-ended, and, as a result, research questions are either loose or not specified, so that it is doubtful whether or not ethnographers in particular are able to inform others accurately about the nature of their research. Perhaps, too, some interviewees find the questions we ask unsettling or find the cut and thrust of a focus group discussion stressful, especially if they inadvertently reveal more than they might have intended.

There are, in other words, many ways in which there is the potential for deception and, relatedly, lack of informed consent in business research. These instances are, of course, a far cry from the deceptions perpetrated in the research summarized in Research in focus 5.1 and Research in focus 5.3, but they point to the difficulty of arriving at ethically informed decisions. Ethical codes give advice on patently inappropriate practices, though sometimes leaving some room for manoeuvre, as we have seen, but provide less guidance on marginal areas of ethical decision-making. Indeed, guidelines may even be used by

research participants against the researcher when they seek to limit the boundaries of a fieldworker's investigation (Punch 1994). Finally, computer technology, and in particular the use of the Internet as a data collection method, has introduced new ethical challenges for researchers that will be discussed in Chapter 26.

This might lead business researchers to regard ethical issues as a series of obstacles that need to be overcome so that they can get on with their study. There is no doubt that the level of ethical scrutiny business researchers face in relation to their activities has increased in recent years, and the burden of responsibility for demonstrating that ethical issues have been satisfactorily addressed has been placed firmly on the shoulders of researchers. Some universities require even undergraduate and postgraduate student research projects to go through an ethical approval process, and the prospect of having one's research scrutinized by an ethics committee can seem daunting for a new researcher. Moreover, these requirements can encourage a bureaucratic compliance-based approach whereby, once ethical approval has been obtained, the researcher tends to assume that ethical considerations can be set to one side as having been dealt with. However, nothing could be farther from the truth; we believe it is vitally important for qualitative and quantitative researchers continually to revisit ethical issues throughout their study and to see them as an integral part of the research process.



## *Checklist*

### Ethical issues to consider

- ◯ Have you read and incorporated into your research the principles associated with at least one of the major professional associations mentioned in this book?
- ◯ Have you read and incorporated the requirements for doing ethical research in your institution?
- ◯ Have you found out whether or not all proposed research needs to be submitted to the body in your institution that is responsible for the oversight of ethical issues?
- ◯ If only certain types of research need to be submitted, have you checked to see whether or not your proposed research is likely to require clearance?
- ◯ Have you checked to ensure that there is no prospect of any harm coming to participants?
- ◯ Does your research conform to the principle of informed consent, so that research participants understand:
  - ◯ what the research is about?
  - ◯ the purposes of the research?
  - ◯ who is sponsoring it?
  - ◯ the nature of their involvement in the research?
  - ◯ how long their participation is going to take?
  - ◯ that their participation is voluntary?
  - ◯ that they can withdraw from participation in the research at any time?
  - ◯ what is going to happen to the data (e.g. how are the data going to be kept)?
- ◯ Are you confident that the privacy of the people involved in your research will not be violated?
- ◯ Do you appreciate that you should not divulge information or views to your research participants that other research participants have given you?
- ◯ Have you taken steps to ensure that your research participants will not be deceived about the research and its purposes?

- ○ Have you taken steps to ensure that the confidentiality of data relating to your research participants will be maintained?
- ○ Once the data have been collected, have you taken steps to ensure that the names of your research participants and the location of your research (such as the name of the organization(s) in which it took place) are not identifiable?
- ○ Does your strategy for keeping your data in electronic form comply with data-protection legislation?
- ○ Once your research has been completed, have you met obligations that were a requirement of doing the research (for example, submitting a report to an organization that allowed you access)?



## Key points

- This chapter has been concerned with a limited range of issues concerning ethics in business research, in that it has concentrated on ethical concerns that might arise in the context of collecting and analysing data. Our concern has mainly been with relations between researchers and research participants. Other ethical issues can arise in the course of business research.
- While the codes and guidelines of professional associations provide some guidance, their potency is ambiguous, and they often leave the door open for some autonomy with regard to ethical issues.
- The main areas of ethical concern relate to: harm to participants; lack of informed consent; invasion of privacy; and deception.
- Covert observation and certain notorious studies have been particular focuses of concern.
- The boundaries between ethical and unethical practices are not clear cut.
- Writers on social research ethics have adopted several different stances in relation to the issue.
- While the rights of research participants are the chief focus of ethical principles, concerns about professional self-interest are also of concern.



## Questions for review

- Why are ethical issues important in relation to the conduct of business research?
- Outline the different stances on ethics in social research.

### *Ethical principles*

- Does 'harm to participants' refer to physical harm alone?
- What are some difficulties with following this ethical principle?
- Why is the issue of informed consent so hotly debated?
- What are some of the difficulties of following this ethical principle?
- Why is the privacy principle important?
- What principles concerning the use of personal data are expressed in the 1998 Data Protection Act?
- Why does deception matter?
- How helpful are studies like Milgram's, Zimbardo's, and Dalton's in terms of understanding the operation of ethical principles in business research?

***The difficulties of ethical decision-making***

- How easy is it to conduct ethical research?
- Read one of the ethical guidelines referred to in this chapter. How effective is it in guarding against ethical transgressions?
- Were the actions taken by Holliday (1995) and described in Research in focus 5.8 ethical? (Explain your viewpoint using the framework provided in this chapter.) Would you have behaved differently in these circumstances? If so, how?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Ethics in Business Research.*

# Part Two

Part Two of this book is concerned with quantitative research. Chapter 6 sets the scene by exploring the main features of this research strategy. Chapter 7 discusses the ways in which we sample people on whom we carry out research. Chapter 8 focuses on the structured interview, which is one of the main methods of data collection in quantitative research, and in survey research in particular. Chapter 9 is concerned with another prominent method of gathering data through survey research—questionnaires that people complete themselves. Chapter 10 provides guidelines on how to ask questions for structured interviews and questionnaires. Chapter 11 discusses structured observation, a method that provides a systematic approach to the observation of people. Chapter 12 addresses content analysis, which is a distinctive and systematic approach to the analysis of a wide variety of documents. Chapter 13 discusses the possibility of using in your own research data collected by other researchers or official statistics. Chapter 14 presents some of the main tools you will need to conduct quantitative data analysis. Chapter 15 shows you how to use computer software in the form of SPSS—a very widely used package of programs—to implement the techniques learned in Chapter 14.

These chapters will provide you with the essential tools for doing quantitative research. They will take you from the very general issues to do with the generic features of quantitative research to the very practical issues of conducting surveys and analysing your own data.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# 6

# The nature of quantitative research

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 150

**The main steps in quantitative research** 150

**Concepts and their measurement** 153
- What is a concept? 153
- Why measure? 154
- Indicators 154
- Using multiple-indicator measures 156
- Dimensions of concepts 157

**Reliability and validity** 157
- Reliability 157
- Stability 157
- Internal reliability 158
- Inter-observer consistency 159

**Validity** 159
- Face validity 160
- Concurrent validity 160
- Predictive validity 160
- Construct validity 160
- Convergent validity 160
- Reflections on reliability and validity 160

**The main preoccupations of quantitative researchers** 163
- Measurement 163
- Causality 163
- Generalization 163
- Replication 165

**The critique of quantitative research** 167
- Criticisms of quantitative research 167

**Is it always like this?** 169
- Reverse operationism 169
- Reliability and validity testing 169
- Sampling 170

***Key points*** 170

***Questions for review*** 171



## Chapter outline

This chapter is concerned with the characteristics of quantitative research, an approach that has been the dominant strategy for conducting business research, although its influence has waned slightly since the mid-1980s, when qualitative research became more influential. However, quantitative research continues to exert a powerful influence in many quarters. The emphasis in this chapter is very much on what quantitative research typically entails, although at a later point in the chapter the ways in which there are frequent departures from this ideal type are outlined. This chapter explores:

- the main steps of quantitative research, which are presented as a linear succession of stages;
- the importance of concepts in quantitative research and the ways in which measures may be devised for concepts; this discussion includes a discussion of the important idea of an *indicator*, which is devised as a way of measuring a concept for which there is no direct measure;
- the procedures for checking the reliability and validity of the measurement process;
- the main preoccupations of quantitative research, which are described in terms of four features: measurement; causality; generalization; and replication;
- some criticisms that are frequently levelled at quantitative research.

# Introduction

In Chapter 1 quantitative research was outlined as a distinctive research strategy. In very broad terms, it was described as entailing the collection of numerical data and as exhibiting a view of the relationship between theory and research as deductive, a predilection for a natural science approach (and of positivism in particular), and as having an objectivist conception of social reality. A number of other features of quantitative research were outlined, but in this chapter we will be examining the strategy in much more detail.

It should be abundantly clear by now that the description of the research strategy as 'quantitative research' should not be taken to mean that quantification of aspects of social life is all that distinguishes it from a qualitative research strategy. The very fact that it has a distinctive epistemological and ontological position suggests that there is a good deal more to it than the mere presence of numbers. In this chapter, the main steps in quantitative research are outlined. We also examine some of the principal preoccupations of the strategy and how certain issues of concern among practitioners are addressed, such as the concerns about measurement validity.



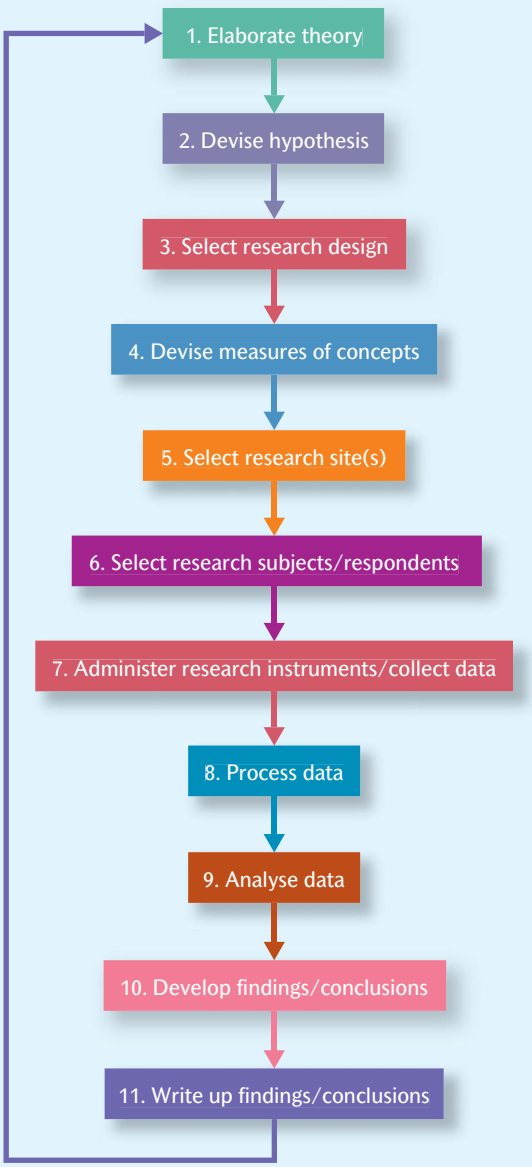
# The main steps in quantitative research

Figure 6.1 outlines the main steps in quantitative research. This is very much an ideal-typical account of the process: it is probably never or rarely found in this pure form, but it represents a useful starting point for getting to grips with the main ingredients of the approach and the links between them. Research is rarely as linear and as straightforward as the figure implies, but its aim is to do no more than capture the main steps and to provide a rough indication of their interconnections.

Some of the chief steps have been covered in the first two chapters. The fact that we start off with theory signifies that a broadly deductive approach to the relationship

## Figure 6.1

### The process of quantitative research




between theory and research is taken. It is common for outlines of the main steps of quantitative research to suggest that a hypothesis is deduced from the theory and is tested. This notion has been incorporated into Figure 6.1. However, a great deal of quantitative research does not entail the specification of a hypothesis, and instead theory acts loosely as a set of concerns in relation to which the business researcher collects data. The specification of hypotheses to be tested is particularly likely to be found in experimental research. Although other research designs sometimes entail the testing of hypotheses, as a general rule, we tend to find that Step 2 is more likely to be found in experimental research.

The next step entails the selection of a research design, a topic that was explored in Chapter 2. As we have seen, the selection of research design has implications for a variety of issues, such as the external validity of findings and researchers' ability to impute causality to their findings. Step 4 entails devising measures of the concepts in which the researcher is interested. This process is often referred to as *operationalization*, a term that originally derives from physics to refer to the operations by which a concept (such as temperature or velocity) is measured (Bridgman 1927). Aspects of this issue will be explored later on in this chapter.

The next two steps entail the selection of a research site or sites and then the selection of subjects/respondents. (Experimental researchers tend to call the people on whom they conduct research 'subjects', whereas social survey researchers typically call them 'respondents'.) Thus, in social survey research an investigator must first be concerned to establish an appropriate setting for his or her research. A number of decisions may be involved. The *Affluent Worker* research undertaken by Goldthorpe et al. (1968: 2–5) involved two decisions about a research site or setting. First, the researchers needed a community that would be appropriate for the testing of the 'embourgeoisement' thesis (the idea that affluent workers were becoming more middle class in their attitudes and lifestyles). As a result of this consideration, Luton was selected. Secondly, in order to come up with a sample of 'affluent workers' (Step 6), it was decided that people working for three of Luton's leading employers should be interviewed. Moreover, the researchers wanted the firms selected to cover a range of production technologies, because of evidence at that time that technologies had implications for workers' attitudes and behaviour. As a result of these considerations, the three firms were selected. Industrial workers were then sampled, also in terms of selected criteria that were to do with the researchers' interests in embourgeoisement and in the implications of technology for work attitudes and behaviour. Research in focus 6.1 provides a much more recent example of research that involved similar deliberations about selecting research sites and sampling respondents. In experimental research, these two steps are likely to include the assignment of subjects into control and treatment groups.



## Research in focus 6.1

## Selecting research sites and sampling respondents: the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative

The Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI) involved research in six labour markets: Aberdeen, Coventry, Kirkcaldy, Northampton, Rochdale, and Swindon. These labour markets were chosen to reflect contrasting patterns of economic change in the early to mid-1980s and in the then recent past. Within each locality, three main surveys were carried out.

- *The Work Attitudes/Histories Survey*. Across the six localities a random sample of 6,111 individuals was interviewed using a structured interview schedule. Each interview comprised questions about the individual's work history and about a range of attitudes.
- *The Household and Community Survey*. A further survey was conducted on roughly one-third of those interviewed for the Work Attitudes/Histories Survey. Respondents and their partners were interviewed by structured interview schedule, and each person also completed a self-completion questionnaire. This survey was concerned with such areas as the domestic division of labour, leisure activities, and attitudes to the welfare state.
- *The Baseline Employers Survey*. Each individual in each locality interviewed for the Work Attitudes/Histories Survey was asked to provide details of his or her employer (if appropriate). A sample of these employers was then interviewed by structured interview schedule. The interview schedules covered such areas as the gender distribution of jobs, the introduction of new technologies, and relationships with trade unions.

The bulk of the results was published in a series of volumes, including Penn, Rose, and Rubery (1994) and A. M. Scott (1994). This example shows clearly the ways in which researchers are involved in decisions about selecting both research site(s) and respondents.

Step 7 involves the administration of the research instruments. In experimental research, this is likely to entail pre-testing subjects, manipulating the independent variable for the experimental group, and post-testing respondents. In cross-sectional research using social survey research instruments, it will involve interviewing the sample members by structured interview schedule or distributing a self-completion questionnaire. In research using structured observation, this step will mean an observer (or possibly more than one) watching the setting and the behaviour of people and then assigning categories to each element of behaviour.

Step 8 simply refers to the fact that, once information has been collected, it must be transformed into 'data'. In the context of quantitative research, this is likely to mean that it must be prepared so that it can be quantified. With some information this can be done in a relatively straightforward way—for example, for information relating to such things as people's ages, incomes, number of years spent at school, and so on. For other variables, quantification will entail *coding* the information—that is, transforming it into numbers to facilitate the quantitative analysis of the data, particularly if the analysis is going to be carried out by computer. Codes act as tags that are placed on data about people to allow the information to be processed by the computer. This consideration leads into Step 9—the analysis of the data. In this step, the researcher is concerned to use a number of techniques of quantitative data analysis to reduce the amount of data collected, to test for relationships between variables, to develop ways of presenting the results of the analysis to others, and so on.

On the basis of the analysis of the data, the researcher must interpret the results of the analysis. It is at this stage that the 'findings' will emerge. The researcher will consider the connections between the findings that emerge out of Step 8 and the various preoccupations that acted as the impetus of the research. If there is a hypothesis, is it supported? What are the implications of the findings for the theoretical ideas that formed the background to the research?

Then the research must be written up. It cannot take on significance beyond satisfying the researcher's personal curiosity until it enters the public domain in some way by being written up as a paper to be read at a conference, or as a report to the agency that funded the research, or as a book or journal article for academic business researchers. In writing up the findings and conclusions,

the researcher is doing more than simply relaying what has been found to others: readers must be convinced that the research conclusions are important and that the findings are robust. Thus, a significant part of the research process entails convincing others of the significance and validity of one's findings.

Once the findings have been published, they become part of the stock of knowledge (or 'theory' in the loose sense of the word) in their domain. Thus, there is a feedback loop from Step 11 back up to Step 1. The presence of both an element of deductivism (Step 2) and inductivism (the feedback loop) is indicative of the positivist foundations of quantitative research. Similarly, the emphasis on the translation of concepts into measures (Step 4) is symptomatic of the principle of phenomenalism (see Key concept 1.7), which is also a feature of positivism. It is to this important phase of translating concepts into measures that we now turn. As we will see, certain considerations follow on from the stress placed on measurement in quantitative research. By and large, these considerations are to do with the validity and reliability of the measures devised by social scientists. These considerations will figure prominently in the following discussion.

As noted before presenting the model in Figure 6.1, this sequence of stages is a kind of ideal-typical account that is probably rarely found in this pure form. At the end of this chapter, the section 'Is it always like this?' deals with three ways in which the model may not be found in practice.



# Concepts and their measurement

## What is a concept?

**Concepts** are the building blocks of theory and represent the points around which business research is conducted. Just think of the numerous concepts that are mentioned in relation to just some of the research examples cited in this book:

structure, agency, deskilling, organizational size, technology, charismatic leadership, followers, TQM, functional subcultures, knowledge, managerial identity, motivation to work, moral awareness, productivity, stress management, employment relations, organizational development, competitive success.

Each represents a label that we give to elements of the social world that seem to have common features and that strike us as significant. As Bulmer succinctly puts it, concepts 'are categories for the organization of ideas and observations' (1984: 43). One item mentioned in Chapter 2 but omitted from the list of concepts above is IQ. It has been omitted because it is not a concept! It is a *measure* of a concept—namely, intelligence. This is a rare case of a social scientific measure that has become so well known that the measure and the concept are almost as synonymous as temperature and the centigrade or Fahrenheit scales, or as length and the metric scale. The concept of intelligence has arisen as a result of noticing that some people are very clever, some are quite clever, and still others are not at all bright. These variations in what we have come to call the concept of 'intelligence' seem important, because we might try to construct theories to explain these variations. We may try to incorporate the concept of intelligence into theories to explain variations in things like job competence or entrepreneurial success. Similarly, with indicators of organizational performance such as productivity or return on investment, we notice that some organizations improve their performance relative to others, others remain static, and others decline in economic value. Out of such considerations, the concept of organizational performance is reached.

If a concept is to be employed in quantitative research, it will have to be measured. Once they are measured, concepts can be in the form of independent or dependent variables. In other words, concepts may provide an explanation of a certain aspect of the social world, or they may stand for things we want to explain. A concept like organizational performance may be used in either capacity: for example, as a possible explanation of culture (are there differences between highly commercially successful organizations and others, in terms of the cultural values, norms, and beliefs held by organizational members?) or as something to be explained (what are the causes of variation in organizational performance?). Equally, we might be interested in evidence of changes in organizational performance over time or in variations between comparable nations in levels of organizational performance. As we start to investigate such issues, we are likely to formulate theories to help us understand why,

for example, rates of organizational performance vary between countries or over time. This will, in turn, generate new concepts, as we try to tackle the explanation of variation in rates.

## Why measure?

There are three main reasons for the preoccupation with measurement in quantitative research.

- Measurement allows us to delineate *fine differences* between people in terms of the characteristic in question. This is very useful, since, although we can often distinguish between people in terms of extreme categories, finer distinctions are much more difficult to recognize. We can detect clear variations in levels of job satisfaction—people who love their jobs and people who hate their jobs—but small differences are much more difficult to detect.
- Measurement gives us a *consistent device* or yardstick for making such distinctions. A measurement device provides a consistent instrument for gauging differences. This consistency relates to two things: our ability to be consistent over time and our ability to be consistent with other researchers. In other words, a measure should be something that is influenced neither by the timing of its administration nor by the person who administers it. Obviously, saying that the measure is not influenced by timing is not meant to indicate that measurement readings do not change: they are bound to be influenced by the process of social change. What it means is that the measure should generate consistent results, other than those that occur as a result of natural changes. Whether a measure actually possesses this quality has to do with the issue of *reliability*, which was introduced in Chapter 2 and which will be examined again below.
- Measurement provides the basis for *more precise estimates of the degree of relationship between concepts* (for example, through **correlation** analysis, which will be examined in Chapter 14). Thus, if we measure both job satisfaction and the things with which it might be related, such as stress-related illness, we will be able to produce more precise estimates of how closely they are related than if we had not proceeded in this way.

## Indicators

In order to provide a measure of a concept (often referred to as an **operational definition**, a term deriving from the idea of operationalization), it is necessary to have an **indicator** or indicators that will stand for the concept (see Key concept 6.2). There are a number of ways in which indicators can be devised:

- through a question (or series of questions) that is part of a structured interview schedule or self-completion questionnaire; the question(s) could be concerned with the respondents' report of an attitude (for example, job satisfaction) or their employment status (for example, job title) or a report of their behaviour (for example, job tasks and responsibilities);
- through the recording of individuals' behaviour using a structured **observation schedule** (for example, managerial activity);
- through official statistics, such as the use of Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) data (see Research in focus 2.14) to measure UK employment policies and practices;
- through an examination of mass media content through content analysis—for example, to determine changes in the salience of an issue, such as courage in managerial decision-making (Harris 2001).



## Key concept 6.2
## What is an indicator?

It is worth making two distinctions here. First, there is a distinction between an *indicator* and a *measure*. The latter can be taken to refer to things that can be relatively unambiguously counted. At an individual level, measures might include personal salary, age, or years of service, whereas at an organizational level they might include annual turnover or number of employees. Measures, in other words, are quantities. If we are interested, for example, in some of the correlates of variation in the age of employees in part-time employment, age can be quantified in a reasonably direct way. We use indicators to tap concepts that are less directly quantifiable. If we are interested in the causes of variation in job satisfaction, we will need indicators that will stand for the concept. These indicators will allow job satisfaction to be measured and we can treat the resulting quantitative information as if it were a measure. An indicator, then, is something that is devised or already exists and that is

employed *as though it were a measure of a concept*. It is viewed as an indirect measure of a concept, like job satisfaction. An IQ test is a further example, in that it is a battery of indicators of the concept intelligence. We see here a second distinction between *direct* and *indirect* indicators of concepts. Indicators may be direct or indirect in their relationship to the concepts for which they stand. Thus, an indicator of marital status has a much more direct relationship to its concept than an indicator (or set of indicators) relating to job satisfaction. Sets of attitudes always need to be measured by batteries of indirect indicators. So too do many forms of behaviour. When indicators are used that are not true quantities, they will need to be coded to be turned into quantities. Directness and indirectness are not qualities inherent to an indicator: data from a survey question on amount earned per month may be a direct measure of personal income, but, if we treat it as an indicator of social class, it becomes an indirect measure. The issue of indirectness raises the question of where an indirect measure comes from—that is, how does a researcher devise an indicator of something like job satisfaction? Usually, it is based on common-sense understandings of the forms the concept takes or on anecdotal or qualitative evidence relating to that concept.

Indicators, then, can be derived from a wide variety of sources and methods. Very often the researcher has to consider whether one indicator of a concept will be sufficient. This consideration is frequently a focus for social survey researchers. Rather than have just a single indicator of a concept, the researcher may feel that it may be preferable to ask a number of questions in the course of a structured interview or a self-completion questionnaire that tap that concept (see Research in focus 6.3 and Research in focus 6.4).



## Research in focus 6.3
## A multiple-indicator measure of a concept

The research on cultural values and management ethics by Jackson (2001) involved a questionnaire survey of part-time MBA and post-experience students in Australia, China, Britain, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Spain, India, Switzerland, and the USA. This contained twelve statements, each relating to a specific action, and respondents were asked to judge the extent to which they *personally* believed the action was ethical on a five-point **scale**, 1 = unethical; 5 = ethical. There was a middle point on the scale that allowed for a neutral response. This approach to investigating a cluster of attitudes is known as a **Likert scale**, though in some cases researchers use a seven-point scale rather than a five-point scale for responses. The twelve statements were as follows:

- accepting gifts/favours in exchange for preferential treatment;
- passing blame for errors to an innocent co-worker;
- divulging confidential information;
- calling in sick to take a day off;
- pilfering organization's materials and supplies;
- giving gifts/favours in exchange for preferential treatment;
- claiming credit for someone else's work;
- doing personal business on organization's time;
- concealing one's errors;
- taking extra personal time (breaks, etc.);
- using organizational services for personal use;
- not reporting others' violations of organizational policies.

Respondents were also asked to judge the extent to which they thought their *peers* believed the action was ethical, using the same scale. Finally, using the same Likert scale, they were asked to evaluate the frequency with which they and their peers act in the way implied by the statement: 1 = infrequently; 5 = frequently. 'Hence, respondents make a judgement as to the extent to which they believe (or they think their colleagues believe) an action is ethical: the higher the score, the higher the belief that the action is ethical' (2001: 1283). The study found that, across all national groups, managers saw their colleagues as less ethical than themselves. The findings also supported the view that ethical attitudes vary according to cultural context.



## Research in focus 6.4

## Specifying dimensions of a concept: the case of job characteristics

A key question posed by Hackman and Oldham (1980) was: 'How can work be structured so that employees are internally motivated?' Their answer to this question relied on development of a model identifying five job dimensions that influence employee motivation. At the heart of the model is the suggestion that particular job characteristics ('core job dimensions') affect employees' experience of work ('critical psychological states'), which in turn have a number of outcomes for both the individual and the organization. The three critical psychological states are:

- *experienced meaningfulness*: individual perceives work to be worthwhile in terms of a broader system of values;
- *experienced responsibility*: individual believes him or herself to be personally accountable for the outcome of his or her efforts;
- *knowledge of results*: individual is able to determine on a regular basis whether or not the outcomes of his or her work are satisfactory.

In addition, a particular employee's response to favourable job characteristics is affected by his or her 'growth need strength'—that is, his or her need for personal growth and development. It is expected that favourable work outcomes will occur when workers experience jobs with positive core characteristics; this in turn will stimulate critical psychological states.

In order to measure these factors, Hackman and Oldham devised the Job Diagnostic Survey (JDS), a lengthy questionnaire that can be used to determine the Motivating Potential Score (MPS) of a particular job—that is, the extent to which it possesses characteristics that are necessary to influence motivation. Below are the five dimensions; in each case an example is given of an item that can be used to measure it.

1. *Skill variety*: 'The job requires me to use a number of complex or high-level skills.'
2. *Task identity*: 'The job provides me with the chance completely to finish the pieces of work I begin.'
3. *Task significance*: 'This job is one where a lot of other people can be affected by how well the work gets done.'
4. *Autonomy*: 'The job gives me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do the work.'
5. *Feedback*: 'The job itself provides plenty of clues about whether or not I am performing well.'

Respondents are asked to indicate how far they think each statement is accurate, from 1 = very inaccurate, to 7 = very accurate. In Hackman and Oldham's initial study, the JDS was administered to 658 individuals working in 62 different jobs across 7 organizations. Interpreting an individual's MPS score involves comparison with norms for specific job 'families', which were generated on the basis of this original sample. For example, professional/technical jobs have an average MPS of 154, whereas clerical jobs normally have a score of 106. Understanding the motivational potential of job content thus relies on interpretation of the MPS relative to that of other jobs and in the context of specific job families. Workers who exhibit high growth need strength, adequate knowledge, and skill, and are satisfied with their job context, are expected to respond best to jobs with a high MPS.

## Using multiple-indicator measures

What are the advantages of using a multiple-indicator measure of a concept? The main reason for its use is a recognition that there are potential problems with a reliance on just a single indicator:

- It is possible that a single indicator will incorrectly classify many individuals. This may be due to the wording of the question or it may be a product of misunderstanding. But, if there are a number of indicators, if people are misclassified through a particular question, it will be possible to offset its effects.

- One indicator may capture only a portion of the underlying concept or be too general. A single question may need to be of an excessively high level of generality and so may not reflect the true state of affairs for the people replying to it. Alternatively, a question may cover only one aspect of the concept in question. For example, if you were interested in job satisfaction, would it be sufficient to ask people how satisfied they were with their pay? Almost certainly not, because most people would argue that there is more to job satisfaction than just satisfaction with pay. A single indicator such as this would be missing out on such things as satisfaction with conditions, with the work itself, and with other aspects of the work environment. By asking a number of questions, the researcher can get access to a wider range of aspects of the concept.
- You can make much finer distinctions. Taking the Terence Jackson (2001) measure as an example (see Research in focus 6.3), if we just took one of the indicators as a measure, we would be able to array people only on a scale of 1 to 5, assuming that answers indicating that a manager believed an item was unethical were assigned 1 and answers indicating a manager believed an item was ethical were assigned 5, with the three other points being scored 2, 3, and 4. However, with a multiple-indicator measure of twelve indicators the range is 12 ($12 \times 1$) to 60 ($12 \times 5$).

## Dimensions of concepts

One elaboration of the general approach to measurement is to consider the possibility that the concept in which you are interested comprises different dimensions. This view is associated particularly with Lazarsfeld (1958). The idea behind this approach is that, when the researcher is seeking to develop a measure of a concept, the different aspects or components of that concept should be considered. This specification of the dimensions of a concept would be undertaken with reference to theory and research associated with that concept. An example of this kind of approach can be discerned in Hofstede's (1984; see Research in focus 1.12) delineation of four dimensions of cultural difference (power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, and masculinity). Bryman and Cramer (2004) demonstrate the operation of this approach with reference to the concept of 'professionalism'. The idea is that people scoring high on one dimension may not necessarily score high on other dimensions, so that for each respondent you end up with a multidimensional 'profile'. Research in focus 6.4 demonstrates the use of dimensions in connection with the concept of internal motivation to work.

However, in much if not most quantitative research, there is a tendency to rely on a single indicator of concepts. For many purposes this is quite adequate. It would be a mistake to believe that investigations that use a single indicator of core concepts are somehow deficient. In any case, some studies employ both single- and multiple-indicator measures of concepts. What *is* crucial is whether or not measures are reliable and whether or not they are valid representations of the concepts they are supposed to be tapping. It is to this issue that we now turn.



# Reliability and validity

Although the terms *reliability* and *validity* seem to be almost like synonyms, they have quite different meanings in relation to the evaluation of measures of concepts, as was seen in Chapter 2.

## Reliability

As Key concept 6.5 suggests, reliability is fundamentally concerned with issues of consistency of measures. There are at least three different meanings of the term. These are outlined in Key concept 6.5 and elaborated upon below.

## Stability

The most obvious way of testing for the stability of a measure is the *test–retest* method. This involves administering a test or measure on one occasion and then readministering it to the same sample on another occasion, i.e.

| $T_1$ | $T_2$ |
|---|---|
| $Obs_1$ | $Obs_2$ |

We should expect to find a high correlation between $Obs_1$ and $Obs_2$. Correlation is a measure of the strength of the relationship between two variables. This topic will



# Key concept 6.5
# What is reliability?

*Reliability* refers to the consistency of a measure of a concept. The following are three prominent factors involved when considering whether a measure is reliable.

- *Stability*. This consideration entails asking whether or not a measure is stable over time, so that we can be confident that the results relating to that measure for a sample of respondents do not fluctuate. This means that, if we administer a measure to a group and then readminister it, there will be little variation over time in the results obtained.
- **Internal reliability**. The key issue is whether or not the indicators that make up the scale or **index** are consistent—in other words, whether or not respondents' scores on any one indicator tend to be related to their scores on the other indicators.
- *Inter-observer consistency*. When a great deal of subjective judgement is involved in such activities as the recording of observations or the translation of data into categories and where more than one 'observer' is involved in such activities, there is the possibility that there is a lack of consistency in their decisions. This can arise in a number of contexts, for example: in content analysis where decisions have to be made about how to categorize media items; when answers to open-ended questions have to be categorized; or in structured observation when observers have to decide how to classify subjects' behaviour.

be covered in Chapter 14 in the context of a discussion about quantitative data analysis. Let us imagine that we develop a multiple-indicator measure that is supposed to tap a concept that we might call 'designerism' (a preference for buying goods and especially clothing with 'designer' labels). We would administer the measure to a sample of respondents and readminister it some time later. If the correlation is low, the measure would appear to be unstable, implying that respondents' answers cannot be relied upon.

However, there are a number of problems with this approach to evaluating reliability. First, respondents' answers at $T_1$ may influence how they reply at $T_2$. This may result in greater consistency between $Obs_1$ and $Obs_2$ than is in fact the case. Secondly, events may intervene between $T_1$ and $T_2$ that influence the degree of consistency. For example, if a long span of time is involved, changes in the economy or in respondents' personal financial circumstances could influence their views about and predilection for designer goods. There are no obvious solutions to these problems, other than by introducing a complex research design and so turning the investigation of reliability into a major project in its own right. Perhaps for these reasons, many if not most reports of research findings do not appear to carry out tests of stability. Indeed, longitudinal research is often undertaken precisely in order to identify social change and its correlates.

## Internal reliability

This meaning of reliability applies to multiple-indicator measures like those examined in Research in focus 6.3 and Research in focus 6.4. When you have a multiple-item measure in which each respondent's answers to each question are aggregated to form an overall score, the possibility is raised that the indicators do not relate to the same thing; in other words, they lack coherence. We need to be sure that all our designerism indicators are related to each other. If they are not, some of the items may actually be unrelated to designerism and therefore indicative of something else. An example of a study that assessed internal reliability is given in Research in focus 6.9.

One way of testing internal reliability is the *split-half* method. We can take the management ethics measure developed by Terence Jackson (2001) as an example (see Research in focus 6.3). The twelve indicators would be divided into two halves, with six in each group. The indicators would be allocated on a random or an odd–even basis. The degree of correlation between scores on the two halves would then be calculated. In other words, the aim would be to establish whether respondents scoring high on one of the two groups also scored high on the other group of indicators. The calculation of the correlation will yield a figure, known as a coefficient, that varies between 0 (no correlation and therefore no internal consistency) and 1 (perfect correlation and therefore complete internal consistency). It is usually expected that a result of 0.8 and above implies an acceptable level of internal reliability. Do not worry if these figures appear somewhat opaque. The meaning of correlation will be explored in much greater detail later on. The chief point to carry away with you at this stage is



## Key concept 6.6
## What is Cronbach's alpha?

To a large extent we are leaping ahead too much here, but it is important to appreciate the basic features of what this widely used test means. Cronbach's alpha is a commonly used test of internal reliability. It essentially calculates the average of all possible split-half reliability coefficients. A computed alpha coefficient will vary between 1 (denoting perfect internal reliability) and 0 (denoting no internal reliability). The figure 0.80 is typically employed as a rule of thumb to denote an acceptable level of internal reliability, though many writers accept a slightly lower figure. For example, in the case of the burnout scale replicated by Schutte et al. (2000; see Research in focus 6.11), alpha was 0.7, which they suggest 'as a rule of thumb' is 'considered to be efficient' (2000: 56).

that the correlation establishes how closely respondents' scores on the two groups of indicators are related.

Nowadays, most researchers use a test of internal reliability known as *Cronbach's alpha* (see Key concept 6.6). Its use has grown as a result of its incorporation into computer software for quantitative data analysis.

### Inter-observer consistency

The idea of inter-observer consistency is briefly outlined in Key concept 6.5. The issues involved are rather too advanced to be dealt with at this stage and will be briefly touched on in later chapters. Cramer (1998: ch. 14) provides a very detailed treatment of the issues and appropriate techniques.



# Validity

As noted in Chapter 2, the issue of measurement validity has to do with whether or not a measure of a concept really measures that concept (see Key concept 6.7). When people argue about whether or not a person's IQ score really measures or reflects that person's level of intelligence, they are raising questions about the measurement validity of the IQ test in relation to the concept of intelligence. Similarly, one often hears people say that they do not believe that the Retail Price Index really reflects inflation and the rise in the cost of living. Again, a query is being raised in such comments about measurement validity. And whenever students or lecturers debate whether or not formal examinations provide an accurate measure of academic ability, they too are raising questions about measurement validity.

Writers on measurement validity distinguish between a number of types of validity. These types really reflect different ways of gauging the validity of a measure of a concept. These different types of validity will now be outlined.



## Key concept 6.7
## What is validity?

*Validity* refers to the issue of whether or not an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept really measures that concept. Several ways of establishing validity are explored in the text: face validity; **concurrent validity**; predictive validity; construct validity; and convergent validity. Here the term is being used as a shorthand for what was referred to as *measurement validity* in Chapter 2. Measurement validity should therefore be distinguished from the other terms introduced in Chapter 2: internal validity; external validity; and ecological validity.

## Face validity

At the very minimum, a researcher who develops a new measure should establish that it has *face validity*—that is, that the measure apparently reflects the content of the concept in question. Face validity might be established by asking other people whether or not the measure seems to be getting at the concept that is the focus of attention. In other words, people, possibly those with experience or expertise in a field, might be asked to act as judges to determine whether or not on the face of it the measure seems to reflect the concept concerned. Face validity is, therefore, an essentially intuitive process.

## Concurrent validity

The researcher might seek also to gauge the *concurrent validity* of the measure. Here the researcher employs a *criterion* on which cases (for example, people) are known to differ and that is relevant to the concept in question. A new measure of job satisfaction can serve as an example. A criterion might be absenteeism, because some people are more often absent from work (other than through illness) than others. In order to establish the concurrent validity of a measure of job satisfaction, we might see if people who are satisfied with their jobs are less likely than those who are not satisfied to be *absent* from work. If a lack of correspondence was found, such as there being no difference in levels of job satisfaction among frequent absentees, doubt might be cast on whether or not our measure is really addressing job satisfaction. An example of a study that measured concurrent validity is given in Research in focus 6.9.

## Predictive validity

Another possible test for the validity of a new measure is *predictive validity*, whereby the researcher uses a *future* criterion measure, rather than a contemporary one, as in the case of concurrent validity. With predictive validity, the researcher would take future levels of absenteeism as the criterion against which the validity of a new measure of job satisfaction would be examined. The difference from concurrent validity is that a future rather than a simultaneous criterion measure is employed. An example of a study that measured predictive validity is given in Research in focus 6.9.

## Construct validity

Some writers advocate that the researcher should also estimate the *construct validity* of a measure. Here, the researcher is encouraged to deduce hypotheses from a theory that is relevant to the concept. For example, drawing upon ideas about the impact of technology on the experience of work, the researcher might anticipate that people who are satisfied with their jobs are less likely to work on routine jobs; those who are not satisfied are more likely to work on routine jobs. Accordingly, we could investigate this theoretical deduction by examining the relationship between job satisfaction and job routine. However, some caution is required in interpreting the absence of a relationship between job satisfaction and job routine in this example. First, either the theory or the deduction that is made from it might be misguided. Secondly, the measure of job routine could be an invalid measure of that concept.

## Convergent validity

In the view of some methodologists, the validity of a measure ought to be gauged by comparing it to measures of the same concept developed through other methods. For example, if we develop a questionnaire measure of how much time managers spend on various activities (such as attending meetings, touring their organization, informal discussions, and so on), we might examine its validity by tracking a number of managers and using a structured observation schedule to record how much time is spent in various activities and their frequency. An example of convergent *in*validity is described in Research in focus 6.8.

## Reflections on reliability and validity

There are, then, a number of ways of investigating the merit of measures that are devised to represent social scientific concepts. However, the discussion of reliability and validity is potentially misleading, because it would be wrong to think that all new measures of concepts are submitted to the rigours described above. In fact, most typically, measurement is undertaken within a stance that Cicourel (1964) described as 'measurement by fiat'. By the term 'fiat', Cicourel was referring not to a well-known Italian car manufacturer but to the notion of 'decree'. He meant that most measures are simply asserted. Fairly straightforward but minimal steps may be taken to ensure that a measure is reliable and/or valid, such as testing for internal reliability when a **multiple-indicator measure** has been devised and examining face validity. But in many, if not the majority, of cases in which a concept is measured, no further testing takes place. This point will be further elaborated below.



## Research in focus 6.8

## The study of strategic HRM: a case of convergent *in*validity?

Researchers in the field of human resource management (HRM) have sought to develop and test basic hypotheses concerning the impact of strategic HRM on firm performance. They have set out to measure the extent to which 'high performance work practices' (including comprehensive recruitment and selection procedures, incentive compensation and performance management systems, employee involvement, and training) are related to organizational performance.

In one of the earliest empirical studies of this topic, published in the *Academy of Management Journal*, Arthur (1994) focused on a sample of US steel minimills (relatively small steel-producing facilities) and drew on his previous research in which two types of human resource systems were identified—labelled 'control' and 'commitment'. He explains his approach as follows: 'I developed and tested propositions regarding the utility of this human resource system taxonomy for predicting both manufacturing performance, measured as labor efficiency and scrap rate, and the level of employee turnover' (1994: 671). Based on questionnaire responses from human resource managers at 30 minimills, Arthur's conclusions are that commitment systems were more effective than control systems of HRM, being associated with lower scrap rates and higher labour efficiency than with control. In the following year, Huselid (1995) published a paper in the same journal claiming that high-performance work practices associated with a commitment model of HRM have an economically and statistically significant impact on employee outcomes such as turnover and productivity and on measures of corporate financial performance. Results were based on a sample of nearly 1,000 US firms drawn from a range of industries, and data were collected using a postal questionnaire, which was addressed to the senior human resources professional in each firm.

However, this strong tradition of questionnaire-based research is not without its critics. One assumption they tend to make is that HRM effectiveness affects firm performance, but it may be that human resource managers who work in a firm that is performing well tend to think the firm's HRM system must be effective. Moreover, the reliance of these researchers on questionnaire data implies a lack of convergent validity, and their tendency to focus on HRM managers as the main or only respondents implies a potential managerial bias. This has been the focus of more recent critiques (Pfeffer 1997) and has led to more qualitative empirical study (e.g. Truss 2001; see Research in focus 25.7) in order to overcome the limitations of earlier work. Some of this research calls into question the validity of the proposed relationship between high-performance human resources practices and firm performance identified in earlier studies.

It should also be borne in mind that, although reliability and validity are analytically distinguishable, they are related because validity presumes reliability. This means that if your measure is not reliable, it cannot be valid. This point can be made with respect to each of the three criteria of reliability that have been discussed. If the measure is not stable over time, it simply cannot be providing a valid measure. The measure could not be tapping the concept it is supposed to be related to if the measure fluctuated. If the measure fluctuates, it may be measuring different things on different occasions. If a measure lacks internal reliability, it means that a multiple-indicator measure is actually measuring two or more different things, therefore, the measure cannot be valid. Finally, if there is a lack of inter-observer consistency, it means that observers cannot agree on the meaning of what they are observing, which in turn means that a valid measure cannot be in operation.



## Research in focus 6.9

# Assessing the internal reliability and the concurrent and predictive validity of a measure of organizational climate

Patterson et al. (2005) describe the way they went about validating a measure they developed of organizational climate. This is a rather loose concept that was first developed in the 1960s and 1970s to refer to the perceptions of an organization by its members. Four main dimensions of climate were developed, based around the following notions:

1. *human relations model*: feelings of belonging and trust in the organization and the degree to which there is training, good communication, and supervisory support;
2. *internal process model*: the degree of emphasis on formal rules and on traditional ways of doing things;
3. *open systems model*: the extent to which flexibility and innovativeness are valued;
4. *rational goal model*: the degree to which clearly defined objectives and the norms and values associated with efficiency, quality, and high performance are emphasized.

An Organizational Climate Measure, comprising 95 items in a 4-point Likert format (definitely likely, mostly false, mostly true, definitely true) was developed and administered to employees in 55 organizations, with 6,869 completing a questionnaire—a response rate of 57 per cent. A factor analysis (see Key concept 6.12) was conducted to explore the extent to which there were distinct groupings of items that tended to go together. This procedure yielded seventeen scales, such as autonomy, involvement, innovation and flexibility, and clarity of organizational goals.

The *internal reliability* of the scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, showing that all scales were at a level of 0.73 or above. This suggests that the measure's constituent scales were internally reliable.

*Concurrent validity* was assessed following semi-structured interviews with each company's managers in connection with their organization's practices. The interview data were coded to provide criteria against which the validity of the scales could be gauged. In most cases, the scales were found to be concurrently valid. For example, the researchers examined the correlation between a scale designed to measure the emphasis on tradition and the degree to which practices associated with the 'new manufacturing paradigm' (Patterson et al. 2005: 397) were adopted, as revealed by the interview data. The correlation was –0.42, implying that those firms that were perceived as rooted in tradition tended to be less likely to adopt new manufacturing practices. Here the adoption of new manufacturing practices was treated as a criterion to assess the extent to which the scale measuring perceptions of tradition really was addressing tradition. If the correlation had been small or positive, the concurrent validity of the scale would have been in doubt.

To assess *predictive validity*, the researchers asked a senior **key informant** at each company to complete a questionnaire one year after the main survey had been conducted. The questionnaire was meant to address two of the measure's constituent scales, one of which was the innovation and flexibility scale. It asked the informants to assess their companies in terms of their innovativeness in a number of areas. For example, the correlation between the innovation and flexibility scale and informants' assessment of their companies in terms of innovativeness with respect to products achieved a correlation of 0.53. This implies that there was indeed a correlation between perceptions of innovativeness and flexibility and a subsequent indicator of innovativeness.



# The main preoccupations of quantitative researchers

Both quantitative and qualitative research can be viewed as exhibiting a set of distinctive but contrasting preoccupations. These preoccupations reflect epistemologically grounded beliefs about what constitutes acceptable knowledge. In this section, four distinctive preoccupations that can be discerned in quantitative research will be outlined and examined: measurement, causality, generalization, and replication.

## Measurement

The most obvious preoccupation is with measurement, a feature that is scarcely surprising in the light of much of the discussion in the present chapter so far. From the position of quantitative research, measurement carries a number of advantages that were previously outlined. It is not surprising, therefore, that issues of reliability and validity are a concern for quantitative researchers, though this is not always manifested in research practice.

## Causality

There is a very strong concern in most quantitative research with explanation. Quantitative researchers are rarely concerned merely to describe how things are, but are keen to say why things are the way they are. This emphasis is also often taken to be a feature of the ways in which the natural sciences proceed. Thus, researchers are often not only interested in a phenomenon like motivation to work as something to be described, for example, in terms of how motivated a certain group of employees are, or what proportion of employees in a sample are highly motivated and what proportion are largely lacking in motivation. Rather, they are likely to want to explain it, which means examining its causes. The researcher may seek to explain motivation to work in terms of personal characteristics (such as 'growth need strength', which refers to an individual's need for personal growth and development—see Research in focus 6.4) or in terms of the characteristics of a particular job (such as task interest or degree of supervision). In reports of research you will often come across the idea of 'independent' and 'dependent' variables, which reflect the tendency to think in terms of causes and effects. Motivation to work might be regarded as the dependent variable, which is to be explained, and 'growth need strength' as an independent variable, which therefore has a causal influence upon motivation.

When an experimental design is being employed, the independent variable is the variable that is manipulated. There is little ambiguity about the direction of causal influence. However, with cross-sectional designs of the kind used in most social survey research, there is ambiguity about the direction of causal influence in that data concerning variables are simultaneously collected. Therefore, we cannot say that an independent variable precedes the dependent one. To refer to independent and dependent variables in the context of cross-sectional designs, we must *infer* that one causes the other, as in the example concerning 'growth need strength' and motivation to work in the previous paragraph. We must draw on common sense or theoretical ideas to infer the likely temporal precedence of variables. However, there is always the risk that the inference will be wrong (see Research in focus 25.9 for an example of this possibility).

The concern about causality is reflected in the preoccupation with internal validity that was referred to in Chapter 2. There it was noted that a criterion of good quantitative research is frequently the extent to which there is confidence in the researcher's causal inferences. Research that exhibits the characteristics of an experimental design is often more highly valued than cross-sectional research, because of the greater confidence that can be enjoyed in the causal findings associated with the former. For their part, quantitative researchers who employ cross-sectional designs are invariably concerned to develop techniques that will allow causal inferences to be made. Moreover, the emergence of longitudinal research like WERS (see Research in focus 2.14) almost certainly reflects a desire on the part of quantitative researchers to improve their ability to generate findings that permit a causal interpretation.

## Generalization

In quantitative research the researcher is usually concerned to be able to say that his or her findings can be generalized beyond the confines of the particular context in which the research was conducted. Thus, if a study of motivation to work is carried out by a questionnaire with a number of people who answer the questions, we often

want to say that the results can apply to individuals other than those who responded in the study. This concern reveals itself in survey research in the attention that is often given to the question of how one can create a representative sample. Given that it is rarely feasible to send questionnaires to or interview whole populations (such as all members of a town, or the whole population of a country, or all members of an organization), we have to sample. However, we will want the sample to be as representative as possible in order to be able to say that the results are not unique to the particular group upon whom the research was conducted; in other words, we want to be able to generalize the findings beyond the cases (for example, the people) that make up the sample. The preoccupation with generalization means some researchers become focused on developing lawlike principles about human behaviour that can be used to predict what people will do in certain situations. To complicate matters further, this research is sometimes based on studies of animal rather than human behaviour, thus raising the question of whether or not behaviour can be generalized from one species to another (see Research in focus 6.10).



## Research in focus 6.10
## Generalizability and behaviour: Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs

The study of animals has formed an important part of the research design used in several psychological studies of human behaviour (e.g. Skinner 1953). The logic behind this strategy relies on the assumption that non-human behaviour can provide insight into the essential aspects of human nature that have ensured our survival as a species. This has made non-human study particularly attractive in areas such as motivational research, where early studies conducted on mice, rats, pigeons, monkeys, and apes have been used to inform understanding of human behaviour and in particular the relationship between motivation and performance (see Vroom 1964 for a review). However, some writers have cast doubt on the potential generalizability of such findings. In other words, do results from these studies apply equally to humans or should the findings be treated as unique to the particular species on which the study was conducted?

An interesting illustration of this debate is to be found in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, which remains one of the most well-known theories of motivation within business and management, even though much subsequent research has cast doubt on the validity of his theory. One of these critics has been Cullen (1997), who has drawn attention to the empirical research on which the theory is based. Cullen argues that Maslow developed the needs hierarchy using his observations of primate behaviour, which revealed differences between individuals in terms of dominant behaviour. Maslow used these observations as a basis for arguing that people vary in the extent to which they are inclined to progress through the needs hierarchy.

However, as Cullen points out, the fundamental problem with motivation theory's use of Maslow's hierarchy is not necessarily the fact that the theory is based on data generated through the study of primates, since several other management theories rely on insights drawn from animal studies. The problem instead relates to the nature of the animal data on which Maslow based his understanding of dominance. In particular, his conclusion that the confidence of some monkeys allowed them to dominate others was based on the study of caged animals that were largely kept isolated from each other: 'If we rely on a theory based on animal data that was collected more than 60 years ago, we are obligated to consider the accuracy and validity of that data' (1997: 368). Cullen suggests that recent studies of free-living primates in their natural habitats have called into question previous understandings of dominance and aggression but 'the experimental methods Maslow used did not permit him to see the social skills involved in establishing and maintaining dominance in non-human primate societies' (1997: 369). This alternative interpretation of dominance 'would seem to have more relevance for complex social settings such as organizations than does Maslow's individualistic interpretation' (1997: 369). Her main argument is that, if we intend to apply insights from the study of primates in order to understand the behaviour of humans in organizations, we cannot afford to ignore current debates and changes in understanding that occur in other research fields.

Probability sampling, which will be explored in Chapter 7, is the main way in which researchers seek to generate a representative sample. This procedure largely eliminates bias from the selection of a sample by using a process of random selection. The use of a random selection process does not guarantee a representative sample, because, as will be seen in Chapter 7, there are factors that operate over and above the selection system used that can jeopardize the representativeness of a sample. A related consideration here is this: even if we did have a representative sample, what would it be representative *of*? The simple answer is that it will be representative of the population from which it was selected. This is certainly the answer that sampling theory gives us. Strictly speaking, we cannot generalize beyond that population. This means that, if the members of the population from which a sample is taken are all inhabitants of a town, city, or region, or are all members of an organization, we can generalize only to the inhabitants or members of the town, city, region, or organization. But it is very tempting to see the findings as having a more pervasive applicability, so that, even if the sample was selected from a large organization like IBM, the findings are relevant to all similar organizations. We should not make inferences beyond the population from which the sample was selected, but researchers frequently do so. The concern to be able to generalize is often so deeply ingrained that the limits to the generalizability of findings are frequently forgotten or sidestepped.

The concern with generalizability or external validity is particularly strong among quantitative researchers using cross-sectional and longitudinal designs. There is a concern about generalizability among experimental research, as the discussion of external validity in Chapter 2 suggested, but users of this research design usually give greater attention to internal validity issues.

## Replication

The natural sciences are often depicted as wishing to reduce to a bare minimum the contaminating influence of the scientist's biases and values. The results of a piece of research should be unaffected by the researcher's special characteristics or expectations. If biases and lack of objectivity were pervasive, the claims of the natural sciences to provide a definitive picture of the world would be seriously undermined. As a check upon the influence of these potentially damaging problems, scientists may seek to replicate—that is, to reproduce—each other's experiments. If there was a failure to replicate, so that a scientist's findings repeatedly could not be reproduced, serious questions would be raised about the validity of his or her findings. Consequently, scientists often attempt to be highly explicit about their procedures so that an experiment is capable of replication. Likewise, quantitative researchers in the social sciences often regard replication, or more precisely the ability to replicate, as an important ingredient of their activity. It is easy to see why: the possibility of a lack of objectivity and of the intrusion of the researcher's values would appear to be much greater when examining the social world than when the natural scientist investigates the natural order. Consequently, it is often regarded as important that the researcher spells out clearly his or her procedures so that they can be replicated by others, even if the research does not end up being replicated. The study by Schutte et al. (2000) described in Research in focus 6.11 relies on replication of the Maslach Burnout Inventory—General Survey, a psychological measure that has been used by the authors to test for emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment across a range of occupational groups and nations.

It has been relatively straightforward and therefore quite common for researchers to replicate the Job Characteristic Model, developed by Hackman and Oldham (1980, see Research in focus 6.4), in order to enhance confidence in the theory and its findings. Several of these have attempted to improve the generalizability of the model through its replication in different occupational settings—for example, on teachers, university staff, nursery school teachers, and physical education and sport administrators. However, some criticism has been levelled at the original research for failing to make explicit how the respondent sample was selected, beyond the fact that it involved a diverse variety of manual and non-manual occupations in both manufacturing and service sectors, thus undermining the potential generalizability of the investigation (Bryman 1989*a*). A further criticism relates to the emphasis that the model places on particular characteristics of a job, such as feedback from supervisors, which may be less of a feature in today's working context than they were in the late 1970s. A final criticism made of subsequent replications of the initial study is that they fail to test the total model, focusing on the core job characteristics rather than incorporating the effects of the mediating psychological states, which Hackman and Oldham suggest are the 'causal core of the model' (1976: 255).

A study by Johns, Xie, and Fang (1992) attempts to address this last criticism by specifically focusing on the mediating and moderating effects of psychological states on the relationship between job characteristics and outcomes. Basing their research on a random sample of 605 first- and second-level managers in a large utility company



## Research in focus 6.11

# Testing validity through replication: the case of burnout

The Maslach Burnout Inventory relies on the use of a questionnaire to measure the syndrome of burnout, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment; it is particularly associated with individuals who do 'people work of some kind'. Findings from the original, North American study (Maslach and Jackson 1981) led the authors to conclude that burnout has certain debilitating effects, resulting ultimately in a loss of professional efficacy.

This particular study by Schutte et al. (2000) attempted to replicate these findings across a number of occupational groups (managers, clerks, foremen, technicians, blue-collar workers) in three different nations—Finland, Sweden, and Holland. However, subsequent tests of the Maslach Burnout Inventory scale suggested a need for revisions that would enable its use as a measure of burnout in occupational groups other than the human services, such as nurses, teachers, and social workers, for whom the original scale was intended. Using this revised, General Survey version, the researchers sought to investigate its *factorial validity*, or the extent to which the dimensions of burnout could be measured using the same questionnaire items in relation to different occupational and cultural groupings than the original study (see Key concept 6.12 for an explanation of *factor analysis*).

Following Hofstede (1984; see Research in focus 1.12), employees were drawn from the same multinational corporation in different countries, in order to minimize the possibility that findings would reflect 'idiosyncracies' associated with one company or another. The final sample size of 9,055 reflected a response rate to the questionnaire of 63 percent.

The inventory comprises three subscales, each measured in terms of a series of items. An example of each is given below:

- *Exhaustion* (*Ex*): 'I feel used up at the end of the workday.'
- *Cynicism* (*Cy*): 'I have become less enthusiastic about my work.'
- *Professional Efficacy* (*PE*): 'In my opinion I am good at my job.'

The individual responds according to a seven-point scale, from 0 = never, to 6 = daily. High scores on Ex and Cy and low scores on PE are indicative of burnout. A number of statistical analyses were carried out; for example, the reliability of the subscales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha as an indicator of internal consistency, meeting the criterion of 0.70 in virtually all the (sub)samples.

The authors conclude that their present study:

- confirms that burnout is a three-dimensional concept;
- clearly demonstrates the factorial validity of the scale across occupational groups;
- reveals that the three subscales are sufficiently internally consistent.

Furthermore, significant differences were found in the pattern of burnout among white- and blue-collar workers, the former scoring higher on PE and lower on Cy. In interpreting these findings they argue that the higher white-collar PE scores may have arisen because 'working conditions are more favourable for managers than for workers, offering more autonomy, higher job complexity, meaningful work, and more respect for co-workers' (2000: 64).

Conversely: 'The relatively high scores on Cy for blue-collar workers reflect indifference and a more distant attitude towards their jobs. This might be explained by the culture on the shopfloor where distrust, resentment, and scepticism towards management and the organization traditionally prevail' (2000: 64).

Finally, they note that there were significant differences across national samples, the Dutch employees having scores that were consistently lower than their Swedish or Finnish colleagues. The authors conclude that the Maslach Burnout Inventory—General Survey is a suitable instrument for measuring burnout in occupational groups other than human services and in nations apart from those that are North American.

(response rate approximately 50 percent), the authors used a slightly modified version of the JDS questionnaire to determine the relationship between job characteristics, psychological states, and outcome variables. Their results provide some support for the mediating role of psychological states in determining outcomes based on core job characteristics—however, not always in the way that is specified by the model. In particular, some personal characteristics, such as educational level, were found to affect psychological states in a reverse manner to that which was expected—those with less education responded more favourably to elevated psychological states.

Another significant interest in replication stems from the original Aston studies (see Research in focus 2.6), which stimulated a plethora of replications over a period of more than thirty years following publication of the first generation of research in the early 1960s. Most clearly associated with replication were the 'fourth-generation' Aston researchers, who undertook studies that

- used a more homogenous sample drawn from a single industry, such as electrical engineering companies, 'to further substantiate the predictive power of the Aston findings' (Grinyer and Yasai-Ardekani 1980: 405); or
- extended the original findings to other forms of organization, such as churches (e.g. Hinings, Ranson, and Bryman 1976) or educational colleges (Holdaway et al. 1975).

Later proponents of the 'Aston approach' made international comparisons of firms in different countries in order to test the hypothesis that the relationship between the context and the structure of an organization was dependent on the culture of the country in which it operates. Studies conducted in China, Egypt, France, Germany, India, and Japan (e.g. Shenoy 1981) sought to test the proposition that some of the characteristic differences in organizational structure originally identified by the Aston researchers remained constant across these diverse national contexts.

However, replication is not a high-status activity in the natural or the social sciences, partly because it is often regarded as a pedestrian and uninspiring pursuit. Moreover, standard replications do not form the basis for attractive articles, so far as many academic journal editors are concerned. Consequently, replications of research appear in print far less frequently than might be supposed. A further reason for the low incidence of published replications is that it is difficult to ensure in business research that the conditions in a replication are precisely the same as those that pertained in an original study. So long as there is some ambiguity about the degree to which the conditions relating to a replication are the same as those in the initial study, any differences in findings may be attributable to the design of the replication rather than to some deficiency in the original study.

Nonetheless, it is often regarded as crucial that the methods taken in generating a set of findings are made explicit, so that it is *possible* to replicate a piece of research. Thus, it is *replicability* that is often regarded as an important quality of quantitative research.



# The critique of quantitative research

Over the years, quantitative research, along with its epistemological and ontological foundations, has been the focus of a great deal of criticism, particularly from exponents and spokespersons of qualitative research. To a very large extent, it is difficult to distinguish between different kinds of criticism when reflecting on the different critical points that have been proffered. These include: criticisms of quantitative research in general as a research strategy; criticisms of the epistemological and ontological foundations of quantitative research; and criticisms of specific methods and research designs with which quantitative research is associated.

## Criticisms of quantitative research

To give a flavour of the critique of quantitative research, four criticisms will be covered briefly.

- *Quantitative researchers fail to distinguish people and social institutions from 'the world of nature'*. The phrase 'the world of nature' is from the writings of Schutz and the specific quotation from which it has been taken can be found in Chapter 1. Schutz and other phenomenologists charge social scientists who employ a natural science model with treating the social world as if it were no different from the natural order. In so doing, they draw attention to one of positivism's

central tenets—namely, that the principles of the scientific method can and should be applied to all phenomena that are the focus of investigation. As Schutz argues, this tactic is essentially to imply that this means turning a blind eye to the differences between the social and natural world. More particularly, as was observed in Chapter 1, it therefore means ignoring and riding roughshod over the fact that people interpret the world around them, whereas this capacity for self-reflection cannot be found among the objects of the natural sciences ('molecules, atoms, and electrons', as Schutz put it).

- *The measurement process possesses an artificial and spurious sense of precision and accuracy*. There are a number of aspects to this criticism. For one thing, it has been argued that the connection between the measures developed by social scientists and the concepts they are supposed to be revealing is assumed rather than real; hence, Cicourel's (1964) notion of 'measurement by fiat'. Testing for validity in the manner described in the previous section cannot really address this problem, because the very tests themselves entail measurement by fiat. A further way in which the measurement process is regarded by writers like Cicourel as flawed is that it presumes that when, for example, members of a sample respond to a question on a questionnaire (which is itself taken to be an indicator of a concept), they interpret the key terms in the question similarly. For many writers, respondents simply do not interpret such terms similarly. An often used reaction to this problem is to use questions with fixed-choice answers, but this approach merely provides 'a solution to the problem of meaning by simply ignoring it' (Cicourel 1964: 108).
- *The reliance on instruments and procedures hinders the connection between research and everyday life*. This issue relates to the question of ecological validity that was raised in Chapter 2. Many methods of quantitative research rely heavily on administering research instruments to subjects (such as structured interviews and self-completion questionnaires) or on controlling situations to determine their effects (such as in experiments). However, as Cicourel (1982) asks, how do we know if survey respondents have the requisite knowledge to answer a question or if they are similar in their sense of the topic being important to them in their everyday lives? Thus, if respondents answer a set of questions designed to measure motivation to work, can we be sure that they are equally aware of what it is and its manifestations, and can we be sure that it is of equal concern to them in the ways in which it connects with their everyday working life? One can go even further and ask how well their answers relate to their everyday lives. People may answer a question designed to measure their motivation to work, but respondents' actual behaviour may be at variance with their answers (LaPiere 1934).
- *The analysis of relationships between variables creates a static view of social life that is independent of people's lives*. Blumer argued that studies that aim to bring out the relationships between variables omit 'the process of interpretation or definition that goes on in human groups' (1956: 685). This means that we do not know how what appears to be a relationship between two or more variables has been produced by the people to whom it applies. This criticism incorporates the first and third criticisms that have been referred to—that the meaning of events to individuals is ignored and that we do not know how such findings connect to everyday contexts—but adds a further element—namely, that it creates a sense of a static social world that is separate from the individuals who make up that world. In other words, quantitative research is seen as carrying an objectivist ontology that reifies the social world.

We can see in these criticisms the application of a set of concerns associated with a qualitative research strategy that reveals the combination of an interpretivist epistemological orientation (an emphasis on meaning from the individual's point of view) and a constructionist ontology (an emphasis on viewing the social world as the product of individuals rather than as something beyond them). The criticisms may appear very damning, but, as we will see in Chapter 16, quantitative researchers have a powerful battery of criticisms of qualitative research in their arsenal as well!



# Is it always like this?

One of the problems with characterizing any research strategy, research design, or research method is that to a certain extent one is always outlining an ideal-typical approach. In other words, one tends to create something that represents that strategy, design, or method, but that may not be reflected in its entirety in research practice. This gap between the ideal type and actual practice can arise as a result of at least two major considerations. First, it arises because those of us who write about and teach research methods cannot cover every eventuality that can arise in the process of business research, so that we tend to provide accounts of the research process that draw upon common features. Thus, a model of the process of quantitative research, such as that provided in Figure 6.1, should be thought of as a general *tendency* rather than as a definitive description of all quantitative research. A second reason why the gap can arise is that, to a very large extent when writing about and teaching research methods, we are essentially providing an account of *good practice*. The fact of the matter is that these practices are often not followed in the published research that students are likely to encounter in the substantive courses that they will be taking. This failure to follow the procedures associated with good practice is not necessarily due to incompetence on the part of business researchers (though in some cases it can be!), but is much more likely to be associated with matters of time, cost, and feasibility—in other words, the pragmatic concerns that cannot be avoided when one does business research.

## Reverse operationism

As an example of the first source of the gap between the ideal type and actual research practice we can take the case of something that Bryman has referred to as 'reverse operationism' (1988*a*: 28). The model of the process of quantitative research in Figure 6.1 implies that concepts are specified and measures are then provided for them. As we have noted, this means that indicators must be devised. This is the basis of the idea of '**operationism**' or 'operationalism', a term that derives from physics (Bridgman 1927), and that implies a deductive view of how research should proceed. However, this view of research neglects the fact that measurement can entail much more of an inductive element than Figure 6.1 implies. Sometimes, measures are developed that in turn lead to conceptualization. One way in which this can occur is when a statistical technique known as *factor analysis* is employed (see Key concept 6.12). In order to measure the concept of 'charismatic leadership', a term that owes a great deal to Weber's (1947) notion of charismatic authority, Conger and Kanungo (1998) generated twenty-five items to provide a multiple-item measure of the concept. These items derived from their reading of existing theory and research on the subject, particularly in connection with charismatic leadership in organizations. When the items were administered to a sample of respondents and the results were factor analysed, it was found that the items bunched around six factors, each of which to all intents and purposes represents a dimension of the concept of charismatic leadership:

- strategic vision and articulation behaviour;
- sensitivity to the environment;
- unconventional behaviour;
- personal risk;
- sensitivity to organizational members' needs;
- action orientation away from the maintenance of the status quo.

The point to note is that these six dimensions were not specified at the outset: the link between conceptualization and measurement was an inductive one. Nor is this an unusual situation so far as research is concerned (Bryman 1988*a*: 26–8).

## Reliability and validity testing

The second reason why the gap between the ideal type and actual research practice can arise is because researchers do not follow some of the recommended practices. A classic case of this tendency is that, while, as in the present chapter, much time and effort are expended on the articulation of the ways in which the reliability and validity of measures should be determined, a great deal of the time these procedures are not followed. There is evidence from analyses of published quantitative research in organization studies (Podsakoff and Dalton 1987) that writers rarely report tests of the stability of their measures and even more rarely report evidence of



## Key concept 6.12
## What is factor analysis?

Factor analysis is employed in relation to multiple-indicator measures to determine whether groups of indicators tend to bunch together to form distinct clusters, referred to as factors. Its main goal is to reduce the number of variables with which the researcher needs to deal. It is used in relation to multiple-item measures, like Likert scales, to see how far there is an inherent structure to the large number of items that often make up such measures. Researchers sometimes use factor analysis to establish whether the dimensions of a measure that they expect to exist can be confirmed. The clusters of items that are revealed by a factor analysis need to be given names (for example, innovation and flexibility or autonomy in the example in Research in focus 6.9). It is a complex technique that is beyond the level at which this book is pitched (see Bryman and Cramer 2008: ch. 13), but it has considerable significance for the development of measures in many social scientific fields.

validity (only 3 per cent of articles provided information about measurement validity). A large proportion of articles used Cronbach's alpha, but, since this device is relevant only to multiple-item measures, because it gauges internal consistency, the stability and validity of many measures that are employed are unknown. This is not to say that this research is necessarily *un*stable and *in*valid, but that we simply do not know. The reasons why the procedures for determining stability and validity are rarely used are almost certainly the cost and time that are likely to be involved. Researchers tend to be concerned with substantive issues and are less than enthusiastic about engaging in the kind of development work that would be required for a thoroughgoing determination of measurement quality. However, what this means is that Cicourel's (1964) previously cited remark about much measurement in sociology being 'measurement by fiat' has considerable weight.

The remarks on the lack of assessment of the quality of measurement should not be taken as a justification for readers to neglect this phase in their work. Our aim is merely to draw attention to some of the ways in which practices described in this book are not always followed and to suggest some reasons why they are not followed.

## Sampling

A similar point can be made in relation to sampling, which will be covered in the next chapter. As we will see, good practice is strongly associated with *random* or *probability sampling*. However, quite a lot of research is based on non-probability samples—that is, samples that have not been selected in terms of the principles of probability sampling to be discussed in Chapter 7. Sometimes the use of non-probability samples will be due to the impossibility or extreme difficulty of obtaining probability samples. Yet another reason is that the time and cost involved in securing a **probability sample** are too great relative to the level of resources available. And yet a third reason is that sometimes the opportunity to study a certain group presents itself and represents too good an opportunity to miss. Again, such considerations should not be viewed as a justification and hence a set of reasons for ignoring the principles of sampling to be examined in the next chapter, not least because not following the principles of probability sampling carries implications for the kind of statistical analysis that can be employed (see Chapter 14). Instead, our purpose, as before, is to draw attention to the ways in which gaps between recommendations about good practice and actual research practice can arise.



## *Key points*

- Quantitative research can be characterized as a linear series of steps moving from theory to conclusions, but the process described in Figure 6.1 is an ideal type from which there are many departures.
- The measurement process in quantitative research entails the search for indicators.

- Establishing the reliability and validity of measures is important for assessing their quality.
- Quantitative research can be characterized as exhibiting certain preoccupations, the most central of which are: measurement; causality; generalization; and replication.
- Quantitative research has been subjected to many criticisms by qualitative researchers. These criticisms tend to revolve around the view that a natural science model is inappropriate for studying the social world.



# Questions for review

### *The main steps in quantitative research*

- What are the main steps in quantitative research?
- To what extent do the main steps follow a strict sequence?
- Do the steps suggest a deductive or inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research?

### *Concepts and their measurement*

- Why is measurement important for the quantitative researcher?
- What is the difference between a measure and an indicator?
- Why might multiple-indicator approaches to the measurement of concepts be preferable to those that rely on a single indicator?

### *Reliability and validity*

- What are the main ways of thinking about the reliability of the measurement process? Is one form of reliability the most important?
- 'Whereas validity presupposes reliability, reliability does not presuppose validity.' Discuss.
- What are the main criteria for evaluating measurement validity?

### *The main preoccupations of quantitative researchers*

- Outline the main preoccupations of quantitative researchers. What reasons can you give for their prominence?
- Why might replication be an important preoccupation among quantitative researchers, in spite of the tendency for replications in business research to be fairly rare?

### *The critique of quantitative research*

- 'The crucial problem with quantitative research is the failure of its practitioners to address adequately the issue of meaning.' Discuss.
- How central is the adoption by quantitative researchers of a natural science model of conducting research to the critique by qualitative researchers of quantitative research?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in The Nature of Quantitative Research.*

# 7

# Sampling

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 173

**Introduction to sampling** 175

**Sampling error** 177

**Types of probability sample** 179

- Simple random sample 179
- Systematic sample 180
- Stratified random sampling 181
- Multi-stage cluster sampling 181

**The qualities of a probability sample** 185

**Sample size** 187

- Absolute and relative sample size 187
- Time and cost 188
- Non-response 188
- Heterogeneity of the population 189
- Kind of analysis 189

**Types of non-probability sampling** 190

- Convenience sampling 190
- Snowball sampling 192
- Quota sampling 193

**Limits to generalization** 195

**Error in survey research** 196

***Key points*** 198

***Questions for review*** 198



## Chapter outline

This chapter and the three that follow it are very much concerned with principles and practices associated with social survey research. Sampling principles are not exclusively concerned with survey research; for example, they are relevant to the selection of documents for content analysis (see Chapter 9). However, in this chapter the emphasis will be on sampling in connection with the selection of people who would be asked questions by interview or questionnaire. The chapter explores:

- the related ideas of generalization (also known as external validity) and of a representative sample; the latter allows the researcher to generalize findings from a sample to a population;
- the idea of a *probability sample*—that is, one in which a random selection process has been employed;
- the main types of probability sample: the **simple random sample**; the systematic sample; the stratified random sample; and the multi-stage **cluster sample**;
- the main issues involved in deciding on sample size;
- different types of **non-probability sample**, including quota sampling, which is widely used in market research and opinion polls;
- potential sources of error in survey research.

# Introduction

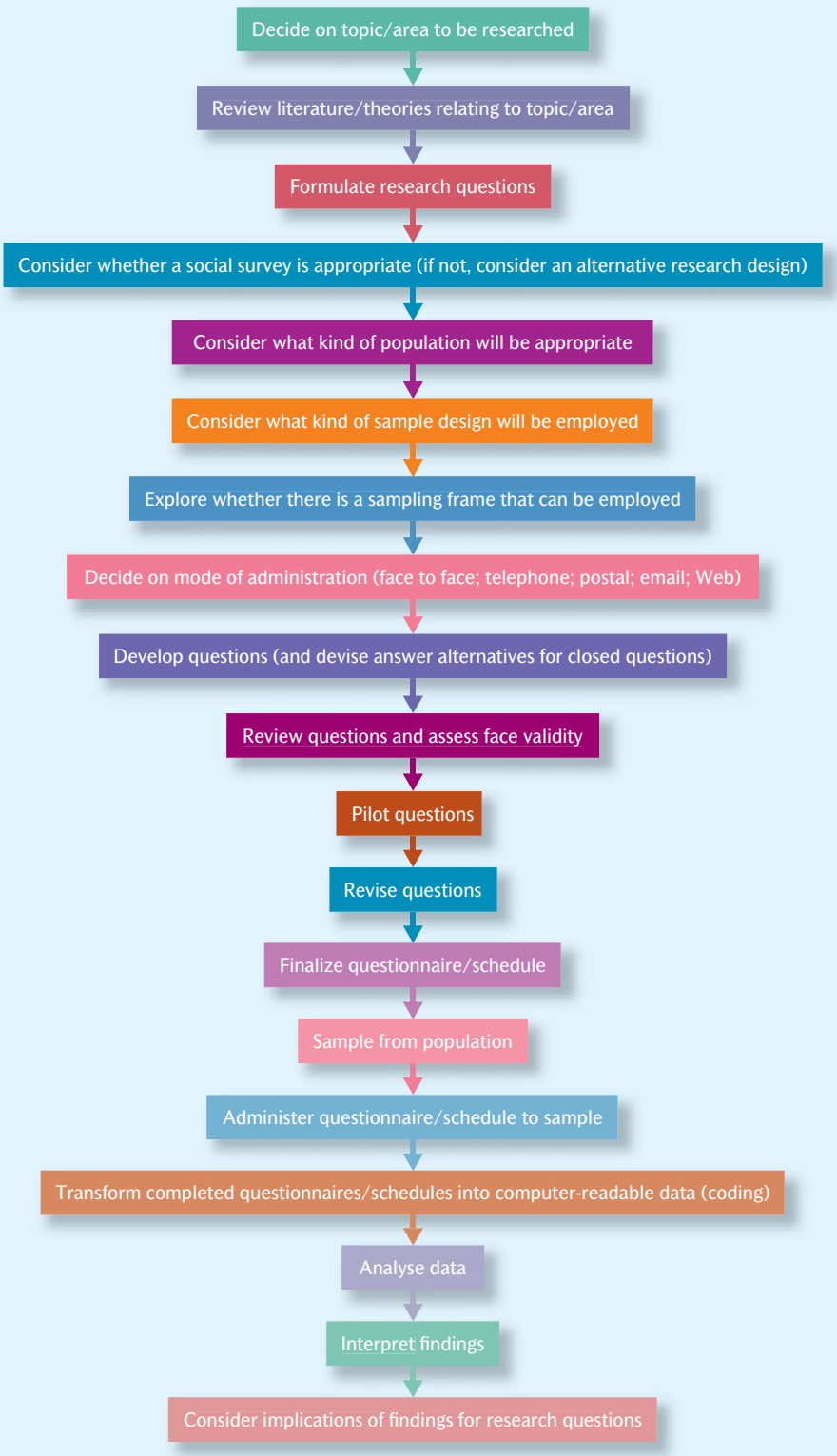
This chapter is concerned with some important aspects of conducting a survey, but it presents only a partial picture, because there are many other steps. In this chapter we are concerned with the issues involved in selecting individuals for survey research, although the principles involved apply equally to other approaches to **quantitative research**, such as content analysis. The next three chapters deal with the data collection aspects of conducting a survey, while Chapters 11 and 12 deal with issues to do with the analysis of data.

Figure 7.1 aims to outline the main steps involved in doing survey research. Initially, the survey will begin with general research issues that need to be investigated. These are gradually narrowed down so that they become research questions, which may take the form of hypotheses, but this need not necessarily be the case. The movement from research issues to research questions is likely to be the result of reading the literature relating to the issues, such as relevant theories and evidence.

Once the research questions have been formulated, the planning of the fieldwork can begin. In practice, decisions relating to sampling and the research instrument will overlap but are presented in Figure 7.1 as part of a sequence. The figure is meant to illustrate the main phases of a survey, and these different steps (other than those to do with sampling, which will be covered in this chapter) will be followed through in the next three chapters and in Chapters 14 and 15. The survey researcher needs to decide what kind of population is suited to the investigation of the topic and also needs to formulate a research instrument and how it should be administered. By 'research instrument' is meant simply something like a **structured interview schedule** or a **self-completion questionnaire**. Moreover, there are several different ways of administering such instruments. Figure 7.2 outlines the main types that are likely to be encountered. Types 1 to 4 are covered in Chapter 8. Types 5 and 6 are covered in Chapter 9. Types 7 to 9 are covered in Chapter 26 in the context of the use of the Internet generally.

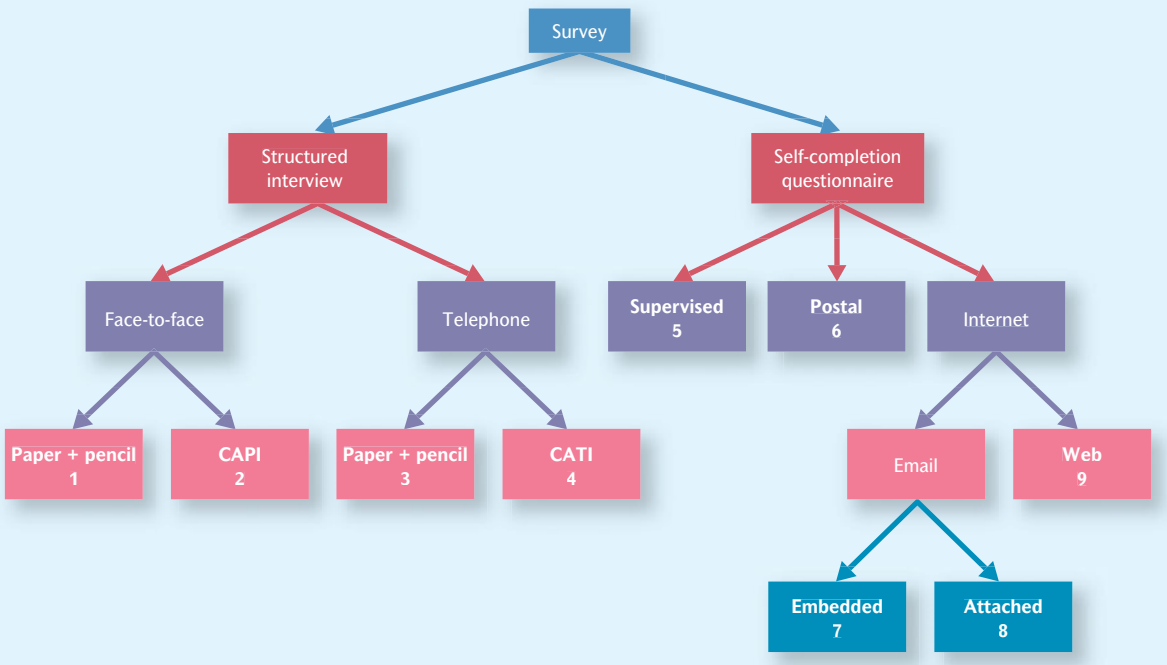
# Figure 7.1

## Steps in conducting a social survey



# Figure 7.2

**Main modes of administration of a survey**






## Introduction to sampling

Many of the readers of this book will be university or college students. At some point in your stay at your university (we will use this term from now on to include colleges) you may have wondered about the attitudes of your fellow students to various matters, or about their behaviour in certain areas, or something about their backgrounds. If you were to decide to examine any or all of these three areas, you might consider conducting structured interviews or sending out questionnaires in order to find out about their behaviour, attitudes, and backgrounds. You will, of course, have to consider how best to design your interviews or questionnaires, and the issues that are involved in the decisions that need to be made about designing these research instruments and administering them will be the focus of Chapters 8 to 10. However, before getting to that point, you are likely to be confronted with a problem. Let us say that your university is quite large and has around 9,000 students. It is extremely unlikely that you will have the time and resources to conduct a survey of all these students. It is unlikely that you would be able to send questionnaires to all 9,000 and even more unlikely that you would be able to interview all of them, since conducting survey research by interview is considerably more expensive and time-consuming, all things being equal, than by postal questionnaire (see Chapter 9). It is almost certain that you will need to *sample* students from the total population of students in your university.

The need to sample is one that is almost invariably encountered in quantitative research. In this chapter, we will be almost entirely concerned with matters relating to sampling in relation to social survey research involving data collection by structured interview or questionnaire. In social survey research, sampling constitutes a key step in the research process, as illustrated in Figure 7.1. However,

other methods of quantitative research also involve sampling considerations, as will be seen in Chapters 11 and 12, when we will examine structured observation and content analysis, respectively. The principles of sampling involved are more or less identical in connection with these other methods, but frequently other considerations come to the fore as well.

But will any old sample suffice? Would it be sufficient to locate yourself in a central position on your campus (if it has one) and then interview the students who come past you and whom you are in a position to interview? Alternatively, would it be sufficient to go around your student union asking people to be interviewed? Or again to send questionnaires to everyone on your course?

The answer, of course, depends on whether or not you want to be able to *generalize* your findings to the entire student body in your university. If you do, it is unlikely that any of the three sampling strategies proposed in the previous paragraph would provide you with a *representative sample* of all students in your university. In order to be able to generalize your findings from your sample to the population from which it was selected, the sample must be representative. See Key concept 7.1 for an explanation of key terms concerning sampling.



## Key concept 7.1
## Basic terms and concepts in sampling

- *Population*: basically, the universe of units from which the sample is to be selected. The term 'units' is employed because it is not necessarily people who are being sampled—the researcher may want to sample from a universe of nations, cities, regions, firms, etc. Thus, 'population' has a much broader meaning than the everyday use of the term, whereby it tends to be associated with a nation's entire population.
- *Sample*: the segment of the population that is selected for investigation. It is a subset of the population. The method of selection may be based on a probability or a non-probability approach (see below).
- *Sampling frame*: the listing of all units in the population from which the sample will be selected.
- *Representative sample*: a sample that reflects the population accurately so that it is a microcosm of the population.
- *Sampling bias*: a distortion in the representativeness of the sample that arises when some members of the population (or more precisely the sampling frame) stand little or no chance of being selected for inclusion in the sample.
- *Probability sample*: a sample that has been selected using random selection so that each unit in the population has a known chance of being selected. It is generally assumed that a *representative sample* is more likely to be the outcome when this method of selection from the population is employed. The aim of probability sampling is to keep **sampling error** (see below) to a minimum.
- *Non-probability sample*: a sample that has not been selected using a random selection method. Essentially, this implies that some units in the population are more likely to be selected than others.
- *Sampling error*: the difference between a sample and the population from which it is selected, even though a probability sample has been selected.
- **Non-sampling error**: differences between the population and the sample that arise either from deficiencies in the sampling approach, such as an inadequate sampling frame or **non-response** (see below), or from such problems as poor question wording, poor interviewing, or flawed processing of data.
- *Non-response*: a source of non-sampling error that is particularly likely to happen when individuals are being sampled. It occurs whenever some members of the sample refuse to cooperate, cannot be contacted, or for some reason cannot supply the required data (for example, because of mental incapacity).
- **Census**: the enumeration of an entire population. Thus, if data are collected in relation to all units in a population, rather than in relation to a sample of units of that population, the data are treated as census data. The phrase '*the* census' typically refers to the complete enumeration of all members of the population of a nation state—that is, a national census. This form of enumeration occurs once every ten years in the UK. However, in a statistical context, like the term *population*, the idea of a census has a broader meaning than this.

Why might the strategies for sampling students previously outlined be unlikely to produce a representative sample? There are various reasons, of which the following stand out.

- The first two approaches depend heavily upon the availability of students during the time or times that you search them out. Not all students are likely to be equally available at that time, so the sample will not reflect these students.
- They also depend on the students going to the locations. Not all students will necessarily pass the point where you locate yourself or go to the student union, or they may vary hugely in the frequency with which they do so. Their movements are likely to reflect such things as where their halls of residence or accommodation are situated, or where their departments are located, or their social habits. Again, to rely on these locations would mean missing out on students who do not frequent them.
- It is possible, not to say likely, that your decisions about which people to approach will be influenced by your judgements about how friendly or cooperative the people concerned are likely to be or by how comfortable you feel about interviewing students of the same (or opposite) gender to yourself, as well as by many other factors.
- The problem with the third strategy is that students on your course by definition take the same subject as each other and therefore will not be representative of all students in the university.

In other words, in the case of all of the three sampling approaches, your decisions about whom to sample are influenced too much by personal judgements, by prospective respondents' availability, or by your implicit criteria for inclusion. Such limitations mean that, in the language of survey sampling, your sample will be *biased*. A biased sample is one that does not represent the population from which the sample was selected. As far as possible, bias should be removed from the selection of your sample. In fact, it is incredibly difficult to remove bias altogether and to derive a truly representative sample. What needs to be done is to ensure that steps are taken to keep bias to an absolute minimum.

Three sources of bias can be identified (see Key concept 7.1 for an explanation of terms).

- *If a non-probability or non-random sampling method is used*. If the method used to select the sample is not random, there is a possibility that human judgement will affect the selection process, making some members of the population more likely to be selected than others. This source of bias can be eliminated through the use of probability or random sampling, the procedure for which is described below.
- *If the sampling frame is inadequate*. If the sampling frame is not comprehensive or is inaccurate or suffers from some other kind of similar deficiency, the sample that is derived cannot represent the population, even if a random/probability sampling method is employed.
- *If some sample members refuse to participate or cannot be contacted—in other words, if there is non-response*. The problem with non-response is that those who agree to participate may differ in various ways from those who do not agree to participate. Some of the differences may be significant to the research question or questions. If the data are available, it may be possible to check how far, when there is non-response, the resulting sample differs from the population. It is often possible to do this in terms of characteristics such as gender or age, or, in the case of something like a sample of university students, whether the sample's characteristics reflect the entire sample in terms of faculty membership. However, it is usually impossible to determine whether differences exist between the population and the sample after non-response in terms of 'deeper' factors, such as attitudes or patterns of behaviour.



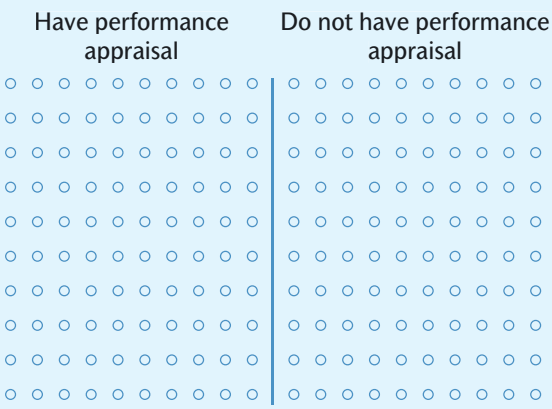
## Sampling error

In order to appreciate the significance of sampling error for achieving a representative sample, consider Figures 7.3–7.7. Imagine we have a population of 200 employees and we want a sample of 50. Imagine as well that one of the variables of concern to us is whether or not employees receive regular performance appraisals from their immediate supervisor and that the population is equally divided between those who do and those who do not. This split is represented by the vertical line that divides the population into two halves (see Figure 7.3). If the sample is

representative, we would expect our sample of 50 to be equally split in terms of this variable (see Figure 7.4). If there is a small amount of sampling error, so that we have one employee too many who is not appraised and one too few who is, it will look like Figure 7.5. In Figure 7.6 we see a rather more serious degree of over-representation of employees who do not receive appraisals. This time there are three too many who are not appraised and three too few who are. In Figure 7.7 we have a very serious over-representation of employees who do not receive performance appraisals, because there are 35 employees in the sample who are not appraised, which is much larger than the 25 who should be in the sample.

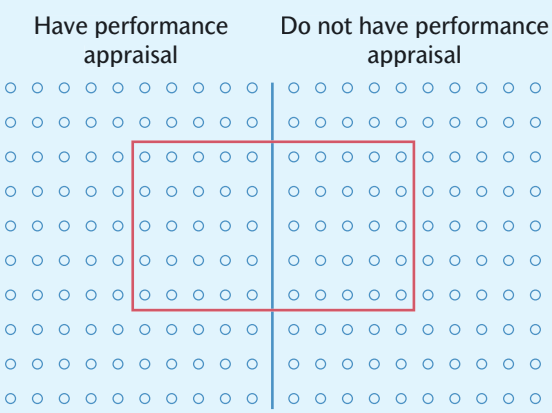
## Figure 7.3

**Having performance appraisals in a population of 200**



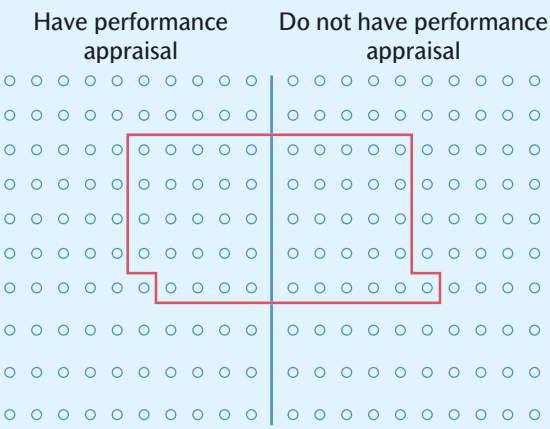

## Figure 7.4

**A sample with no sampling error**



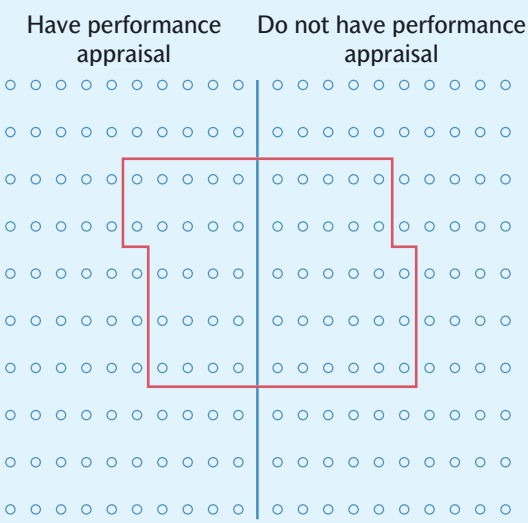

## Figure 7.5

**A sample with very little sampling error**



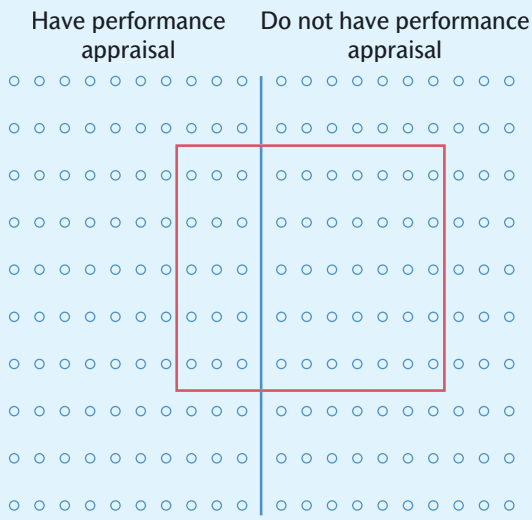

## Figure 7.6

**A sample with some sampling error**



## Figure 7.7

**A sample with a lot of sampling error**




It is important to appreciate that, as suggested above, probability sampling does not and cannot eliminate sampling error. Even with a well-crafted probability sample, a degree of sampling error is likely to creep in. However, probability sampling stands a better chance than non-probability sampling of keeping sampling error in check so that it does not end up looking like the outcome featured in Figure 7.7. Moreover, probability sampling allows the researcher to employ tests of statistical significance that permit inferences to be made about the sample from which the sample was selected. These will be addressed in Chapter 14.



# Types of probability sample

Imagine that we are interested in levels of training, skill development, and learning among employees and the variables that relate to variation in levels of training they have undertaken. We might decide to conduct our research in a single nearby company. This means that our population will all be employees in that company, which in turn will mean that we will be able to generalize our findings only to employees of that company. We simply cannot assume that levels of training and their correlates will be the same in other companies. We might decide that we want our research to be conducted only on full-time employees, so that part-time and subcontracted workers are omitted. Imagine too that there are 9,000 full-time employees in the company.

## Simple random sample

The simple random sample is the most basic form of probability sample. With random sampling, each unit of the population has an equal probability of inclusion in the sample. Imagine that we decide that we have enough money to interview 450 employees at the company. This means that the probability of inclusion in the sample is

$$\frac{450}{9{,}000} \quad \text{i.e.} \quad 1 \text{ in } 20.$$

This is known as the *sampling fraction* and is expressed as

$$\frac{n}{N},$$

where $n$ is the sample size and $N$ is the population size.

The key steps in devising our simple random sample can be represented as follows:

1. Define the population. We have decided that this will be all full-time employees at the company. This is our $N$ and in this case is 9,000.
2. Select or devise a comprehensive sampling frame. It is likely that the company's personnel department will keep records of all employees and that this will enable us to exclude those who do not meet our criteria for inclusion—i.e. part-time employees and those who work on the premises but are not employees of the company.
3. Decide your sample size ($n$). We have decided that this will be 450.

4. List all the employees in the population and assign them consecutive numbers from 1 to *N*. In our case, this will be 1 to 9,000.
5. Using a table of random numbers, or a computer program that can generate random numbers, select *n* (450) different random numbers that lie between 1 and *N* (9,000).
6. The employees to which the *n* (450) random numbers refer constitute the sample.

Two points are striking about this process. First, there is almost no opportunity for human bias to manifest itself. Employees would not be selected on such subjective criteria as whether they looked friendly and approachable. The selection of whom to interview is entirely mechanical. Secondly, the process is not dependent on the employees' availability. They do not have to be working in the interviewer's proximity to be included in the sample. The process of selection is done without their knowledge. It is not until they are contacted by an interviewer that they know that they are part of a social survey.

Step 5 mentions the possible use of a table of random numbers. These can be found in the appendices of many statistics books. The tables are made up of columns of five-digit numbers, such as:

09188
90045
73189
75768
54016
08358
28306
53840
91757
89415.

The first thing to notice is that, since these are five-digit numbers and the maximum number that we can sample from is 9,000, which is a four-digit number, none of the random numbers seems appropriate, except for 09188 and 08358, although the former is larger than the largest possible number. The answer is that we should take just four digits in each number. Let us take the last four digits. This would yield the following:

9188
0045
3189
5768
4016
8358
8306
3840
1757
9415.

However, two of the resulting numbers—9188 and 9415—exceed 9,000. We cannot have an employee with either of these numbers assigned to him or her. The solution is simple: we ignore these numbers. This means that the employee who has been assigned the number 45 will be the first to be included in the sample; the employee who has been assigned the number 3189 will be next; the employee who has been assigned the number 5768 will be next; and so on.

An alternative but very similar strategy to the one that has been described is to write (or get someone to write for you) a simple computer program that will select *n* random numbers (in our case 450) that lie between 1 and *N* (in our case 9,000). As with using a table of random numbers, you may be faced with the possibility of some random numbers turning up more than once. Since you will want to interview the person to whom those recurring random numbers refer on only one occasion, you will want to ignore any random number that recurs. This procedure results in a sample known as a simple random sample *without replacement*. More or less all simple random samples will be of this kind in the context of business research and so the qualifier 'without replacement' is invariably omitted.

## Systematic sample

A variation on the simple random sample is the **systematic sample**. With this kind of sample, you select units directly from the sampling frame—that is, without resorting to a table of random numbers.

We know that we are to select 1 employee in 20. With a systematic sample, we would make a random start between 1 and 20 inclusive, possibly by using the last two digits in a table of random numbers. If we did this with the ten random numbers above, the first relevant one would be 54016, since it is the first one where the last two digits yield a number of 20 or below, in this case 16. This means that the sixteenth employee on our sampling frame is the first to be in our sample. Thereafter, we take every twentieth employee on the list. So the sequence will go:

16, 36, 56, 76, 96, 116, etc.

This approach obviates the need to assign numbers to employees' names and then to look up names of the employees whose numbers have been drawn by the random selection process. It is important to ensure, however,

that there is no inherent ordering of the sampling frame, since this may bias the resulting sample. If there is some ordering to the list, the best solution is to rearrange it.

## Stratified random sampling

In our imaginary study of company employees, one of the features that we might want our sample to exhibit is a proportional representation of the different departments in which employees work. It might be that the kind of department an employee works in is viewed as relevant to a wide range of attitudinal features that are relevant to the study of skill development and training. Generating a simple random sample or a systematic sample *might* yield such a representation, so that the proportion of employees from the sales and marketing department in the sample is the same as that in the employee population and so on. Thus, if there are 1,800 employees in the sales and marketing department, using our sampling fraction of 1 in 20, we would expect to have 90 employees in our sample from this department of the company. However, because of sampling error, it is unlikely that this will occur and that there will be a difference, so that there may be, say, 85 or 93 from this department.

Because it is very likely that the company will include in its records the department in which employees are based, or indeed may have separate sampling frames for each department, it will be possible to ensure that employees are accurately represented in terms of their departmental membership. In the language of sampling, this means stratifying the population by a criterion (in this case, departmental membership) and selecting either a simple random sample or a systematic sample from each of the resulting strata. In the present example, if there are five departments we would have five strata, with the numbers in each stratum being one-twentieth of the total for each department, as in Table 7.1, which also shows a hypothetical outcome of using a simple random sample, which results in a distribution of employees across departments that does not mirror the population all that well.

The advantage of stratified sampling in a case like this is clear: it ensures that the resulting sample will be distributed in the same way as the population in terms of the stratifying criterion. If you use a simple random or systematic sampling approach, you *may* end up with a distribution like that of the stratified sample, but it is unlikely. Two points are relevant here. First, you can conduct stratified sampling sensibly only when it is relatively easy to identify and allocate units to strata. If it is not possible or it would be very difficult to do so, stratified sampling will not be feasible. Secondly, you can use more than one stratifying criterion. Thus, it may be that you would want to stratify by both department and gender and whether or not employees are above or below a certain salary level or occupational grade. If it is feasible to identify employees in terms of these stratifying criteria, it is possible to use pairs of criteria or several criteria (such as departmental membership plus gender plus occupational grade).

Stratified sampling is really feasible only when the relevant information is available. In other words, when data are available that allow the ready identification of members of the population in terms of the stratifying criterion (or criteria), it is sensible to employ this sampling method. But it is unlikely to be economical if the identification of population members for stratification purposes entails a great deal of work because there is no available listing in terms of strata.

## Multi-stage cluster sampling

In the example we have been dealing with, employees to be interviewed are located in a single company. Interviewers will have to arrange their interviews with the sampled

# Table 7.1

**The advantages of stratified sampling**

| Department | Population | Stratified sample | Possible simple random or systematic sample |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sales and marketing | 1,800 | 90 | 85 |
| Finance and accounts | 1,200 | 60 | 70 |
| Human resource management and training | 1,000 | 50 | 60 |
| Technical, research, and new-product development | 1,800 | 90 | 84 |
| Production | 3,200 | 160 | 151 |
| TOTAL | 9,000 | 450 | 450 |

employees, but, because they are all working on the same premises, they will not be involved in a lot of travel. However, imagine that we wanted a *national* sample of employees. It is likely that interviewers would have to travel the length and breadth of the UK to interview the sampled individuals. This would add a great deal to the time and cost of doing the research. This kind of problem occurs whenever the aim is to interview a sample that is to be drawn from a widely dispersed population, such as a national population, or a large region, or even a large city.

One way in which it is possible to deal with this potential problem is to employ *cluster sampling*. With cluster sampling, the primary sampling unit (the first stage of the sampling procedure) is not the units of the population to be sampled but groupings of those units. It is the latter groupings or aggregations of population units that are known as *clusters*. Imagine that we want a nationally representative sample of 5,000 employees who are working for the 100 largest companies in the UK (this information is publicly available and generated through the FTSE index; size is measured in terms of market capitalization). Using simple random or systematic sampling would yield a widely dispersed sample, which would result in a great deal of travel for interviewers. One solution might be to sample companies and then employees from each of the sampled companies. A probability sampling method would need to be employed at each stage. Thus, we might randomly sample ten companies from the entire population of 100 largest companies in the UK, thus yielding ten clusters, and we would then interview 500 randomly selected employees at each of the ten companies. Research in focus 7.2 gives an example of a study that used cluster sampling.



## Research in focus 7.2
## A cluster sample survey of small ventures in the tourism industry

In a study aimed at identifying the performance measures of small ventures in the Israeli tourism industry, Haber and Reichel (2005) designed a cluster sample as the basis for their questionnaire survey. The first stage of their sampling strategy involved the use of information held by the twelve regional tourism associations run by the Ministry of Tourism in Israel. These then formed the basis for the second stage of their sample design, which involved selecting approximately 25 per cent of the total population of the country's small tourism ventures, which were sampled across each of the twelve regional areas, thus ensuring the sample was representative of the national population. The 305 ventures that participated in the survey represented a very high response rate of 94 per cent. This was achieved by preliminary telephone calls followed up by face-to-face interviews to conduct the questionnaire survey.



## Tips and skills
## A guide to industry classification systems

Industry classification systems are used to divide firms and other organizations into groups based on the type of business they are in or the kind of products they make. The oldest of these systems is the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) scheme, which was developed by the US government in 1939 to delineate industrial activities. Over the years there have been several revisions to this system to reflect the emergence of new industries and product markets, most recently revised in 1987. The SIC system forms the basis for the ISIC (International SIC) developed by the United Nations and also for the UK version of the system, the most recent of which is UK SIC '92. Under the system, economic activities are divided into seventeen sections each denoted by a letter, which are in turn divided into sixteen subsections, denoted by a second letter, which are then divided into divisions (60), groups (222), classes (503), and subclasses (253). The seventeen main sections are:

A. Agriculture, hunting, and forestry
B. Fishing
C. Mining and quarrying
D. Manufacturing
E. Electricity, gas, and water supply
F. Construction
G. Wholesale and retail trade and repair
H. Hotels and restaurants
I. Transport, storage, and communication
J. Financial intermediation (including banking)
K. Real estate, renting, and business activities
L. Public administration and defence; compulsory social security
M. Education
N. Health and social work
O. Community, social, and personal service activities
P. Private households with employees
Q. Extra-territorial organizations and bodies

More information about SIC '92 is available from the UK national statistics website:
***www.statistics.gov.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

This includes information about the major revision of the UK SIC that took place in 2007, timed to coincide with the revision of the European Union's industrial classification system—*Nomenclature statistique des Activités économiques dans la Communauté Européenne* (known as *NACE*)—which aims to establish a common statistical classification of economic activities between European Community countries. More information about NACE is available via the Eurostat website at:
***ec.europa.eu*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

However, in 1997 in response to changes in world economies, the SIC codes were supplanted in North America by a more comprehensive system, called the North American Industrial Classification System (NAICS), which is starting to replace the SIC scheme. NAICS classifies establishments based on production processes—in other words, on what they do rather than what they make. NAICS also focuses more on emerging industries and services—of the 358 five-digit industry codes, 250 deliver services (Krishnan and Press 2003). A full list of the codes, which were revised in 2007, can be found at the US Census Bureau website, which explains the NAICS coding system and gives information on new industries and sectors:
***www.census.gov/eos/www/naics*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Eventually NAICS is intended to replace SIC in relation to all North American reporting of statistics, but it is only gradually becoming accepted worldwide and most databases continue to use both the SIC and NAICS systems. However, SIC codes are by far the most commonly used scheme among business researchers (Jacobs and O'Neill 2003; Ojala 2005). Bhojraj, Lee, and Oler (2003) suggest this is because, although researchers acknowledge the limitations of the SIC scheme, in terms of its inability to provide homogenous categories, there isn't a system that is significantly better, so researchers have tended to stick with it.

There are also other industry classification schemes, including the Global Industry Classifications Standard (GICS) system, which was developed by two leading investment banks with the needs of the financial community in mind. Unlike SIC and NAICS codes, which focus primarily on identifying the type of product or service as the basis for categorization, GICS classifies companies according to their principal business activity. GICS also provides guidelines for classifying companies that don't fit neatly into a particular business activity—for example, because a company has diversified across several sectors that contribute equally to revenues (Bhojraj, Lee, and Oler 2003). This is a particularly important challenge for industry classification systems in dealing with the rise of multinational businesses whose activities may span several sectors of activity.

This is fine, but there is no guarantee that these ten companies reflect the diverse range of industrial activities that are engaged in by the population as a whole. One solution to this problem would be to group the 100 largest UK companies by Standard Industrial Classification (SIC '92) codes and then randomly sample companies from each of the major SIC groups (see Tips and skills 'A guide to industry classification systems'). We might follow the example of the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) researchers (see Research in focus 2.14) and exclude the less common SIC groups (agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing, mining and quarrying—A to C, and private households—P). One company might then be sampled from each of the twelve remaining major SIC code categories (D to O) and then approximately 400 employees from each of the twelve companies would be interviewed. Thus, there are three separate stages:

- group 100 largest UK companies by market capitalization;
- sample one company from each of the twelve major SIC categories;
- sample 400 employees from each of the twelve companies.

In a sense, cluster sampling is always a multi-stage approach, because one always samples clusters first and then something else—either further clusters or population units—is sampled.

Many examples of multi-stage cluster sampling entail stratification. We might, for example, want further to stratify the companies according to whether their headquarters are located in the UK or abroad. To do this we would group companies according to whether their headquarters were based in the UK or elsewhere and then select one or two companies from each of the two strata per major SIC code.

Research in focus 7.3 provides an example of a multi-stage cluster sample. It entailed three stages: the sampling of sub-regions within the UK, the sampling of socio-economic groups, and the sampling of individuals. In a way, there are four stages, because addresses are randomly sampled (using the Postcode Address File) and then, if there was more than one eligible individual at the same address, one person was randomly selected.

The advantage of multi-stage cluster sampling should be clear by now: it allows interviewers to be far more concentrated than would be the case if a simple random or stratified sample was selected. The advantages of stratification can be capitalized upon because the clusters can be stratified in terms of strata. However, even when a rigorous sampling strategy is employed, sampling error cannot be avoided, as the example in Research in focus 7.10 clearly shows.



## Research in focus 7.3
## An example of a multi-stage cluster sample

In a survey of skills used at work in modern Britain (1986–2001), the sample used by the researchers aimed to comprise 4,360 interviews with working individuals in Britain aged 20 to 60. The 2001 Skills Survey followed up on an earlier survey conducted in 1997. The sampling process involved several stages based on the selection of households and eligible interviewees. The Postcode Address File (PAF) was used as a sampling frame for the random selection of residential addresses (PAF is considered preferable to the electoral register because it is updated more frequently). This formed the basis for further stratification according to:

- *region*: the sample was then divided into sub-regions to ensure sample points were spread throughout the country;
- *socio-economic grouping*: each sub-region was then further divided into three bands according to the percentage of household heads in non-manual socio-economic groups.

This resulted in the identification of 218 postcode sectors. In each sector, 64 addresses were randomly selected. 'Based on the 1997 Skills Survey, it was anticipated that assignments consisting of 64 addresses would each

produce just over 20 productive interviews' (Felstead, Gallie, and Green 2002: 86). This formed the basis for selection of individuals. The addresses then had to be checked to see if they were eligible in meeting three criteria: (1) residential and currently occupied, (2) contained someone aged between 20 and 60 years of age, and (3) contained at least one person in paid work of one hour per week or more. In households where there was more than one eligible interviewee, a further technique for random selection was used. A total of 4,470 interviews were conducted, suggesting that the researchers' estimation of 20 interviews per 64 addresses was slightly conservative. The response rate was thus an improvement on the rate achieved in the 1997 Skills Survey. The result, according to the authors of the report, 'is a high quality, randomly drawn and representative, quality data set' (Felstead, Gallie, and Green 2002: 23).



# The qualities of a probability sample

The reason why probability sampling is such an important procedure in social survey research is that it is possible to make inferences from information about a random sample to the population from which it was selected. In other words, we can generalize findings derived from a sample to the population. This is different from equivalence sampling, which aims to ensure findings are equivalent between samples rather than representative of the population (see Research in focus 7.4). This is not to say that we treat the population data and the sample data as the same. If we take the example of the level of skill development in our sample of 450 employees, which we will treat as the number of training days completed in the previous twelve months, we will know that the **mean** number of training days undertaken by the sample ($\bar{x}$) can be used to estimate the population mean ($\mu$) but with known margins of error. The mean, or more properly the **arithmetic mean**, is the simple average.

In order to address this point it is necessary to use some basic statistical ideas. These are presented in Tips and skills 'Generalizing from a random sample to the population' and can be skipped if just a broad idea of sampling procedures is required.

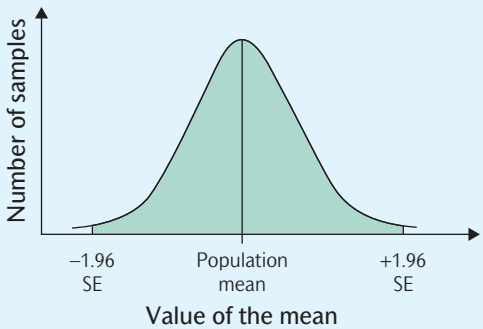


## Tips and skills
## Generalizing from a random sample to the population

Using our imaginary study of training and skill development in a single nearby company, let us say that the sample mean is 6.7 days of training per employee (the average amount of training received in the previous twelve months in the sample). A crucial consideration here is: how confident can we be that the mean number of 6.7 training days is likely to be found in the population, even when probability sampling has been employed? If we take an infinite number of samples from a population, the sample estimates of the mean of the variable under consideration will vary in relation to the population mean. This variation will take the form of a bell-shaped curve known as a *normal distribution* (see Figure 7.8). The shape of the distribution implies that there is a clustering of sample means at or around the population mean. Half the sample means will be at or below the population mean; the other half will be at or above the population mean. As we move to the left (at or lower than the population mean) or the right (at or higher than the population mean), the curve tails off, implying fewer and fewer samples generating means that depart considerably from the population mean. The variation of sample means around the population mean is the *sampling error* and is measured using a statistic known as the **standard error of the mean**. This is an estimate of the amount that a sample mean is likely to differ from the population mean.

# Figure 7.8

## The distribution of sample means




*Note*: 95% of sample means will lie within the shaded area. SE = standard error of the mean.

This consideration is important, because sampling theory tells us that 68 per cent of all sample means will lie between + or – one standard error from the population mean and that 95 per cent of all sample means will lie between + or – 1.96 standard errors from the population mean. It is this second calculation that is crucial, because it is at least implicitly employed by survey researchers when they report their statistical findings. They typically employ 1.96 standard errors as the crucial criterion in how confident they can be in their findings. Essentially, the criterion implies that you can be 95 per cent certain that the population mean lies within + or – 1.96 sampling errors from the sample mean.

If a sample has been selected according to probability sampling principles, we know that we can be 95 per cent certain that the population mean will lie between the sample mean + or – 1.96 multiplied by the standard error of the mean. This is known as the *confidence interval*. If the mean number of training days in the previous twelve months in our sample of 450 employees is 6.7 and the standard error of the mean is 1.3, we can be 95 per cent certain that the population mean will lie between

$6.7 + (1.96 \times 1.3)$

and

$6.7 - (1.96 \times 1.3)$,

i.e. between 9.248 and 4.152.

If the standard error was smaller, the range of possible values of the population mean would be narrower; if the standard error was larger, the range of possible values of the population mean would be wider.

If a stratified sample is selected, the standard error of the mean will be smaller, because the variation between strata is essentially eliminated, because the population will be accurately represented in the sample in terms of the stratification criterion or criteria employed. This consideration demonstrates the way in which stratification injects an extra increment of precision into the probability sampling process, since a possible source of sampling error is eliminated.

By contrast, a cluster sample without stratification exhibits a larger standard error of the mean than a comparable simple random sample. This occurs because a possible source of variability between employees (that is, membership of one department rather than another, which may affect levels of training undertaken) is disregarded. If, for example, some departments have a culture of learning in which a large number of employees were involved, and if these departments were not selected because of the procedure for selecting clusters, an important source of variability would have been omitted. It also implies that the sample mean would be on the low side, but that is another matter.

## Research in focus 7.4

### Ensuring sampling equivalence in a cross-cultural validation study

The main purpose of research carried out by Brengman et al. (2005) was to validate cross-culturally a previously designed measurement instrument called the 'Internet shopper lifestyle' scale through conducting an online e-mail survey of Internet shoppers in the United States and Belgium. They claim that, although lifestyle studies are considered to be an interesting aspect of cross-cultural research, the cross-cultural validity of instruments 'remains to be demonstrated'. By replicating the study, they intended 'to test for cross-cultural differences in the basic meaning and structure of the Internet shopper lifestyle scale' (2005: 79).

The main focus of the sample design was therefore not to obtain a sample with the same cross-national socio-demographic characteristics, or to draw a sample that was representative of the population as a whole. Instead, their aim was to generate a sample that was representative of the relevant target population, which in this case was heads of household with home Internet and email connection. Therefore, in each country the sample was drawn in a very similar way. The American sample was obtained by email requests to participate in the survey sent to 20,000 representative users. In Belgium an invitation email requesting that recipients visit the site where the questionnaire was posted was sent to 11,500 Internet users; response rates were 11 per cent and 19 per cent, respectively. The authors explain, 'since the purpose of the current study is not to provide a cross-cultural segmentation but rather to validate a scale and to compare which segments can be detected in the United States and Belgium, the sample sizes in the United States and Belgium need not be proportionate to the respective population sizes' (2005: 81).

# Sample size

One question about research methods that we are asked by students almost more than any other relates to the size of the sample: 'How large should my sample be?' or 'Is my sample large enough?' The decision about sample size is not a straightforward one: it depends on a number of considerations, and there is no one definitive answer. This is frequently a source of great disappointment to those who pose such questions. Moreover, most of the time decisions about sample size are affected by considerations of time and cost. Therefore, invariably decisions about sample size represent a compromise between the constraints of time and cost, the need for precision, and a variety of further considerations that will now be addressed.

## Absolute and relative sample size

One of the most basic considerations, and one that is possibly the most surprising, is that, contrary to what you might have expected, it is the *absolute* size of a sample that is important, not its *relative* size. This means that a national probability sample of 1,000 individuals in the UK has as much validity as a national probability sample of 1,000 individuals in the USA, even though the latter has a much larger population. It also means that increasing the size of a sample increases the precision of a sample. This means that the 95 per cent confidence interval referred to in Tips and skills 'Generalizing from a random sample to the population' narrows. However, a large sample cannot *guarantee* precision, so that it is probably better to say that increasing the size of a sample increases the *likely* precision of a sample. This means that, as sample size increases, sampling error decreases. Therefore, an important component of any decision about sample size should be how much sampling error one is prepared to tolerate. The less sampling error one is prepared to tolerate, the larger a sample will need to be. Fowler (1993) warns against a simple acceptance of this criterion. He argues that in practice researchers do not base their decisions about sample size on a single estimate of a variable. Most survey research is concerned to generate a host of

estimates—that is, of the variables that make up the research instrument that is administered. He also observes that it is not normal for survey researchers to be in a position to specify in advance 'a desired level of precision' (1993: 34). Moreover, since sampling error will be only one component of any error entailed in an estimate, the notion of using a desired level of precision as a factor in a decision about sample size is not realistic. Instead, to the extent that this notion does enter into decisions about sample size, it usually does so in a general rather than a calculated way.

## Time and cost

Time and cost considerations become very relevant in this context. In the previous paragraph it is clearly being suggested that, the larger the sample size, the greater the precision (because the amount of sampling error will be less). However, by and large up to a sample size of around 1,000, the gains in precision are noticeable as the sample size climbs from low figures of 50, 100, 150, and so on upwards. After a certain point, often in the region of 1,000, the sharp increases in precision become less pronounced, and, although it does not plateau, there is a slowing-down in the extent to which precision increases (and hence the extent to which the sample error of the mean declines). Considerations of sampling size are likely to be profoundly affected by matters of time and cost at such a juncture, since striving for smaller and smaller increments of precision becomes an increasingly uneconomic proposition.



### Tips and skills
### Sample size and probability sampling

As we have said in the text, the issue of sample size is the matter that most often concerns students and others. Basically, this is an area where size really does matter—the bigger the sample, the more representative it is likely to be (provided the sample is randomly selected), regardless of the size of the population from which it is drawn. However, when doing projects, students clearly need to do their research with very limited resources. You should try to find out from your department or business school if there are any guidelines about whether or not samples of a minimum size are expected. If there are no such guidelines, you will need to conduct your mini-survey in such a way as to maximize the number of interviews you can manage or the number of postal questionnaires you can send out, given the amount of time and resources available to you. Also, in many if not most cases, a truly random approach to sample selection may not be open to you. The crucial point is to be clear about and to justify what you have done. Explain the difficulties that you would have encountered in generating a random sample. Explain why you really could not include any more in your sample of respondents. But, above all, do not make claims about your sample that are not sustainable. Do not claim that it is representative or that you have a random sample when it is clearly not the case that either of these is true. In other words, be frank about what you have done. People will be much more inclined to accept an awareness of the limits of your sample design than claims about a sample that are patently false. Also, it may be that there are lots of good features about your sample—the range of people included, the good response rate, the high level of cooperation you received from the firm. Make sure you play up these positive features at the same time as being honest about its limitations.

## Non-response

However, considerations about sampling error do not end here. The problem of *non-response* should be borne in mind. Most sample surveys attract a certain amount of non-response. Thus, it is likely that only some of our sample will agree to participate in the research. If it is our aim to ensure as far as possible that 450 employees are interviewed and if we think that there may be a 20 per cent rate of non-response, it may be advisable to sample 540–550 individuals, on the grounds that approximately 90 will be non-respondents. For example, of the 143 survey questionnaires posted to companies in T. C. Powell's (1995) study of TQM, only 40 were returned and of these only 36 were usable, making a response rate of 25 per cent. This raises the question of whether or not this sample is significant enough to represent companies in the geographical area of the north-eastern USA that the study claims to represent (see Chapter 9 for a further discussion of acceptable response rates). The issue of

non-response, and in particular of refusal to participate, is of particular significance, because it has been suggested by some researchers that response rates (see Key concept 7.5) to surveys are declining in many countries. This implies that there is a growing tendency towards people refusing to participate in survey research. In 1973, an article in the American magazine *Business Week* carried an article ominously entitled 'The Public Clams up on Survey Takers'. The magazine asked survey companies about their experiences and found considerable concern about declining response rates. Similarly, in Britain, a report from a working party on the Market Research Society's Research and Development Committee in 1975 pointed to similar concerns among market research companies. However, an analysis of this issue by T. W. Smith (1995) suggests that, contrary to popular belief, there is no consistent evidence of such a decline. Moreover, Smith shows that it is difficult to disentangle general trends in response rates from such variables as the subject matter of the research, the type of respondent, and the level of effort expended on improving the number of respondents to individual surveys. The strategies that can improve responses to survey instruments such as structured interviews and postal questionnaires will be examined in Chapter 8.

## Heterogeneity of the population

Yet another consideration is the homogeneity and heterogeneity of the population from which the sample is to be taken. When a sample is very heterogeneous, like a sample of a whole country or city, the population is likely to be highly varied. When it is relatively homogeneous, such as members of a company or of an occupation, the amount of variation is less. The implication of this is that, the greater the heterogeneity of a population, the larger a sample will need to be.



### Key concept 7.5
### What is a response rate?

The notion of a response rate is a common one in social survey research. When a social survey is conducted, whether by structured interview or by self-completion questionnaire, it is invariably the case that some people who are in the sample refuse to participate. The response rate is, therefore, the percentage of a sample that does, in fact, agree to participate. However, the calculation of a response rate is a little more complicated than this. First, not everyone who replies will be included: if a large number of questions are not answered by a respondent, or if there are clear indications that he or she has not taken the interview or questionnaire seriously, it is better to employ only the number of *usable* interviews or questionnaires as the numerator. Similarly, it also tends to occur that not everyone in a sample turns out to be a suitable or appropriate respondent or can be contacted. Thus the response rate is calculated as follows:

$$\frac{\text{numbers of usable questionnaires}}{\text{total sample} - \text{unsuitable or uncontactable members of the sample}} \times 100$$

## Kind of analysis

Finally, researchers should bear in mind the *kind of analysis* they intend to undertake. A case in point here is the **contingency table**. A contingency table shows the relationship between two variables in tabular form. It shows how variation in one variable relates to variation in another variable. To understand this point, consider our example of employee skill development and learning in the 100 largest UK companies. A contingency table would show how far the 5,000 employees that comprise the sample vary in terms of skill and learning, measured in terms of training received during the previous twelve months. In addition, the table would need to reflect differences between companies that represent the seventeen main SIC code sections. However, it is unlikely that the initial criterion of selecting the 100 largest companies would enable all the SIC sections, such as education, community activities, or fishing, to be represented; therefore, some of the cells of the table would remain empty. In order to overcome this problem, the sample would have to be designed to reflect a much wider range of public and private organizational activity, perhaps by removing the criterion of size of company from the study. This would have a bearing on the number of employees who would be sampled from each company.



# Types of non-probability sampling

The term *non-probability sampling* is essentially an umbrella term to capture all forms of sampling that are not conducted according to the canons of probability sampling outlined above. It is not surprising, therefore, that the term covers a wide range of types of sampling strategy, at least one of which—the **quota sample**—is claimed by some practitioners to be almost as good as a probability sample. Also covered under non-probability sampling is the practice of surveying one individual per organization, often a human resources or senior manager, in order to find out about the organization (see Thinking deeply 7.6). In this section we will also cover three main types of non-probability sample: the **convenience sample**; the **snowball sample**; and the quota sample.



## Thinking deeply 7.6
## Using a single respondent to represent an organization

It is fairly common practice in business and management survey research for one respondent, often a senior manager, to be asked to complete a questionnaire or to be interviewed about issues that are related to their organization or workplace. One of the advantages of gathering data from a single executive respondent is that it enables a larger number of organizations to be surveyed with a lower investment of time and resources than if multiple respondents were surveyed within each organization. However, it can also be argued that it is unwise to rely on a single respondent to know everything about the organization. In addition, if the respondent is a senior manager, he or she may also be inclined to represent organizational practices in a way that portrays his or her own role and responsibilities more favourably than other respondents in the organization would. It is therefore important to acknowledge the potential limitations associated with such a sampling strategy.

## Convenience sampling

A convenience sample is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility. Imagine that a researcher who teaches at a university business school is interested in the way that managers deal with ethical issues when making business decisions. The researcher might administer a questionnaire to several classes of students, all of whom are managers taking a part-time MBA degree. The chances are that the researcher will receive all or almost all the questionnaires back, so that there will be a good response rate. The findings may prove quite interesting, but the problem with such a sampling strategy is that it is impossible to generalize the findings, because we do not know of what population this sample is representative. They are simply a group of managers who are available to the researcher. They are almost certainly not representative of managers as a whole—the very fact they are taking this degree programme marks them out as different from managers in general.

This is not to suggest that convenience samples should never be used. Let us say that our lecturer/researcher is developing a battery of questions that are designed to measure the ethical decision-making processes used by managers. It is highly desirable to pilot such a research instrument before using it in an investigation, and administering it to a group who are not a part of the main study may be a legitimate way of carrying out some preliminary analysis of such issues as whether or not respondents tend to answer in identical ways to a question, or whether or not one question is often omitted when managers respond to it. In other words, for this kind of purpose, a convenience sample may be acceptable, though not ideal. A second kind of context in which it may be at least fairly acceptable to use a convenience sample is when the chance presents itself to gather data from a convenience sample and it represents too good an opportunity to miss. The data will not allow definitive findings to be generated, because of the problem of generalization, but they could provide a springboard for further research or allow links to be forged with existing findings in an area.

It also perhaps ought to be recognized that convenience sampling probably plays a more prominent role than is sometimes supposed. Certainly, in the field of business and management, convenience samples are very common and indeed are more prominent than are samples based on probability sampling (Bryman 1989*a*: 113–14). Research in focus 7.7 provides two examples of the use of convenience samples involving university students. Probability sampling involves a lot of preparation, so it is frequently avoided because of the difficulty and costs involved.



## Research in focus 7.7
## Two convenience samples involving university students

It is relatively common for business researchers to make use of the opportunities they have to draw a sample from their own organization, usually a university, when carrying out research. The use of convenience samples reflects this, as the following two examples illustrate.

Hall, Workman, and Marchioro (1998) were interested in whether or not leadership perceptions are dependent on an individual's sex and behavioural flexibility, as well as the sex type of the group task. Their convenience sample comprised undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Akron, where all three of the researchers were employed. More than 200 potential participants were pre-screened, and a sample of 112 was selected on the basis of their responses to a questionnaire that was designed to measure behavioural flexibility—that is, the extent to which individuals are able and willing to adapt their responses to fit their social context. This stratified sample of socially adaptable and socially inflexible participants was then subdivided into experimental groups of sixteen people made up of four four-person groups. Each four-person group consisted of two males and two females, one pair being adaptable and the other inflexible. High attendance at the experimental session was ensured by the fact that the students received course credit for their participation. The laboratory experiment involved two group tasks, each lasting around twenty minutes. The first was a manufacturing game, which the authors expected would be congruent with a masculine sex role; the second was a brainstorming task related to children's health, which the authors expected would be more gender neutral. After completing the task, the participants rated the other group members according to their leadership impressions, on such questions as 'To what degree did this person fit your image of a leader?' Response options ranged from 5 = very much, to 1 = not at all, on a five-point Likert scale. The results showed that males emerged as leaders in 71 per cent of groups in relation to the first task and in 68 per cent of groups for the second task. The researchers had expected women to be perceived as more leader-like in the second task than the first. However, the effect of the task on leadership perception was not statistically significant. Finally, the study did find that both men and women who are more behaviourally flexible are perceived as more leader-like than those who are less behaviourally flexible. The researchers claim that their use of student subjects instead of working adults was driven by their experimental research design, which 'would have been difficult, if not impossible to implement in an organizational setting' (1998: 27). That said, because their sample involved persons who had not worked together before, may not have known each other, and were not in paid employment, the ability of the research to detect the cumulative effects of disparity between the sexes on leader perceptions in an organizational setting is limited.

Lucas (1997) describes a study of university students that was undertaken to find out about the extent and kinds of part-time employment among students. Data were collected in spring 1995 from students in five of the seven faculties at Manchester Metropolitan University, where the author of the report was a lecturer. The specific degree programmes chosen were first degrees in: chemistry, combined studies, electrical engineering, history, hotel and catering management, illustration, law, psychology, and social science. Self-completion questionnaires were given out to students in the first, final, and either second or third years of their degrees (depending on whether the course lasted three or four years). The choice of subjects was designed to maximize the amount of variety in the type of degree programme and to provide similar numbers of males and females (since one gender frequently predominates in particular degree programmes). The questionnaire 'was issued, completed, and

collected at the end of class contact time by one of the researchers, or by a member of teaching staff' (1997: 6001). These procedures represent a very good attempt to generate a varied sample. It is a convenience sample, because the choice of degree programmes was selected purposively rather than randomly and because absentees from classes were unavailable to answer the questionnaires. On the other hand, because of the way questionnaires were administered, there was a very high rate of response among those students to whom the questionnaires were administered. An interesting question is whether or not absence from classes might be connected in some way to part-time working; in other words, might absence be due to students working at the time of the class or to students perhaps being too tired to go to the class because of their part-time work?

There is also an important difference between these two convenience samples that should be noticed. The first involves a convenience sample where the principal shared characteristic of the group—that is, that they are all university students—is in no way directly related to the subject of study, which is leadership perceptions. In other words, the convenience sample could as easily have been drawn from employees of a large corporation or members of a professional association if the researchers had found it convenient to draw their sample from this population. However, in the second, Lucas was studying the incidence of part-time employment among university students; therefore, her choice of convenience sample is directly related to her subject of study. This raises the issue of whether or not convenience samples can be used as the basis for generalization to a population that is wider than that to which the group belongs. In the case of the study of leadership perceptions by Hall, Workman, and Marchioro (1998), we cannot assume that the leadership perceptions of university students are representative of employees working in an organization. This is a limitation of convenience sampling.



## Research in focus 7.8
## A snowball sample

Venter, Boshoff, and Maas (2005) were interested in factors that influence the succession process in small and medium-sized family businesses. Their initial intention was to obtain access to a mailing list of small and medium-sized family businesses in South Africa from banks and other large organizations that had family businesses as clients. This would then have formed the basis of their sample. However, these large organizations declined to share their client information with the research team and so instead they used a snowball sampling technique. This involved research associates, who were employed in different regions of the country to contact small and medium-sized businesses in general with the aim of identifying those that were family businesses. Potential respondents were then asked to refer the researchers on to other family businesses that they knew about. As the researchers explain, 'following up on referrals proved to be the most effective approach and eventually yielded the majority of the potential respondents listed on the sampling frame' (2005: 291). A questionnaire survey was then mailed to 2,458 respondents, comprising current owner-managers, potential successors, successors, and retiring owner-managers in 1,038 family businesses, and a total of 332 usable questionnaires were returned.

## Snowball sampling

In certain respects, snowball sampling is a form of convenience sample, but it is worth distinguishing because it has attracted quite a lot of attention over the years. With this approach to sampling, the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others. Bryman used an approach like this to create a sample of British visitors to Disney theme parks (Bryman 1999). Another example of snowball sampling is given in the study by Venter, Boshoff, and Maas (2005) (see Research in focus 7.8), where this technique was used to identify owner-managers and successors of small and medium-sized family businesses in South Africa.

A snowball sample is in no sense random, because there is no way of knowing the precise extent of the population from which it would have to be drawn. In other words, there is no accessible sampling frame for the population from which the sample is to be taken, and the difficulty of creating such a sampling frame means that such an approach is the only feasible one. Moreover, even if one could create a sampling frame of strategic decision-makers or of British visitors to Disney theme parks, it would almost certainly be inaccurate straight away, because this is a shifting population. People will constantly be becoming and ceasing to be associated with the decision-making network, while new theme park visitors are arriving all the time. The problem with snowball sampling is that it is very unlikely that the sample will be representative of the population, though, as we have just suggested, the very notion of a population may be problematic in some circumstances. However, by and large, snowball sampling is used not within a quantitative research strategy, but within a qualitative one: both Franwick's and Bryman's studies were carried out within a predominantly qualitative research framework. Concerns about external validity and the ability to generalize do not loom as large within a qualitative research strategy as they do in a quantitative research one (see Chapters 6 and 16). In qualitative research, the orientation to sampling is more likely to be guided by a preference for *theoretical sampling* than with the kind of statistical sampling that has been the focus of this chapter (see Key concept 17.11). There is a much better 'fit' between snowball sampling and the theoretical sampling strategy of qualitative research than with the statistical sampling approach of quantitative research. This is not to suggest that snowball sampling is entirely irrelevant to quantitative research: when the researcher needs to focus upon or to reflect relationships between people, tracing connections through snowball sampling may be a better approach than conventional probability sampling (J. S. Coleman 1958).

## Quota sampling

Quota sampling is used intensively in commercial research, such as market research and political opinion polling (see Thinking deeply 7.9). The aim of quota sampling is to produce a sample that reflects a population in terms of the relative proportions of people in different categories, such as gender, ethnicity, age groups, socio-economic groups, and region of residence, and in combinations of these categories. However, unlike a stratified sample, the sampling of individuals is not carried out randomly, since the final selection of people is left up to the interviewer. Information about the stratification of the UK population or about certain regions can be obtained from sources like the census and from surveys based on probability samples such as the WERS (see Research in focus 2.14) or the UK Skills Survey (see Research in focus 7.3).

Once the categories and the number of people to be interviewed within each category (known as *quotas*) have been decided upon, it is then the job of interviewers to select people who fit these categories. The quotas will typically be interrelated. In a manner similar to stratified sampling, the population may be divided into strata in terms of, for example, gender, social class, age, and ethnicity. Census data might be used to identify the number of people who should be in each subgroup. The numbers to be interviewed in each subgroup will reflect the population. Each interviewer will probably seek out individuals who fit several subgroup quotas. Accordingly, an interviewer may know that among the various subgroups of people, he or she must find and interview five Asian, 25–34-year-old, lower-middle-class females in the area in which the interviewer has been asked to work (say, the Wirral). The interviewer usually asks people who are available to him or her about their characteristics (though gender will presumably be self-evident) in order to determine their suitability for a particular subgroup. Once a subgroup quota (or a combination of subgroup quotas) has been achieved, the interviewer will no longer be concerned to locate individuals for that subgroup.

The choice of respondents is left to the interviewer, subject to the requirement of all quotas being filled, usually within a certain time period. Those of you who have ever been approached on the street by a person toting a clipboard and interview schedule and have been asked about your age, occupation, and so on, before being asked a series of questions about a product or whatever, have almost certainly encountered an interviewer with a quota sample to fill. Sometimes, he or she will decide not to interview you because you do not meet the criteria required to fill a quota. This may be due to a quota already having been filled or to the criteria for exclusion meaning that a person with a certain characteristic you possess is not required.

A number of criticisms are frequently levelled at quota samples.

- Because the choice of respondent is left to the interviewer, the proponents of probability sampling argue that a quota sample cannot be representative. It may accurately reflect the population in terms of superficial characteristics, as defined by the quotas. However,

in their choice of people to approach, interviewers may be unduly influenced by their perceptions of how friendly people are or by whether the people make eye contact with the interviewer (unlike most of us, who look at the ground and shuffle past as quickly as possible because we do not want to be bothered in our leisure time).

- People who are in an interviewer's vicinity at the times he or she conducts interviews, and are therefore available to be approached, may not be typical. There is a risk, for example, that people in full-time paid work may be under-represented and that those who are included in the sample are not typical.
- The interviewer is likely to make judgements about certain characteristics in deciding whether or not to approach a person, in particular, judgements about age. Those judgements will sometimes be incorrect—for example, when someone who is eligible to be interviewed, because a quota that he or she fits is unfilled, is not approached because the interviewer makes an incorrect judgement (for example, that the person is older than he or she looks). In such a case, a possible element of bias is being introduced.
- It has also been argued that the widespread use of social class as a quota control can introduce difficulties, because of the problem of ensuring that interviewees are properly assigned to class groupings (Moser and Kalton 1971).
- It is not permissible to calculate a standard error of the mean from a quota sample, because the non-random method of selection makes it impossible to calculate the range of possible values of a population.

All of this makes the quota sample look a poor bet, and there is no doubt that it is not favoured by academic researchers. It does have some arguments in its favour, however.

- It is undoubtedly cheaper and quicker than an interview survey on a comparable probability sample. For example, interviewers do not have to spend a lot of time travelling between interviews.
- Interviewers do not have to keep calling back on people who were not available at the time they were first approached.
- Because calling back is not required, a quota sample is easier to manage. It is not necessary to keep track of people who need to be recontacted or to keep track of refusals. Refusals occur, of course, but it is not necessary (and indeed it is not possible) to keep a record of which respondents declined to participate.
- When speed is of the essence, a quota sample is invaluable when compared to the more cumbersome probability sample. Newspapers frequently need to know how a national sample of voters feel about a certain topic or how they intend to vote at that time. Alternatively, if there is a sudden major news event, such as the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York, the news media may seek a more or less instant picture of the nation's views or responses. Again, a quota sample will be much faster.
- As with convenience sampling, it is useful for conducting development work on new measures or on research instruments. It can also be usefully employed in relation to exploratory work from which new theoretical ideas might be generated.
- Although the standard error of the mean should not be computed for a quota sample, it frequently is. As Moser and Kalton (1971) observe, some writers argue that the use of a non-random method in quota sampling should not act as a barrier to such a computation because its significance as a source of error is small when compared to other errors that may arise in surveys (see Figure 7.9). However, they go on to argue that at least with random sampling the researcher can calculate the amount of sampling error and does not have to be concerned about its potential impact.

There is some evidence to suggest that, when compared to random samples, quota samples often result in biases. They under-represent people in lower social strata, people who work in the private sector and manufacturing, and people at the extremes of income, and they over-represent women in households with children and people from larger households (Marsh and Scarbrough 1990; Butcher 1994). On the other hand, it has to be acknowledged that probability samples are often biased too.



## Thinking deeply 7.9
## Using quota sampling in telephone market research

H. Taylor (1997) conducted a questionnaire survey of the methods used by eighty-three leading marketing research firms in seventeen countries, which revealed great variation in the way that they understood the notion of sampling within public opinion surveys using telephone interviewing (see Chapter 8 for a definition). Firms are divided according to whether they are committed to probability or quota sampling; 40 per cent of firms described their methods as quota sampling. 'In many so-called quota samples, telephone numbers are selected on some kind of random basis, and individual respondents at those numbers are interviewed if they fit in the quotas' (1997: 424). However, the distinction between probability and quota sampling is unclear within many firms, virtually all of which use some form of quota sampling, by region, sex, gender, or age, and in telephone surveys almost all firms use some form of quota to accept or reject some individual respondents. Taylor concludes that concepts of probability and quota sampling 'seem to be loosely defined in the minds of many researchers; this suggests the need for a better and common research language for use worldwide, with unambiguous definitions' (1997: 432).



# Limits to generalization

One point that is often not fully appreciated is that, even when a sample has been selected using probability sampling, any findings can be generalized only to the population from which that sample was taken. This is an obvious point, but it is easy to think that findings from a study have some kind of broader applicability. If we take our imaginary study of training and skill development among employees of a company, any findings could be generalized only to that company. In other words, you should be very cautious about generalizing to employees at other companies. There are many factors that may imply that the level of training and skill development is higher (or lower) than among company employees as a whole. There may be a higher (or lower) level of skill required in order to do the jobs that the company requires its employees to do, there may be more (or less) money in the company's training budget, there may be more (or less) of a culture of learning at this company, or the company may recruit a higher (or lower) proportion of employees who are already skilled. There may be many other factors too.

Similarly, we should be cautious of overgeneralizing in terms of locality. Hence a frequent criticism made in relation to research on employee motivation relates to the extent to which it can be assumed to be generalizable beyond the confines of the national culture on which the study is based. For example, Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) conducted semi-structured interviews with 203 accountants and engineers in the Pittsburgh area in the USA. Most of the companies that constituted sites for the study were involved in heavy industry, such as steel making or shipbuilding. The population from which the sample was selected consisted of all accountants and engineers who worked for these companies. Respondents were chosen randomly according to certain criteria for stratification, including age, job title, level in the company, and length of service. It is interesting that there is no mention of gender in the study, although we can fairly safely assume that, given that this was a study of accountants and engineers in the late 1950s, there is likely to be a male bias to the study. The maximum number of individuals selected for interview in each company was approximately 50. As the authors acknowledge, 'the fact that this work was done within a thirty-mile radius around Pittsburgh will inevitably raise questions about the degree to which the findings are applicable in other areas of the country' (1959: 31). The findings may also reflect the values of high individualism, self-interest, and high masculinity that have been identified as characteristic of American culture (Hofstede 1984). This is part of the reason there have been so many attempts to replicate the study on other occupational groups and in other localities, including different cultures and nationalities.

However, there could even be a further limit to generalization that is implied by the Herzberg et al. sample. The main study was conducted in the late 1950s. One issue that is rarely discussed in this context, and that is almost impossible to assess, is whether or not there is a time limit on the findings that are generated. Quite aside

from the fact that we need to appreciate that the findings cannot (or at least should not) be generalized beyond the Pittsburgh area, is there a point at which we have to say, 'Well, those findings applied to the Pittsburgh area then but things have changed and we can no longer assume that they apply to that or any other locality'? We are, after all, used to thinking that things have changed when there has been some kind of prominent change. To take a simple example: no one would be prepared to assume that the findings of a study in 1980 of university students' budgeting and personal finance habits would apply to students in the early twenty-first century. Quite aside from changes that might have occurred naturally, the erosion and virtual dismantling of the student grant system has changed the ways students finance their education, including perhaps a greater reliance on part-time work (Lucas 1997), a greater reliance on parents, and use of loans. But, even when there is no definable or recognizable source of relevant change of this kind, there is nonetheless the possibility (or even likelihood) that findings are temporally specific. Such an issue is impossible to resolve without further research (Bryman 1989*b*).



## Error in survey research

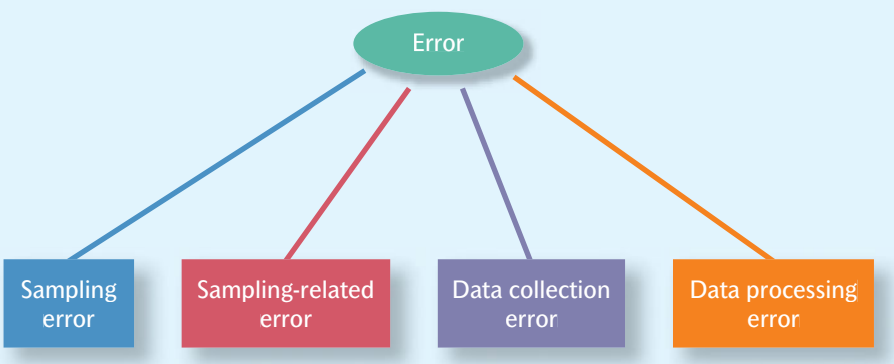
We can think of 'error', a term that has been employed on a number of occasions, as being made up of four main factors (see Figure 7.9).

- *Sampling error*. See Key concept 7.1 for a definition. This kind of error arises because it is extremely unlikely that one will end up with a truly representative sample, even when probability sampling is employed.
- We can distinguish what might be thought of as *sampling-related error*. This is error that is subsumed under the category *non-sampling error* (see Key concept 7.1) but that arises from activities or events that are related to the sampling process and are connected with the issue of generalizability or external validity of findings. Examples are an inaccurate sampling frame and non-response.
- There is also error that is connected with the implementation of the research process. We might call this *data collection error*. This source of error includes such factors as: poor question wording in self-completion questionnaires or structured interviews; poor interviewing techniques; and flaws in the administration of research instruments.
- Finally, there is *data processing error*. This arises from faulty management of data, in particular, errors in the *coding* of answers.

The third and fourth sources of error relate to factors that are not associated with sampling and instead relate much more closely to concerns about the validity of measurement, which was addressed in Chapter 6. An example of the way that non-response can impact upon the external validity and generalizability of findings is shown in Research in focus 7.10. However, the kinds of steps that need to be taken to keep these sources of error to a minimum in the context of social survey research will be addressed in the next three chapters.

## Figure 7.9

**Four sources of error in social survey research**





## Research in focus 7.10

# Sources of sampling and non-sampling error in a survey of the effects of privatization

In a study of the effects of privatization on corporate culture and employee well-being, Cunha and Cooper (2002) describe, first, the difficulties they experienced in obtaining access to companies in Portugal that were going through privatization and, secondly, the impact of a high non-response rate on their research design. Commenting on the first issue, the authors explain, 'we faced a very strong resistance on the part of top management of the companies we contacted, which is understandable considering the "sensitive" [*sic*] political and human resource decisions that were being taken' (2002: 27). In relation to the second point, samples were selected by the human resource managers, forming the basis for the questionnaire survey, which was sent directly by the researchers to the employees' home address. The three companies, the samples, and non-response rates were as follows:

- The first was a cement company. It employed approximately 2,500 employees and a stratified sample of 750 employees was chosen, in managerial, technical/professional, clerical, and manual jobs; 133 valid responses were obtained (18 per cent response rate).
- The second was a smaller cement company. From a population of 500 a stratified sample of 125 employees was chosen, but no manual workers were included in the sample owing to the low literacy levels among workers. Thirty-five valid responses were received (28 per cent response rate). By occupational level this sample consisted of 22 managers, 11 technical/professional, and 2 clerical employees.
- The third was a paper pulp company with 2,800 employees. A stratified sample of 1,244 employees was chosen. In this case a longitudinal element was built into the survey—questionnaires were sent in 1994 (before partial privatization) and again in 1996 (after partial privatization). However, the number of employees who responded to both these surveys was quite small ($n$ = 545), so the researchers had to select different kinds of sample that focused on subgroups that were involved in privatization.

This study raises a number of questions in relation to possible sources of sampling error. The fact that samples were chosen by the human resources manager in the company means that they were non-random and thus may have reflected a bias on the part of the individual who was making these choices. The researchers' original aim—to conduct a longitudinal analysis based on surveying employees before and after privatization—had to be modified owing to insufficient access. This meant that the researchers were limited in the extent to which they were able to suggest that changes in corporate culture were caused by privatization.

A further possible source of bias associated with the sampling frame related to the exclusion of manual workers from the survey in the second company, owing to their low levels of literacy. However, it is worth noting that this problem could potentially have been overcome through the use of a structured interview approach instead of a **self-administered questionnaire**. In addition, we can see from the profile of responses in this company (22 managers, 11 technical/professional, and 2 clerical employees) that this sample consists of significantly more managers than other kinds of employees. It is, therefore, extremely likely that the sample does not reflect the actual population. Finally, the high non-response rate in the third company introduced a further source of sample bias (this forced the researchers to find other ways of breaking down the sample in ways that were more statistically meaningful).

The example shows how various sources of sampling and non-sampling error are sometimes closely interrelated. In particular, it illustrates how non-response rates and sampling frames can be affected by the sensitivity of the issue that is being investigated and the consequent willingness of companies and employees to participate in the research.



## Key points

- Probability sampling is a mechanism for reducing bias in the selection of samples.
- Ensure you become familiar with key technical terms in the literature on sampling such as: representative sample; random sample; non-response; population; sampling error; etc.
- Randomly selected samples are important because they permit generalizations to the population and because they have certain known qualities.
- Sampling error decreases as sample size increases.
- Quota samples can provide reasonable alternatives to random samples, but they suffer from some deficiencies.
- Convenience samples may provide interesting data, but it is crucial to be aware of their limitations in terms of generalizability.
- Sampling and sampling-related error are just two sources of error in social survey research.



## Questions for review

- What do each of the following terms mean: population; probability sampling; non-probability sampling; sampling frame; representative sample; and sampling and non-sampling error?
- What are the goals of sampling?
- What are the main areas of potential bias in sampling?

### *Sampling error*

- What is the significance of sampling error for achieving a representative sample?

### *Types of probability sample*

- What is probability sampling and why is it important?
- What are the main types of probability sample?
- How far does a stratified random sample offer greater precision than a simple random or systematic sample?
- If you were conducting an interview survey of around 500 people in Manchester, what type of probability sample would you choose and why?
- A researcher positions herself on a street corner and asks one person in five who walks by to be interviewed: she continues doing this until she has a sample of 250. How likely is she to achieve a representative sample?

### *The qualities of a probability sample*

- A researcher is interested in levels of job satisfaction among manual workers in a firm that is undergoing change. The firm has 1,200 manual workers. The researcher selects a simple random sample of 10 per cent of the population. He measures job satisfaction on a Likert scale comprising ten items. A high level of satisfaction is scored 5 and a low level is scored 1. The mean job satisfaction score is 34.3. The standard error of the mean is 8.57. What is the 95 per cent confidence interval?

### *Sample size*

- What factors would you take into account in deciding how large your sample should be when devising a probability sample?
- What is non-response and why is it important to the question of whether or not you will end up with a representative sample?

### *Types of non-probability sampling*

- Are non-probability samples useless?
- In what circumstances might you employ snowball sampling?
- 'Quota samples are not true random samples, but in terms of generating a representative sample there is little difference between them, and this accounts for their widespread use in market research and opinion polling.' Discuss.

### *Limits to generalization*

- 'The problem of generalization to a population is not just to do with the matter of getting a representative sample.' Discuss.

### *Error in survey research*

- 'Non-sampling error, as its name implies, is concerned with sources of error that are not part of the sampling process.' Discuss.



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Sampling.*

# 8

# Structured interviewing

## Chapter outline


**Introduction** 201

**The structured interview** 202
- Reducing error due to interviewer variability 202
- Accuracy and ease of data processing 203
- Other types of interview 204

**Interview contexts** 205
- More than one interviewee 205
- More than one interviewer 206
- In person or by telephone? 206
- Computer-assisted interviewing 209

**Conducting interviews** 210
- Know the schedule 210
- Introducing the research 210
- Rapport 211
- Asking questions 211
- Recording answers 212
- Clear instructions 213
- Question order 213
- Probing 215
- Prompting 216
- Leaving the interview 217
- Training and supervision 217

**Other approaches to structured interviewing** 218
- Critical incident method 219
- Projective methods, pictorial and photo elicitation 220
- Verbal protocol approach 221
- Repertory grid technique 223

**Problems with structured interviewing** 225
- Characteristics of interviewers 225
- Response sets 226
- The problem of meaning 227
- The feminist critique 227

***Key points*** 228

***Questions for review*** 228



## Chapter outline

Once sampling issues have been taken into consideration, the next stage of the survey research process (see Figure 7.1) involves considering whether to administer the questionnaire face to face or to rely on self-completion. This chapter deals with the first option, the structured interview, while the following chapter addresses issues relating to self-completion. A further option to consider is whether to administer the questionnaire by email or by using the Web; this possibility will be covered later on in Chapter 26.

The structured interview is one of a variety of forms of research interview, but it is the one that is most commonly employed in survey research. The goal of the structured interview is for the interviewing of respondents to be standardized so that differences between interviews in any research project are minimized. As a result, there are many guidelines about how structured interviewing should be carried out so that variation in the conduct of interviews is small. This chapter explores:

- the reasons why the structured interview is a prominent research method in survey research; this issue entails a consideration of the importance of standardization to the process of measurement;
- the different contexts of interviewing, such as the use of more than one interviewer and whether the administration of the interview is in person or by telephone;
- various prerequisites of structured interviewing, including: establishing rapport with the interviewee; asking questions as they appear on the interview schedule; recording exactly what is said by interviewees; ensuring there are clear instructions on the interview schedule concerning question sequencing and the recording of answers; and keeping to the question order as it appears on the schedule;
- problems with structured interviewing, including: the influence of the interviewer on respondents and the possibility of systematic bias in answers (known as *response sets*). The feminist critique of the structured interview, which raises a distinctive cluster of problems with the method, is also examined.

# Introduction

The interview is a common occurrence in social life, because there are many different forms of interview. There are job interviews, media interviews, social work interviews, police interviews, appraisal interviews. And then there are research interviews, which represent the kind of interview that will be covered in this and other chapters (such as Chapters 18 and 19). These different kinds of interview share some common features, such as the eliciting of information by the interviewer from the interviewee and the operation of rules of varying degrees of formality or explicitness concerning the conduct of the interview.

In the business research interview, the aim is for the interviewer to elicit from the interviewee or *respondent*, as he or she is frequently called in survey research, all manner of information: interviewees' own behaviour or that of others, attitudes, norms, beliefs, and values. There are many different types or styles of research interview, but the kind that is primarily employed in survey research is the structured interview, which is the focus of this chapter. Other kinds of interview will be briefly mentioned in this chapter but will be discussed in greater detail in later chapters.

# The structured interview

The research interview is a prominent data collection strategy in both quantitative and qualitative research. The social survey is probably the chief context within which business researchers employ the structured interview (see Key concept 8.1) in connection with quantitative research, and it is this form of the interview that will be emphasized in this chapter. The reason why survey researchers typically prefer this kind of interview is that it promotes standardization of *both* the asking of questions *and* the recording of answers. This feature has two closely related virtues from the perspective of quantitative research.

## Key concept 8.1
## What is a structured interview?

A structured interview, sometimes called a *standardized interview*, entails the administration of an interview schedule by an interviewer. The aim is for all interviewees to be given exactly the same context of questioning. This means that each respondent receives exactly the same interview stimulus as any other. The goal of this style of interviewing is to ensure that interviewees' replies can be aggregated, and this can be achieved reliably only if those replies are in response to identical cues. Interviewers are supposed to read out questions exactly and in the same order as they are printed on the schedule. Questions are usually very specific and very often offer the interviewee a fixed range of answers (this type of question is often called *closed*, *closed ended*, *pre-coded*, or *fixed choice*). The structured interview is the typical form of interview in social survey research.

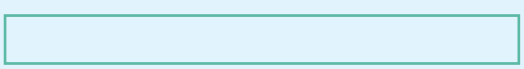
## Reducing error due to interviewer variability

The standardization of both the asking of questions and the recording of answers means that, if the interview is properly executed, variation in people's replies will be due to 'true' or 'real' variation and not due to the interview context. To take a simple illustration, when we ask a question that is supposed to be an indicator of a concept, we want to keep error to a minimum, an issue that was touched on at the end of Chapter 7. We can think of the answers to a question as constituting the values that a variable takes. These values, of course, exhibit variation. This could be the question on skill development and training among employees that was a focus of Chapter 7 at certain points. Employees will vary in the number of training days they receive (see Figure 8.1). However, some respondents may be inaccurately classified in terms of the variable. There are a number of possible reasons for this.

Most variables will contain an element of error, so that it is helpful to think of variation as made up of two components: true variation and error. In other words:

Figure 8.1

A variable

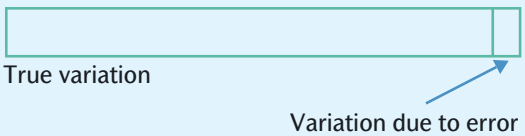



variation = true variation + variation due to error.

The aim is to keep the error component to a minimum (see Figure 8.2), since error has an adverse effect on the validity of a measure. If the error component is quite high (see Figure 8.3), validity will be jeopardized. The significance for error of standardization in the structured interview is that two sources of variation due to error—the second and fifth in Tips and skills 'Common sources of error in survey research'—are likely to be less pronounced, since the opportunity for variation in interviewer behaviour in these two areas (asking questions and recording answers) is reduced.

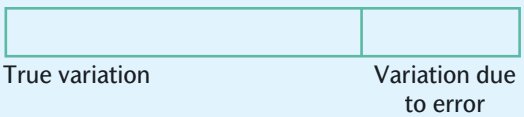
## Figure 8.2

**A variable with little error**




## Figure 8.3

**A variable with considerable error**






## Tips and skills
## Common sources of error in survey research

There are many sources of error in survey research, in addition to those associated with sampling. This is a list of the principal sources of error:

1. a poorly worded question;
2. the way the question is asked by the interviewer;
3. misunderstanding on the part of the interviewee;
4. memory problems on the part of the interviewee;
5. the way the information is recorded by the interviewer;
6. the way the information is processed, either when answers are coded or when data are entered into the computer.

The significance of standardization and of thereby reducing interviewer variability is this: assuming that there is no problem with an interview question owing to such things as confusing terms or ambiguity (an issue that will be examined in Chapter 10), we want to be able to say as far as possible that the variation that we find is connected with true variation between interviewees and not to variation in the way a question was asked or the answers recorded in the course of the administration of a survey by structured interview. Variability can occur in either of two ways: first, *intra-interviewer variability*, whereby an interviewer is not consistent in the way he or she asks questions and/or records answers; secondly, when there is more than one interviewer, there may be *inter-interviewer variability*, whereby interviewers are not consistent with each other in the ways they ask questions and/or record answers. Needless to say, these two sources of variability are not mutually exclusive; they can coexist, compounding the problem even further. In view of the significance of standardization, it is hardly surprising that some writers prefer to call the structured interview a *standardized interview* (e.g. Oppenheim 1992) or *standardized survey interview* (e.g. Fowler and Mangione 1990).

## Accuracy and ease of data processing

Like self-completion questionnaires, most structured interviews contain mainly questions that are variously referred to as *closed*, *closed ended*, *pre-coded*, or *fixed choice*. This issue will be covered in detail in Chapter 10. However, this type of question has considerable relevance to the current discussion. With the **closed question**, the respondent is

given a limited choice of possible answers. In other words, the interviewer provides respondents with two or more possible answers and asks them to select which one or ones apply. Ideally, this procedure will simply entail the interviewer placing a tick in a box by the answer(s) selected by a respondent or circling the selected answer or using a similar procedure. The advantage of this practice is that the potential for interviewer variability is reduced: there is no problem of whether the interviewer writes down everything that the respondent says or of misinterpretation of the reply given. If an *open* or *open-ended* question is asked, the interviewer may not write down everything said, may embellish what is said, or may misinterpret what is said.

However, the advantages of the closed question in the context of survey research go further than this, as we will see in Chapter 10. One advantage that is particularly significant in the context of the present discussion is that closed questions greatly facilitate the processing of data. When an **open question** is asked, the answers need to be sifted and *coded* in order for the data to be analysed quantitatively. Not only is this a laborious procedure, particularly if there is a large number of open questions and/or of respondents; it also introduces the potential for another source of error, which is the sixth in Tips and skills 'Common sources of error in survey research': it is quite likely that error will be introduced as a result of variability in the coding of answers. When open questions are asked, the interviewer is supposed to write down as much of what is said as possible. Answers can, therefore, be in the form of several sentences. These answers have to be examined and then categorized, so that each person's answer can be aggregated with other respondents' answers to a certain question. A number will then be allocated to each category of answer so that the answers can then be entered into a computer database and analysed quantitatively. This general process is known as coding, and will be examined in greater detail in Chapter 10.

Coding introduces yet another source of error. First, if the rules for assigning answers to categories, collectively known as the **coding frame**, are flawed, the variation that is observed will not reflect the true variation in interviewees' replies. Secondly, there may be variability in the ways in which answers are categorized. As with interviewing, there can be two sources: *intra-coder variability*, whereby the coder varies over time in the way in which the rules for assigning answers to categories are implemented; and *inter-coder variability*, whereby coders differ from each other in the way in which the rules for assigning answers to categories are implemented. If either (or both) source(s) of variability occur, at least part of the variation in interviewees' replies will not reflect true variation and instead will be caused by error.

The closed question sidesteps this problem neatly, because respondents allocate *themselves* to categories. The coding process is then a simple matter of attaching a different number to each category of answer and of entering the numbers into a computer database. It is not surprising, therefore, that this type of question is often referred to as pre-coded, because decisions about the coding of answers are typically undertaken as part of the design of the schedule—that is, before any respondents have actually been asked questions. There is very little opportunity for interviewers or coders to vary in the recording or the coding of answers. Of course, if some respondents misunderstand any terms in the alternative answers with which they are presented, or if the answers do not adequately cover the appropriate range of possibilities, the question will not provide a valid measure. However, that is a separate issue and one to which we will return in Chapter 10. The chief point to register about closed questions for the moment is that, when compared to open questions, they reduce one potential source of error *and* are much easier to process for quantitative data analysis.

## Other types of interview

The structured interview is by no means the only type of interview, but it is certainly the main type that is likely to be encountered in survey research and in quantitative research generally. Unfortunately, a host of different terms have been employed by writers on research methodology to distinguish the diverse forms of research interview. Key concept 8.2 represents an attempt to capture some of the major terms and types.

All of the forms of interview outlined in Key concept 8.2, with the exception of the *structured interview* and the *standardized interview*, are primarily used in connection with qualitative research, and it is in that context that they will be encountered again later in this book. They are rarely used in connection with quantitative research, and survey research in particular, because the absence of standardization in the asking of questions and recording of answers makes respondents' replies difficult to aggregate and to process. This is not to say that they have no role at all. For example, as we will see in Chapter 10, the **unstructured interview** can have a useful role in relation to developing the fixed-choice alternatives with which respondents are provided in the kind of closed question that is typical of the structured interview.



## Key concept 8.2
## Major types of interview

- *Structured interview*; see Key concept 8.1.
- *Standardized interview*; see Key concept 8.1.
- **Semi-structured interview**. This is a term that covers a wide range of instances. It typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an interview schedule but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference than that typically found in a structured interview schedule. Also, the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies.
- *Unstructured interview*. The interviewer typically has only a list of topics or issues, often called an **interview guide** or *aide-mémoire*, that are covered. The style of questioning is usually informal. The phrasing and sequencing of questions will vary from interview to interview.
- *Intensive interview*. This term is employed by Lofland and Lofland (1995) as an alternative term to the *unstructured interview*. Spradley (1979) uses the term *ethnographic interview* to describe a form of interview that is also more or less synonymous with the *unstructured interview*.
- *Qualitative interview*. For some writers, this term seems to denote an *unstructured interview* (e.g. Mason 1996), but more frequently it is a general term that embraces interviews of both the semi-structured and unstructured kind (e.g. Rubin and Rubin 1995).
- *In-depth interview*. Like the term *qualitative interview*, this one sometimes refers to an *unstructured interview* but more often refers to both semi-structured and unstructured interviewing.
- *Focused interview*. This is a term devised by Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1956) to refer to an interview using predominantly open questions to ask interviewees questions about a specific situation or event that is relevant to them and of interest to the researcher.
- *Focus group*. This is the same as the *focused interview*, but interviewees discuss the specific issue in groups. See Key concept 19.1 for a more detailed definition.
- *Group interview*. Some writers see this term as synonymous with the *focus group*, but a distinction may be made between the latter and a situation in which members of a group discuss a variety of matters that may be only partially related.
- **Oral history interview**. This is an *unstructured* or *semi-structured interview* in which the respondent is asked to recall events from his or her past and to reflect on them (see also Key concept 18.4). There is usually a cluster of fairly specific research concerns to do with a particular epoch or event, so there is some resemblance to a focused interview.
- **Life history interview**. This is similar to the *oral history interview*, but the aim of this type of *unstructured interview* is to glean information on the entire biography of each respondent (see also Key concept 18.4).



# Interview contexts

In an archetypal interview, an interviewer stands or sits in front of the respondent, asking the latter a series of questions and writing down the answers. However, there are several possible departures from it, although this archetype is the most usual context for an interview.

### More than one interviewee

In the case of group interviews or focus groups, there is more than one, and usually quite a few more than one, respondent or interviewee. Nor is this the only context in

which more than one person is interviewed. Bell, Taylor, and Thorpe (2001) carried out interviews with two managers in the same company, both of whom had been involved in the implementation of the people-management initiative, Investors in People. The managers, who had often had different roles in relation to the initiative or been involved with it at different stages of its development, were together able to build a chronological understanding of its implementation. Similarly, in Bryman's research on visitors to Disney theme parks, not just couples but often their children took part in the interview as well (Bryman 1999). However, it is very unusual for structured interviews to be used in connection with this kind of questioning. In survey research, it is almost always a specific individual who is the object of questioning. Indeed, in survey interviews it is very advisable to discourage as far as possible the presence and intrusion of others during the course of the interview. Investigations in which more than one person is being interviewed tend to be exercises in qualitative research, though this is not always the case.

## More than one interviewer

This is a relatively unusual situation in business research, because of the considerable cost that is involved in dispatching two (or indeed more than two) people to interview someone. Bechhofer, Elliott, and McCrone (1984, see Chapter 18) describe research in which two people interviewed individuals in a wide range of occupations. However, while their approach achieved a number of benefits for them, their interviewing style was of the unstructured kind that is typically employed in qualitative research, and they argue that the presence of a second interviewer is unlikely to achieve any added value in the context of structured interviewing.

## In person or by telephone?

A third way in which the archetype may not be realized is that interviews may be conducted by telephone rather than face to face. While telephone interviewing is quite common in fields like market research, it is less common in business research. In market research opinion has shifted in recent years away from the perception that face-to-face surveys are more representative than telephone surveys, towards thinking that telephone surveys are either more or at least as representative as face-to-face surveys. This is noteworthy, since, as H. Taylor (1997: 429) notes, 'it is not very long since telephone surveys were regarded as a cheap and dirty substitute for face-to-face interviewing by many survey firms'. See Research in focus 8.3 for an example of the use of telephone interviewing.

There are several advantages of telephone over personal interviews.

- On a like-for-like basis, they are far cheaper and also quicker to administer. This arises because, for personal interviews, interviewers have to spend a great deal of time and money travelling between respondents. This factor will be even more pronounced when a sample is geographically dispersed, a problem that is only partially mitigated for in personal interview surveys by strategies like cluster sampling. Of course, telephone interviews take time, and hired interviewers have to be paid, but the cost of conducting a telephone interview will still be lower than a comparable personal one.
- The telephone interview is easier to supervise than the personal interview. This is a particular advantage when there are several interviewers, since it becomes easier to check on interviewers' transgressions in the asking of questions, such as rephrasing questions or the inappropriate use of probes by the interviewer.
- Telephone interviewing has a further advantage that is to do with evidence (which is not as clear-cut as one might want) that suggests that, in personal interviews, respondents' replies are sometimes affected by characteristics of the interviewer (for example, class or ethnicity) and indeed by his or her mere presence (implying that the interviewees may reply in ways they feel will be deemed desirable by interviewers). The remoteness of the interviewer in telephone interviewing removes this potential source of bias to a significant extent. The interviewer's personal characteristics cannot be seen and the fact that he or she is not physically present may offset the likelihood of respondents' answers being affected by the interviewer.

Telephone interviewing suffers from certain limitations when compared to the personal interview (see Thinking deeply 8.4).

- People who do not own or who are not contactable by telephone obviously cannot be interviewed by telephone. In business research, this characteristic is most likely to be a feature of lower-status employees and, therefore, the potential for sampling bias exists. Lower-income households are more likely not to own a telephone; also, many people choose to be ex-directory—that is, they have taken action for their telephone numbers not to appear in a telephone directory. Again, these people cannot be interviewed by telephone. One possible solution



## Research in focus 8.3
## A telephone survey of dignity at work

Berg and Frost (2005) used results from a telephone survey of over 500 low-skill, low-wage workers in hospitals in the USA in order to explore the features that affect workers' perceptions of dignity at work. They also wanted to find out if union representation and/or changes in worker representation influenced workers' perceptions of dignity at work. The researchers identified three main dimensions to the concept of dignity at work: fair treatment, intrinsically satisfying work, and economic security. The kinds of jobs that their sample were engaged in included food service, housekeepers, and nursing assistants doing tasks that the authors describe as 'dead end jobs with little or no chance of upward mobility' (2005: 663). They observe that workers who do these jobs typically earn only the minimum wage and there tends to be a high level of annual turnover, between 50 and 100 per cent.

The data came from a sample of fifteen community hospitals from across the United States, focusing on the most representative group, hospitals with between 200 and 400 beds. The researchers chose telephone interviewing because of the 'inherent instability in the lives of this sector of the workforce' (2005: 669). This method was seen as being one way of reliably reaching the workers. The researchers carried out telephone interviews with 589 workers, asking them about all aspects of their jobs and careers. Telephone numbers were obtained from employers. However, there were a number of difficulties associated with the telephone interview method that stemmed from the nature of the population in which the research was interested. 'Many of the phone numbers we secured from employers were simply no good: the phone service had been disconnected; the person no longer lived at that phone number; or the respondent would not answer the telephone' (2005: 669). One of the reasons why the phone call was not answered was because respondents had call display. If they did not recognize the number, they would not pick up the phone, because they were trying to avoid debt collection agents. These difficulties adversely affected the response rate, which ended up at 45 per cent. The researchers conclude that the people they were able to survey probably represent the most stable part of this population, so the results are likely to overstate the positive aspects associated with these jobs: 'those whose work lives keep them living in a precarious fashion are likely those not responding to our telephone survey' (2005: 669).

to this last difficulty is *random digit dialling*. With this technique, the computer randomly selects telephone numbers within a predefined geographical area. Not only is this a random process that conforms to the rules about probability sampling examined in Chapter 4; it also stands a chance of getting at ex-directory households, though it cannot, of course, gain access to those without a telephone at all. The question of whether response rates (see Key concept 7.5) are lower with surveys by telephone interview than with surveys by personal interview is unclear, in that there is little consistent evidence on this question, but generally it is believed that telephone surveys achieve lower rates (see Table 26.1).

- The length of a telephone interview is unlikely to be sustainable beyond 20–25 minutes, whereas personal interviews can be much longer than this (Frey 2004).
- The question of whether response rates (see Key concept 7.5) are lower with surveys by telephone interview than with surveys by personal interview is unclear, in that there is little consistent evidence on this question. However, there is a general belief that telephone interviews achieve slightly lower rates than personal interviews (Frey and Oishi 1995; Shuy 2002; Frey 2004).
- There is some evidence to suggest that telephone interviews fare less well for the asking of questions about sensitive issues, such as workplace bullying or drug and alcohol use. However, the evidence is not entirely consistent on this point, though it is probably sufficient to suggest that, when many questions of this kind are to be used, a personal interview may be superior (Shuy 2002).
- Developments in telephone communications, such as the growing use of answerphones, other forms of call screening, and mobile phones, have almost certainly had an adverse effect on telephone surveys in terms

of response rates and the general difficulty of getting access to respondents through conventional landlines. Households that rely exclusively on mobile phones represent a particular difficulty.

- Telephone interviewers cannot engage in observation. This means that they are not in a position to respond to signs of puzzlement or unease on the faces of respondents when they are asked a question. In a personal interview, the interviewer may respond to such signs by restating the question or attempting to clarify the meaning of the question, though this has to be handled in a standardized way as far as possible. A further issue relating to the inability of the interviewer to observe is that, sometimes, interviewers may be asked to collect subsidiary information in connection with their visits (for example, whether or not health and safety procedures are made evident at a business premises). Such information cannot be collected when telephone interviews are employed.
- It is frequently the case that specific individuals in households or firms are the targets of an interview. In other words, simply anybody will not do. This requirement is likely to arise from the specifications of the population to be sampled, which means that people in a certain role or position or with particular characteristics are to be interviewed. It is probably more difficult to ascertain by



## Thinking deeply 8.4
## Cold calling and misbehaviour in telephone interviewing

The widespread nature of telephone selling, commonly referred to as 'cold calling', and the predominantly negative nature of public reactions to it, has the potential to create a negative effect in terms of respondent reactions to business research involving telephone interviewing. According to an article in the *Guardian* in 2006, 'by 1995 we [in the UK] were receiving 10 billion cold calls each year. Today, the figure is 13 billion, including three billion coming in from overseas. And, of course, the recipients take it out on the cold callers. According to the Department of Trade and Industry, while 8% of people who work on a telephone helpdesk leave the industry annually, 28% of cold callers abandon their jobs each year.' Ronson, who is a journalist, visited a call centre in Southend-on-Sea to discover how cold callers view their work, the sometimes dubious practices they engage in, and the kinds of abuse that they have to endure from the people they are calling. He notes that, even though the vast majority of people decline to purchase anything as a result of cold calling, all it takes is for just 1 per cent of cold calls to result in a sale for the method to represent a cost-effective form of selling. However, the introduction of the Telephone Preference Service (TPS) in the UK means that individuals can now sign up to have cold calls filtered out, and the rising popularity of this service (eleven million people had signed up to it by the end of 2005) means that the people who are not members are likely to be subjected to more and more cold calling until they eventually also sign up. As a result, many call centres have closed. However, Ronson also cautions that this may not be the end of the story, as the activity may go offshore, where the activity is not subject to the same degree of regulation.

Added to this, telephone surveys are the most popular method of market research in the United States, so the practices adopted by market researchers are also likely to be reflected in the perceptions of potential respondents towards telephone interviewers connected with other kinds of business research. Kiecker and Nelson (1996) list the various kinds of misbehaviour that market research interviewers engage in, which include rewording questions, answering questions when interviewees decline to respond, and fabricating responses to entire questionnaires. An empirical investigation carried out by Kiecker and Nelson (1996) into the nature and incidence of such practices among market research telephone interviewers found that they tend to see such behaviours as ordinary and normal. Although some of these practices, such as adding personal comments and rephrasing questions, might be interpreted as motivated by a desire to improve the quality of the telephone interview, others, such as fabricating a response to a refused question or fabricating an entire interview, may be interpreted as the product of low morale and the interviewer's belief that the process 'is not a scientific search for truth, but instead an assembly-line process where output quotas must be met' (Kiecker and Nelson 1996: 161). They conclude by offering recommendations to marketing academics, researchers, and managers on how to reduce the incidence of telephone interviewing misbehaviour, which include the need for compensation strategies and monitoring procedures that ensure the closer supervision of telephone interviewers. They also suggest the use of computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) to reduce certain types of misbehaviour, such as asking questions out of sequence.

*Source*: J. Ronson, 'Cold Sweat', *Guardian*, 28 Jan. 2006.

telephone interview whether or not the correct person is replying.

- The telephone interviewer cannot readily employ visual aids such as show cards (see Tips and skills 'A show card' and Tips and skills 'Another show card') from which respondents might be asked to select their replies, or use diagrams or photographs.
- There is some evidence to suggest that the quality of data derived from telephone interviews is inferior to that of comparable face-to-face interviews. A series of experiments reported by Holbrook, Green, and Krosnick (2003) on the mode of survey administration in the USA using long questionnaires found that respondents interviewed by telephone were more likely: to express no opinion or 'don't know' (see Chapter 10 for more on this issue); to answer in the same way to a series of linked questions; to express socially desirable answers; to be apprehensive about the interview; and to be more likely to be dissatisfied with the time taken by the interview (even though they were invariably shorter than in the face-to-face mode). Also, telephone interviewees tended to be less engaged with the interview process. While these results should be viewed with caution, since studies like these are bound to be affected by such factors as the use of a large questionnaire on a national sample, they do provide interesting food for thought.

## Computer-assisted interviewing

In recent years, increasing use has been made of computers in the interviewing process, especially in commercial survey research of the kind conducted by market research and opinion polling organizations. There are two main formats for computer-assisted interviewing: computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) and computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI). A very large percentage of telephone interviews are conducted with the aid of personal computers. Among commercial survey organizations, almost all telephone interviewing is of the CATI kind, and this kind of interview has become one of the most popular formats for such firms. The main reasons for the growing use of CAPI has been that the increased portability and affordability of laptop computers, and the growth in the number and quality of software packages that provide a platform for devising interview schedules, provide greater opportunity for them to be used in connection with face-to-face interviews.

With computer-assisted interviewing, the questions that comprise an interview schedule appear on the screen. As interviewers ask each question, they 'key in' the appropriate reply using a mouse and proceed to the next question. Moreover, this process has the great advantage that, when *filter questions* are asked, so that certain answers may be skipped as a result of a person's reply, the computer can be programmed to 'jump' to the next relevant question. This removes the possibility of interviewers inadvertently asking inappropriate questions or failing to ask ones that should be asked. As such, computer-assisted interviewing enhances the degree of control over the interview process and can therefore improve standardization of the asking and recording of questions. However, there is very little evidence to suggest that the quality of data deriving from computer-assisted interviews is demonstrably superior to comparable paper-and-pencil interviews (Couper and Hansen 2002). If the interviewer is out in an organization all day, he or she can either take a disk with the saved data to the research office or send the data down a telephone line with the aid of a modem. It is possible that technophobic respondents may be a bit alarmed by their use, but, by and large, the use of computer-assisted interviewing seems destined to grow. One of us has had personal experience of this technique as a respondent in a market research survey: in this instance the laptop started to beep part of the way through the interview because the battery was about to expire and needed to be replaced with a back-up. An incident such as this could be disruptive to the flow of an interview and be alarming for technophobic respondents.

There is evidence that professional interviewers generally like computer-assisted interviewing, often feeling that it improves the image of their occupation, though there are many who are concerned about the problems that might arise from technical difficulties and the inconvenience of correcting errors with a computer as opposed to a pen. One issue that sometimes disconcerts interviewers is the fact that they can see only part of the schedule at any one time (Couper and Hansen 2002).

CAPI and CATI have not infiltrated academic survey research to anything like the same degree that they have in commercial survey research, although that picture is likely to change considerably because of the many advantages they possess. In any case, many of the large datasets that are used for secondary analysis (see Chapter 13 for examples) derive from computer-assisted interviewing studies undertaken by commercial or large social research organizations. One further point to register in connection with computer-assisted interviewing is that so far we have avoided discussion of Internet surveys. The reason for this is that such surveys are self-completion questionnaires rather than interviews. We cover them in Chapter 26.



# Conducting interviews

Issues concerning the conduct of interviews are examined here in a very general way. In addition to the matters considered here, there is clearly the important issue of how to word the interview questions themselves. This area will be explored in Chapter 10, since many of the rules of question asking relate to self-completion questionnaire techniques like postal questionnaires as well as to structured interviews. One further general point to make here is that the advice concerning the conduct of interviews provided in this chapter relates to structured interviews. The framework for conducting the kinds of interviewing conducted in qualitative research (such as unstructured and semi-structured interviewing and focus groups) will be handled in later chapters.

## Know the schedule

Before interviewing anybody, an interviewer should be fully conversant with the schedule. Even if you are the only person conducting interviews, make sure you know it inside out. Interviewing can be stressful for interviewers and it is possible that under duress standard interview procedures like filter questions (see Tips and skills 'Instructions for interviewers in the use of a filter question') can cause interviewers to get flustered and miss questions out or ask the wrong questions. If two or more interviewers are involved, they need to be fully trained to know what is required of them and to know their way around the schedule. Training is especially important in order to reduce the likelihood of interviewer variability in the asking of questions, which is a source of error.

## Introducing the research

Prospective respondents have to be provided with a credible rationale for the research in which they are being asked to participate and for giving up their valuable time. This aspect of conducting interview research is of particular significance at a time when response rates to social survey research appear to be declining, though, as noted in Chapter 7, the evidence on this issue is the focus of some disagreement. The introductory rationale may be either spoken by the interviewer or written down. In many cases, respondents may be presented with both modes. It comes in spoken form in such situations as when interviewers make contact with respondents on the street or when they 'cold call' respondents in their homes or at their place of work, in person or by telephone. A written rationale will be required to alert respondents that someone will be contacting them in person or on the telephone to request an interview. Respondents will frequently encounter both forms—for example, when they are sent a letter and then ask the interviewer who turns up to interview them what the research is all about. It is important for the rationale given by telephone to be consistent with the one given by letter, as if respondents pick up inconsistencies they may well be less likely to participate in the survey.

Introductions to research should typically contain the bits of information outlined in Tips and skills 'Topics and issues to include in an introductory statement'. Since interviewers represent the interface between the research and the respondent, they have an important role in maximizing the response rate for the survey. In addition, the following points should be borne in mind:

- Interviewers should be prepared to keep calling back if interviewees are out or unavailable. This will require taking into account people's likely work and leisure habits—for example, there is no point in calling at home on people who work during the day. In addition, first thing in the morning may not be the best time to contact a busy manager who is likely to be briefing colleagues and responding to queries.
- Be self-assured; you may get a better response if you presume that people will agree to be interviewed rather than that they will refuse.
- Reassure people that you are not a salesperson. Because of the tactics of certain organizations whose representatives say they are doing market or business research, many people have become very suspicious of people saying they would just like to ask you a few questions.
- Dress in a way that will be acceptable to a wide spectrum of people.
- Make it clear that you will be happy to find a time to suit the respondent.



Tips and skills

## Topics and issues to include in an introductory statement

There are several issues to include in an introductory statement to a prospective interviewee. The following list comprises the principal considerations:

- Make clear the identity of the person who is contacting the respondent.
- Identify the auspices under which the research is being conducted—for example, a university, a market research agency.
- Mention any research funder, or, if you are a student doing an undergraduate or postgraduate dissertation or doing research for a thesis, make this clear.
- Indicate what the research is about in broad terms and why it is important, and give an indication of the kind of information to be collected.
- Indicate why the respondent has been selected—for example, selected by a random process.
- Provide reassurance about the confidentiality of any information provided.
- Make it clear that participation is voluntary.
- Reassure the respondent that he or she will not be identified or be identifiable in any way. This can usually be achieved by pointing out that data are anonymized when they are entered into the computer and that analysis will be conducted at an aggregate level.
- Provide the respondent with the opportunity to ask any questions—for example, provide a contact telephone number if the introduction is in the form of a written statement, or, if in person, simply ask if the respondent has any questions.

These suggestions are also relevant to the covering letter that accompanies mail questionnaires, except that researchers using this method need to remember to include a stamped addressed envelope!

## Rapport

It is frequently suggested that it is important for the interviewer to achieve *rapport* with the respondent. This means that very quickly a relationship must be established that encourages the respondent to want (or at least be prepared) to participate in and persist with the interview. Unless an element of rapport can be established, some respondents may initially agree to be interviewed but then decide to terminate their participation because of the length of time the interview is taking or perhaps because of the nature of the questions being asked. While this injunction essentially invites the interviewer to be friendly with respondents and to put them at ease, it is important that this quality is not stretched too far. Too much rapport may result in the interview going on too long and the respondent suddenly deciding that too much time is being spent on the activity. Also, the mood of friendliness may result in the respondent answering questions in a way that is designed to please the interviewer. The achievement of rapport between interviewer and respondent is therefore a delicate balancing act. Moreover, it is probably somewhat easier to achieve in the context of the face-to-face interview rather than the telephone interview, since in the latter the interviewer is unable to offer obvious visual cues of friendliness like smiling or maintaining good eye contact, which is also frequently regarded as conducive to gaining and maintaining rapport (see Thinking deeply 8.5 for a more detailed discussion of rapport in telephone interviewing).

## Asking questions

It was suggested above that one of the aims of the structured interview is to ensure that each respondent is asked exactly the same questions. It was also pointed out that variation in the ways a question is asked is a potential source of error in survey research. The structured interview is meant to reduce the likelihood of this occurring, but it cannot guarantee that this will not occur, because

there is always the possibility that interviewers will embellish or otherwise change a question when it is asked. There is considerable evidence that this occurs, even among centres of social research that have a solid reputation for being rigorous in following correct methodological protocol (Bradburn and Sudman 1979). The problem with such variation in the asking of questions was outlined above: it is likely to engender variation in replies that does not reflect 'true' variation—in other words, error. Consequently, it is important for interviewers to appreciate the importance of keeping exactly to the wording of the questions they are charged with asking.



## Thinking deeply 8.5
## The problem of laughter in telephone survey interviews

Lavin and Maynard (2001) explore the tension within telephone interviews between the desire for standardization that leads some survey research centres to prohibit interviewers from laughing during a telephone interview, and the need to develop an affiliative social relationship, or rapport, with the interviewee, which even in structured interviewing is important in ensuring completion of the interview and accuracy of the data that are collected. Using data from recorded telephone interviews from a survey research centre, they focus on the occurrence of 'reciprocated laughter', which is defined as when 'an interviewer responds positively to the laughter initiated by a respondent during the course of a telephone survey interview' (2001: 455), taking laughter to be an indication of rapport. The interviews were related to two different surveys, one about television viewing habits and the other about respondents' opinions concerning their local neighbourhoods. Although the survey centre formally and informally prohibits interviewers from engaging in emotional displays including laughter, the researchers found an average of three laughter incidences per interview. They also collected data from a survey centre that did not have a policy of prohibiting laughter, instructing interviewers to be 'natural' and to speak in a conversational manner, where they found an average of eight laughter incidences per interview. They conclude that interviewers sometimes deal with respondent laughter by adhering to the structure of the interview, asking questions, talking seriously, or typing audibly into the computer. However, they also engage in pseudo-laughter, whereby they respond in a cheery way to ensure that the interview relationship is maintained but any supervisor listening in on the call would not actually be able to hear any laughter, for which they might be penalized. They conclude that this reveals the considerable taken-for-granted conversational skill involved in survey interviewing. It also reveals the conventions of survey research centres as sites where practitioners seek to generate objective, scientific knowledge.

You might say: 'Does it really matter?' In other words, surely small variations to wording cannot make a significant difference to people's replies? While the impact of variation in wording obviously differs from context to context and is in any case difficult to quantify exactly, experiments in question wording suggest that even small variations in wording can exert an impact on replies (Schuman and Presser 1981). Three experiments in England conducted by Social and Community Planning Research concluded that a considerable number of interview questions are affected by interviewer variability. The researchers estimated that, for about two-thirds of the questions that were considered, interviewers contributed to less than 2 per cent of the total variation in each question (M. Collins 1997). On the face of it, this is a small amount of error, but the researchers regarded it as a cause for concern.

The key point to emerge, then, is the importance of getting across to interviewers the importance of asking questions as they are written. There are many reasons why interviewers may vary question wording, such as reluctance to ask certain questions, perhaps because of embarrassment (M. Collins 1997), but the general admonition to keep to the wording of the question needs to be constantly reinforced when interviewers are being trained. It also needs to be borne in mind for your own research.

## Recording answers

An identical warning for identical reasons can be registered in connection with the recording of answers by interviewers, who should write down respondents' replies as exactly as possible. Not to do so can result in interviewers distorting respondents' answers and hence introducing error. Such errors are less likely to occur when the interviewer has merely to allocate respondents' replies to a category, as in a closed question. This process can require

a certain amount of interpretation on the part of the interviewer, but the error that is introduced is far less than when answers to open questions are being written down (Fowler and Mangione 1990).

## Clear instructions

In addition to instructions about the asking of questions and the recording of answers, interviewers need instructions about their progress through an interview schedule. An example of the kind of context in which this is likely to occur is in relation to *filter questions*. Filter questions require the interviewer to ask questions of some respondents but not others. For example, the question

> How many days of on-the-job training have you received in the past twelve months?

presumes that the respondent is in employment. This option can be reflected in the fixed-choice answers that are provided, so that one of these is a 'not-in-employment' alternative. However, a better solution is not to presume anything about respondents' work behaviour but to ask them if they are currently in employment and then to filter out those respondents who are not. A further consideration in relation to this filter question is how many hours or days they are employed for. For example, in the Skills Survey (see Research in focus 7.3) the researchers were interested in anyone who was employed for one hour per week or more. In this case, there was no point in asking those who were not in paid work about the training opportunities they had received as part of their employment. Tips and skills 'Instructions for interviewers in the use of a filter question' provides a simple example in connection with an imaginary study of feedback and job performance. The chief point to register about this example is that it requires clear instructions for the interviewer. If such instructions are not provided, there is the risk either that respondents will be asked inappropriate questions (which can be irritating for them) or that the interviewer will inadvertently fail to ask a question (which results in missing information).

## Question order

In addition to warning interviewers about the importance of not varying the asking of questions and the recording of answers, they should be alerted to the importance of keeping to the order of asking questions. For one thing, varying the question order can result in certain questions being accidentally omitted, because the interviewer may forget to ask those that have been leapfrogged during the interview. Also, variation in question order may have an impact on replies: if some respondents have been previously asked a question that they should have been asked whereas others have not, a source of variability in the asking of questions will have been introduced and therefore a potential source of error.

Quite a lot of research has been carried out on the general question of question order, but few if any consistent effects on people's responses that derive from asking questions at different points in a questionnaire or interview schedule have been unveiled. Different effects have been demonstrated on various occasions. A study in the USA found that people were less likely to say that their taxes were too high when they had been previously asked whether or not government spending ought to be increased in a number of areas (Schuman and Presser 1981: 32). Apparently, some people perceived an inconsistency between wanting more spending and lower taxes, and adjusted their answers accordingly. However, it is difficult to draw general lessons from such research, at least in part because experiments in question order do not always reveal clear-cut effects of varying the order in which questions are asked, even in cases where effects might legitimately have been expected. There are two general lessons.

- Within a survey, question order should not be varied (unless, of course, question order is the subject of the study!).
- Researchers should be sensitive to the possible implications of the effect of early questions on answers to subsequent questions.

The following rules about question order are sometimes proposed:

- Early questions should be directly related to the topic of the research, about which the respondent has been informed. This removes the possibility that the respondent will be wondering at an early stage in the interview why he or she is being asked apparently irrelevant questions. This injunction means that personal questions about age, social background, and so on should *not* be asked at the beginning of an interview.
- As far as possible, questions that are more likely to be salient to respondents should be asked early in the interview schedule, so that their interest and attention are more likely to be secured. This suggestion may conflict with the previous one, in that questions specifically on the research topic may not be obviously salient to



## Tips and skills

## Instructions for interviewers in the use of a filter question

**1.** Have you received any feedback concerning your job performance during the last twelve months?

Yes ____

No ____

(if No proceed to question 4)

**2.** (*To be asked if interviewee replied* Yes *to question 1*)

Who provided you with this feedback?

(Ask respondent to choose the category that represents the person who most often gives them feedback and to choose one category only.)

Line manager ____

Personnel manager ____

Other ____ (specify) ____

**3.** How frequently do you receive feedback concerning your job performance?

(Ask interviewee to choose the category that comes closest to his or her current experience.)

Once or twice a week ____

Once or twice a month ____

A few times a year ____

Once or twice a year ____

**4.** (*To be asked if interviewee replied* No *to question 1*)

Have you received feedback concerning your job performance at any time during your employment by this organization?

Yes ____

No ____

respondents, but it implies that as far as possible questions relating to the research topic that are more likely to grab their attention should be asked at or close to the start of the interview.

- Potentially embarrassing questions or ones that may be a source of anxiety should be left till later. In fact, research should be designed to ensure that as far as possible respondents are not discomfited, but it has to be acknowledged that with certain topics this effect may be unavoidable.
- With a long schedule or questionnaire, questions should be grouped into sections, since this allows a better flow than skipping from one topic to another.
- Within each group of questions, general questions should precede specific ones. Research in focus 8.6 provides an illustration of such a sequence.
- A further aspect of the rule that general questions should precede specific ones is that it has been argued that, when a specific question comes before a general one, the aspect of the general question that is covered by the specific one is discounted in the minds of respondents because they feel they have already covered it. Thus, if a question about how people feel about the amount they are paid precedes a general question about job satisfaction, there are grounds for thinking that respondents will discount the issue of pay when responding about job satisfaction.
- It is sometimes recommended that questions dealing with opinions and attitudes should precede questions to do with behaviour and knowledge. This is because it is felt that behaviour and knowledge questions are less affected by question order than questions that tap opinions and attitudes.

- During the course of an interview, it sometimes happens that a respondent provides an answer to a question that is to be asked later in the interview. Because of the possibility of a question order effect, when the interviewer arrives at the question that appears already to have been answered, it should be repeated.



## Research in focus 8.6
## A question sequence

The question sequence given below follows the recommendations of Gallup (1947, cited in Foddy 1993: 61–2). The example demonstrates how this approach might operate in connection with building society demutualization, the process whereby several British mutual building societies turned themselves into banks and hence into public companies quoted on the Stock Exchange. The question order sequence is designed with a number of features in mind. It is designed to establish people's levels of knowledge of demutualization before asking questions about it and to distinguish those who feel strongly about it from those who do not. According to Foddy (1993), the second question is always open-ended, so respondents' frames of reference can be established with respect to the topic at hand. However, it seems likely that, if sufficient pilot research has been carried out, a closed question could be envisaged, a point that applies equally to question 4.

1. Have you heard of demutualization?
   Yes ____ No ____
2. What are your views about demutualization?
3. Do you favour or not favour demutualization?
   Favour ____ Not favour ____
4. Why do you favour (not favour) demutualization?
5. How strongly do you feel about this?
   Very strongly ____
   Fairly strongly ____
   Not at all strongly ____

However, question order effects remain one of the more frustrating areas of structured interview and questionnaire design, because of the inconsistent evidence that is found and because it is difficult to formulate generalizations or rules from the evidence that does point to their operation.

## Probing

Probing is a highly problematic area for researchers employing a structured interview method. It frequently happens in interviews that respondents need help with their answers. One obvious case is where it is evident that they do not understand the question—they may either ask for further information or it is clear from what they say that they are struggling to understand the question or to provide an adequate answer. The second kind of situation the interviewer faces is when the respondent does not provide a sufficiently complete answer and has to be probed for more information. The problem in either situation is obvious: the interviewer's intervention may influence the respondent and the nature of interviewers' interventions may differ. A potential source of variability in respondents' replies that does not reflect 'true' variation is introduced—that is, error.

Some general tactics with regard to probes are as follows:

- If further information is required, usually in the context of an open-ended question, standardized probes can be employed, such as 'Could you say a little more about that?' or 'Are there any other reasons why you think that?' or simply 'Mmmm . . . ?'

- If the problem is that when presented with a closed question the respondent replies in a way that does not allow the interviewee to select one of the pre-designed answers, the interviewer should repeat the fixed-choice alternatives and make it apparent that the answer needs to be chosen from the ones that have been provided.
- If the interviewer needs to know about something that requires quantification, such as the number of visits to building societies in the last four weeks or the number of building societies in which the respondent has accounts, but the respondent resists this by answering in general terms ('quite often' or 'I usually go to the building society every week'), the interviewer needs to persist with securing a number from the respondent. This will usually entail repeating the question. The interviewer should not try to second guess a figure on the basis of the respondent's reply and then suggest that figure to him or her, since the latter may be unwilling to demur from the interviewer's suggested figure.

## Prompting

Prompting occurs when the interviewer suggests a possible answer to a question to the respondent. The key prerequisite here is that all respondents receive the same prompts. All closed questions entail standardized prompting, because the respondent is provided with a list of possible answers from which to choose. An unacceptable approach to prompting would be to ask an open question and to suggest possible answers only to some respondents, such as those who appear to be struggling to think of an appropriate reply.

During the course of a face-to-face interview, there are several circumstances in which it will be better for the interviewer to use 'show cards' rather than rely on reading out a series of fixed-choice alternatives. Show cards (sometimes called 'flash cards') display all the answers from which the respondent is to choose and are handed to the respondent at different points of the interview. Three kinds of context in which it might be preferable to employ show cards rather than to read out the entire set of possible answers are as follows:

- There may be a very long list of possible answers. For example, respondents may be asked which daily newspaper they each read most frequently. To read out a list of newspapers would be tedious and it is probably better to hand the respondent a list of newspapers from which to choose.
- Sometimes, during the course of interviews, respondents are presented with a group of questions to which the same possible answers are attached. An example of this approach is Likert scaling, which is an approach to attitude measurement. A typical strategy entails providing respondents with a series of statements and asking them how far they agree or disagree with the statements (see Chapter 6). These are often referred to as *items* rather than as *questions*, since, strictly speaking, the respondent is not being asked a question. An example was provided in Research in focus 6.3. It would be excruciatingly dull to read out all five possible answers twelve times. Also, it may be expecting too much of respondents to read out the answers once and then require them to keep the possible answers in their heads for the entire batch of questions to which they apply. A show card that can be used for the entire batch and to which respondents can constantly refer is an obvious solution. As was mentioned in Research in focus 6.3, most Likert scales of this kind comprise five levels of agreement/disagreement and it is this more conventional approach that is illustrated in Tips and skills 'A show card'.



Tips and skills

### A show card

**Card 6**

Strongly agree

Agree

Undecided

Disagree

Strongly disagree

- Some people are not keen to divulge personal details such as their age or their income. One way of neutralizing the impact of such questioning is to present respondents with age or income bands with a letter or number attached to each band. They can then be asked to say which letter applies to them (see Tips and skills 'Another show card'). This procedure will obviously not be appropriate if the research requires *exact* ages or incomes.



## Tips and skills
## Another show card

**Card 11**

(*a*) Below 20
(*b*) 20–29
(*c*) 30–39
(*d*) 40–49
(*e*) 50–59
(*f*) 60–69
(*g*) 70 and over

## Leaving the interview

Do not forget common courtesies like thanking respondents for giving up their time. However, the period immediately after the interview is one in which some care is necessary, in that sometimes respondents try to engage the interviewer in a discussion about the purpose of the interview. Interviewers should resist elaboration beyond their standard statement, because respondents may communicate what they are told to others, which may bias the findings.

## Training and supervision

On several occasions, reference has been made to the need for interviewers to be trained. The standard texts on survey research and on interviewing practice tend to be replete with advice on how best to train interviewers. Such advice is typically directed at contexts in which a researcher hires an interviewer to conduct a large amount of or even all the interviews. It also has considerable importance in research in which several interviewers (who may be either collaborators or hired interviewers) are involved in a study, since the risk of interviewer variability in the asking of questions needs to be avoided.

For many readers of this book who are planning to do research, such situations are unlikely to be relevant, because they will be 'lone' researchers. You may be doing an undergraduate dissertation, or an exercise for a research methods course, or you may be a postgraduate conducting research for a Master's dissertation or for a Ph.D. thesis. Most people in such a situation will not have the luxury of being able to hire a researcher to do any interviewing (though you may be able to find someone to help you a little). When interviewing on your own, you must train yourself to follow the procedures and advice provided above. This is a very different situation from a large research institute or market research agency, which relies on an army of hired interviewers who carry out the interviews. Whenever people other than the lead researcher are involved in interviewing, they will need training and supervision in the following areas:

- contacting prospective respondents and providing an introduction to the study;
- reading out questions as written and following instructions in the interview schedule (for example, in connection with filter questions);
- using appropriate styles of probing;
- recording exactly what is said;
- maintaining an interview style that does not bias respondents' answers.

Fowler (1993) cites evidence that suggests that training of less than one full day rarely creates good interviewers.

Supervision of interviewers in relation to these issues can be achieved by:

- checking individual interviewers' response rates;
- tape recording at least a sample of interviews;
- examining completed schedules to determine whether any questions are being left out or if they are being completed properly;
- call-backs on a sample of respondents (usually around 10 per cent) to determine whether or not they were interviewed and to ask about interviewers' conduct.

Research in focus 8.7 provides an example of some of the considerations involved when doing research involving multiple interviewers.



## Research in focus 8.7
## An example of research involving multiple interviewers

The Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) (see Research in focus 2.14) involves a research team that is put together by the UK government Department for Trade and Industry (DTI) and includes industrial relations researchers working together with policy-makers and government agencies. However, the fieldwork is carried out by another organization, the National Centre for Social Research. Data collection takes about a year to complete. Each of the 156 interviewers working on the 1998 survey took part in a two-day training course, which, in addition to covering issues related to administering the survey and the use of computer-assisted personal interviewing, familiarized them with introductory concepts in employment relations. Many of the interviewers who worked on the 1998 survey had also been involved in earlier WERS surveys.

An innovative feature of the survey involved setting up a free-phone facility so that potential respondents who had a query could contact the research team directly. This provided support to the interviewers, who were primarily responsible for negotiating the participation of respondents. This involved:

- telephoning the workplace to ascertain the name and job title of the appropriate management respondent;
- sending an official letter of introduction from the DTI explaining the nature of the survey and asking for their cooperation;
- telephoning again to arrange an interview.

In addition, some reluctant participants were contacted by the research team and encouraged to reconsider their decision not to participate in the survey. All this contributed to the success of the fieldwork and the high overall response rate (see Key concept 7.5) achieved in the survey of 80 per cent.

Revisions to the 2004 survey were relatively minor. The main changes were: '(1) the extension of the Cross-Section sample to include workplaces with between five and nine employees; (2) the sampling of greater numbers of non-union employee representatives; and (3) the adoption of a Financial Performance Questionnaire' (Kersley et al. 2006: 3).



# Other approaches to structured interviewing

A number of other methods or techniques are used in business and management research as part of either the structured or the semi-structured interview. Four main types will be discussed in this section:

- **critical incident method**;
- projective methods, pictorial and photo elicitation;
- **verbal protocol approach**;
- **repertory grid technique**.

We have grouped these four methods together here because they can form part of a structured interview. However, they can also form part of a semi-structured interview (see Chapter 18) in a qualitative investigation and so to an extent they cut across the quantitative/qualitative divide (see Chapter 24). They are sometimes used as one part of an interview, in combination with other questions that form part of a more conventional interview schedule, or in other research designs they form the basis for the entire interview. A further use of these methods is to check findings from more conventional quantitative approaches such as structured interviews or questionnaire surveys.

## Critical incident method

This method involves asking respondents to describe *critical incidents*, which are defined very broadly by Flanagan (1954) as any observable human activity where the consequences are sufficiently clear as to leave the observer with a definite idea as to their likely effects. The term is derived from the analysis of near-disaster situations, where a version of the technique can be used to build up a picture of the events that contribute to a potential disaster and to develop a plan of action for dealing with them. The most common use of the critical incident method involves interviewing respondents about particular types of event or behaviour in order to develop an understanding of their sequence and their significance to the individual.

One of the earliest and most well-known illustrations of this method in business research is the study by Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959), which was mentioned in Chapter 7. The authors explain: 'We decided to ask people to tell us stories about times when they felt exceptionally good or bad about their jobs. We decided that from these stories we could discover the kinds of situations leading to negative or positive attitudes toward the job and the effects of these attitudes' (1959: 17). Their initial interview strategy was followed up by a series of probe questions that filled in missing information in the spontaneously told accounts. Content analysis (see Chapter 12) was then used to focus on exploring the essential features of the critical incident in order to reveal the values that they reflected. A more recent example of the use of the critical incident method is found in the study of self-managing work teams described in Research in focus 8.8.



### Telling it like it is
### Using critical incident method in a student research project

Tom followed the advice of his supervisor and used the critical incident technique when he was interviewing call centre workers about well-being and the experience of working in a call centre. He explained, 'I did use critical incident technique in the interview to try and get people to give an example of a time when things have gone particularly well at work or particularly badly. It was quite a useful tool to get people to talk in an interesting way really about their work experience. And sometimes it wasn't really necessary because they would. give lots of examples anyway, but it was quite a useful prompt to get people to be more specific and give examples of the sort of stuff that their work life was like.'



*To hear more about Tom's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

Finally, although we have introduced the critical incident method in Part Two of the book, which deals with quantitative research, we should point out that this method is often used as part of a qualitative research investigation. An example of this is the study of small business owner-managers by Blackburn and Stokes (2000; see Research in focus 19.4). In this instance, respondents were asked to recall a situation that had arisen in the previous two years in which they had lost a major customer and to explain what had happened and how they had coped with it. Curran and Blackburn's analysis of the data was primarily qualitative, relying on the use of themes illustrated by the inclusion of direct quotes from respondents.



## Research in focus 8.8
## An example of the critical incident method

Urch Druskat and Wheeler (2003) used the critical incident technique in interviews with self-managing work team leaders and team members as part of a mixed-method case study. Their research site was a Fortune 500 durable consumer goods manufacturing plant in the mid-western United States with 3,500 employees that had introduced self-managing work teams five years previously. The critical incident interview technique involved 'asking interviewees to alternate between describing incidents on the job in which they felt effective and incidents in which they felt ineffective' (2003: 440). The role of the interviewer in this context is to 'obtain detailed descriptions of events while remaining as unobtrusive as possible in order to avoid leading interviewees' (2003: 440). The questions consisted of the following:

- What led up to the event?
- Who did and said what to whom?
- What happened next?
- What were you thinking and feeling at that moment?
- What was the outcome?

To enhance the validity and reliability of the critical incident interviews, events were limited to those that had happened within approximately the last year. The kinds of events that respondents recalled included specific team meetings, production or equipment changes, and times when production goals were met or times when they were not met due to adverse conditions.

## Projective methods, pictorial and photo elicitation

Projective methods classically involve the presentation of ambiguous stimuli to individuals, which are interpreted by the researcher to reveal underlying characteristics of the individual concerned. A common example is the Rorschach inkblot test, where respondents are asked to describe random inkblots. Analysis relies on expert psychological interpretation of the way that respondents have described the inkblots, and this is suggested to be indicative of their dominant channels of thinking. Another form of projective analysis involves the 'sentencecompletion test', where the individual is asked to complete a number of unfinished sentences; this technique has been used in the context of recruitment and selection, often as an assessment centre exercise.

One of the best-known examples of the use of **projective techniques** in management research involves the study by McClelland (1961) of leadership and the need for individual achievement. Informed by experimental psychology and the psychoanalytic insights of Freud, McClelland's study first involved stimulating the achievement motive in a group of subjects. He then sought to elicit their 'spontaneous thoughts' and fantasies in order to determine the effect of achievement motivation. The subjects were male college students who were told that they were going to be tested to determine their intelligence and leadership ability; it was assumed that this would arouse a desire in the subjects to do well. After the 'tests' had been completed, subjects were asked to write short, five-minute stories suggested by pictures that flashed onto a screen for a few seconds. 'The pictures represented a variety of life situations centering particularly around work' (1961: 40). The stories were compared with those that had been written by a control group under normal conditions. The experimental group was found to refer more often in their stories to ideas related to achievement. From this, McClelland concluded that, if someone 'in writing his stories consistently uses achievement-related ideas of the same kind as those elicited in everyone under achievement "pressure", then he would appear to be someone with a "bias", a "concern", or a "need" for achievement' (1961: 43). This led him to develop a score for the need for Achievement, defined as the number of achievement-related ideas in stories written by an individual under normal conditions.

A more recent example of projective methods can also be found in advertising research (see Research in focus 8.9). Using a range of methods including collage, storytelling,

sentence completion, and word associations, the authors of this study sought to investigate the nature of consumer desire among students in three countries. However, the use of projective methods is relatively uncommon in business and management research. They have largely been superseded by the use of visual techniques to stimulate creative thinking, problem solving, and to explore feelings, emotions, and values. For example, Stiles (2004) asked members of UK and North American business schools to express how they saw their organization's identity by drawing pictures (see Research in focus 8.10). The use of photo elicitation can also be seen as an adaptation of projective methods (see Key concept 8.11 for an explanation and Research in focus 8.12 for an example).



## Research in focus 8.9
## Using projective methods in consumer research

In a cross-cultural study of consumer desire, Belk, Ger, and Askegaard (1997) wanted to explore the cultural differences in consumer desire among students in the USA ($n$ = 38), Turkey ($n$ = 29), and Denmark ($n$ = 17).

Desire is defined by the authors as belief-based passions that involve longing or wishing for something. Hence, 'we may speak of hungering for, lusting after, or craving certain consumer goods as if they were delicious foods, alluring sexual mates, or addictive drugs' (1997: 24). Research informants were graduate and undergraduate students at the three universities where each of the three authors was employed. The projective methods used included:

- *collage*: using popular magazines, informants were asked to create a collage to express their understanding of desire;
- *associations*: informants were asked to imagine swimming in a sea of things (objects, experiences, people) that bring them pleasure and to describe them;
- *sketches*: they were told to imagine themselves as artists commissioned to create artworks called 'desire' and 'not desire';
- *synonyms*: they were asked to name an object, experience, or person (X) that they desired and to list as many words or phrases that might be used in the sentence, 'I____X';
- *synonym examples and feelings*: informants were asked to name things a person might strongly desire and to describe the feelings a person might have (1) before he or she gets it, (2) at the moment he or she gets it, and (3) after he or she has got it.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the study found that men and women tended to focus on different objects of desire: objects that emerged with greater frequency for men included luxury cars; for women they included food, and especially chocolates. Although both sexes focused on people as objects of desire, women were more likely to specify relationships as the interpersonal objects of their desire whereas men were more likely to desire women as objects. American and Turkish women were more likely than Danish women to see desire as sinful. The authors conclude that desire is a positive emotional state that is at the same time interpersonal, whether in a competitive sense of wanting more or better things than others, or in the sense of wanting approval and love from others.

## Verbal protocol approach

This technique builds on the work of Newell and Simon (1972) in the area of human problem solving and has since been used in relation to a number of topics that are relevant to business and management researchers. The approach involves asking respondents to 'think aloud' while they are performing a task. The idea is to elicit the respondent's thought processes while he or she is making a decision or judgement or solving a problem. The subject's account of what he or she is doing and why is usually tape-recorded and transcribed and then content analysed using a coding scheme that is used to discern different categories of thinking. An interesting example of the use of verbal protocol analysis can be found in a study by Cable and Graham (2000), who wanted to explore the factors that job-seekers consider when evaluating employers' reputations (see Research in focus 8.13).



## Research in focus 8.10
## Using pictorial exercises in a study of business school identity

Stiles (2004) used pictorial methods in a study of strategy in UK and North American business schools. The first stage of the research involved asking individual interviewees to imagine their organization as having a personality and then asking them to draw a picture of what that personality looks like. The second stage of the research involved showing these drawings to members of a focus group (see Chapter 19), who are invited to reach a consensus in choosing five pictures, ranging from an unfavourable depiction of the organization, to neutral, through to a favourable one. 'The group then produces a composite *free-drawn personality image* of its own' (2004: 130). The focus group discussion was video-taped and transcribed. The importance of the pictures stems from the discussion that respondents had around their selection decisions, which revealed insights into the way academics perceived the management styles associated with their organizations and leaders. Stiles notes that, although this study was conducted in a business school setting, it could equally be applied in relation to a variety of other organizational settings. Stiles concludes that the pictorial exercises revealed constructs that were not identified using verbal research instruments, thus introducing the possibility that images are useful in revealing more latent perceptions.



## Key concept 8.11
## What is photo elicitation?

This method involves integrating photographs into the interview by asking the respondent questions about photographs that the researcher has taken of the research setting. Respondents are asked to reflect, explain, and comment on the meaning of the objects in the photograph, the events that are taking place, or the emotions they associate with them. Photographs can provide a point of reference for the discussion and can help to move the interview from 'the concrete (a cataloguing of the objects in the photograph) to the socially abstract (what the objects in the photograph mean to the individual being interviewed)' (Harper 1986: 25). Harper suggests that the most useful photographs tend to be those that are visually arresting, because they are more likely to get the respondent's attention and provoke a response.



## Research in focus 8.12
## Using photo elicitation to study the patient trail

Buchanan's (1998) single case study of business process re-engineering was intended to assess the impact of a project introduced by the management of a UK hospital to improve the 'patient trail'—the process whereby patients are transferred from one part of the hospital to another. Part of Buchanan's research design involved the use of photo elicitation. This involved him documenting the steps in the patient trail photographically on approximately 150 35mm colour transparencies. These were made into a slide presentation that was shown to five groups of hospital staff of mixed job levels in open groups. Hospital staff were then invited to comment on the photographic representation of the patient trail, and these comments were incorporated into the written research account of the patient trail process. (For more about this research see Chapter 21.) Although Buchanan's use of photo elicitation involved a type of focus group interviewing (see Chapter 19), this method could equally apply in interviewing individuals.



## Research in focus 8.13
## The use of the verbal protocol method to enable experimental testing

Cable and Graham (2000) were interested in the factors affecting graduate job-seekers' assessment of employers' reputations. Their sample consisted of fourteen undergraduate students at two large state universities in the USA. Half of the students were on engineering degree programmes and the other half were doing management degrees. The subjects were given a task that involved evaluating the reputations of three employers. They were given a management trainee job description, which was the same for all three organizations, and recruitment brochures from the three companies—General Electric, Wal-Mart, and Broadview Associates. In making their decision, the subjects were told that they should speak all their thoughts aloud. The 'thinking-aloud' process was tape-recorded, and content analysis was conducted on the transcripts using categories that were drawn from the recruitment and job search literatures. Frequently mentioned categories included 'opportunities for growth' and 'organizational culture'. Typical of the former was the comment: 'They have a vast array of opportunities no matter what you do your major in or what you want to do'; a comment typical of the latter was: 'It talks about integrity which is high on my list. I don't want to work for a company that doesn't value integrity and morals.'

The second stage of the research was designed to improve confidence in the findings generated from the first part of the study. It relied on an experimental design involving 66 undergraduate job-seekers, who were asked to read a series of scenarios that described an organization. After reading the scenarios, they reported their perceptions of each company's reputation.

The third stage of the research involved the use of an experimental design to examine the effects of some of the attributes of organizational reputation that had been identified through the verbal protocol analysis. The field experiment involved 126 undergraduate and postgraduate job-seekers, who were asked to complete a questionnaire survey about six organizations with diverse reputations that recruited at the two universities they attended. The survey was repeated three weeks later, in order to limit potential survey biases such as mood effects.

Using these three methods—verbal protocol analysis, an experiment based on scenarios, and a questionnaire survey—the theory of organizational reputation that was developed inductively from the first part of the study using verbal protocol method can then be subjected to further empirical testing using other methods.

## Repertory grid technique

Repertory grid technique is based on G. A. Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory, and it is used to identify the interpretative processes whereby an individual constructs meaning in relation to his or her social context. The theory portrays the individual as a scientist, striving to make sense of his or her environment in order to predict and cope with future events. Kelly claimed that sense-making occurs through an individual's personal construct system, which provides an order for dealing with incoming information. This system is composed of a series of interlinked and hierarchically related constructs, which are the bipolar sorting mechanisms that distinguish between similarity and dissimilarity for a given event. In order to make sense of an event, the individual must assign information to either one pole of the construct or the other. The researcher's task therefore involves identifying the *constructs* that people use to make sense of their world and seeking to understand the way in which a person's thought processes are conditioned by events that he or she anticipates.

The first stage in developing a repertory grid involves the researcher, sometimes together with the participant, identifying a number of (usually between six and twelve) *elements*, which are terms or categories that are deemed relevant to the subject of study—they may be persons, events, or objects. These elements are then written on cards and presented to the respondent, typically in groups of three. The researcher then asks questions that encourage respondents to express how they see the relationship between these elements, such as: 'In what way are two similar?' or 'How does one differ?' The process is then repeated with another three cards, until eventually a picture is built up about how the person construes his or her particular

# Figure 8.4

## An example of a repertory grid designed to elicit an applicant's perceptions of preferred job tasks

| **Construct**—emergent pole (1) | Present job | Disliked past job | **Elements** Liked past job | Neutral past job | Ideal job | **Construct**—contrast pole (5) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Career opportunities* | 4 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 1 | No career opportunities |
| 2. Close supervision | 4 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 5 | Discretionary* |
| 3. Changeable* | 2 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 1 | Fixed |
| 4. Challenging* | 1 | 5 | 2 | 4 | 1 | Not challenging |
| 5. Innovative* | 2 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 2 | Repetitive |
| 6. Deskbound | 5 | 1 | 5 | 4 | 5 | Mobile* |
| 7. No leadership responsibility | 4 | 5 | 4 | 2 | 4 | Leadership responsibilities* |
| 8. Administrative work | 4 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 5 | Planning work* |
| 9. Enjoyed variety* | 2 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 1 | Monotonous/repetitive |
| 10. 'Standing still' | 2 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 5 | Career development* |

*Denotes preferred pole.

*Source*: adapted from N. Anderson (1990).

context. This procedure, which is known as the *sequential triadic method*, enables the elements to be sorted. These data can then be entered into the grid, which relates elements to the constructs that underlie the individual's rationale for sorting decisions, and the respondent is asked to rank each element in relation to each construct, using a five- or seven-point scale, as shown in Figure 8.4.

Repertory grids have been used in the study of strategic management and decision-making, and in studies of recruitment, personnel management, and other areas of organizational behaviour. For example, a study conducted by Neil Anderson (1990) explored how the technique could be used in employee selection to assess the task reactions of applicants in a recruitment situation. In this study, it was used to focus on the job–person match for a marketing manager vacancy. An example of a completed grid for a marketing manager applicant, which has been adapted and simplified for our purposes of illustration, is provided in Figure 8.4. The grid illustrates ten elicited constructs relating to five elements, which in this case are 'present job', 'disliked past job', 'liked past job', 'neutral past job', and 'ideal job'. The participant was presented with these elements in triads and asked to identify two that were alike and to explain what differentiated them from the third element. This process resulted in the generation of a series of constructs, such as 'career opportunities', which the participant used to relate one kind of job to another. The participant was then asked to indicate the preferred pole for each of the constructs he or she had identified, so 'career opportunities' was identified as preferred to 'no career opportunities'. Finally, the applicant was asked to assess each element against each construct using a five-point scale, with 1 = 'emergent pole' and 5 = 'contrast pole'. As Figure 8.4 illustrates, this managerial applicant has ranked the elements 'ideal job' and 'disliked past job' at opposite ends of these poles, as might be expected. Once the grid is completed, analysis can be either interpretative or statistical in nature. Anderson's use of the technique involved feedback of the results of the analysis to each participant as a basis for counselling and discussion. However, as you will probably by now have gathered, one of the difficulties with using repertory grids is that the technique is quite complex, both for the researcher to use and for the respondent to complete. Some researchers therefore suggest that the primary value of repertory grid technique derives from its use as a tool for enabling in-depth discussion and thinking about a topic.

A qualitative application of the repertory grid technique can be found in the study of recruiters' perceptions of job applicants conducted by Kristof-Brown (2000; see Research in focus 8.14). In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to determine what the recruiters thought about each applicant, but the data generated were analysed quantitatively in order to gain an impression of the relative importance of each characteristic. This study illustrates a further important aspect of the technique, which is that it requires that participants base their responses on a common set of stimuli. The use of video-taped interviews in this study of recruiters' selection of job applicants meant that all participants were basing their responses on exactly the same set of interviews.

## Research in focus 8.14
## An example of the use of repertory grid technique

Kristof-Brown (2000) carried out a study using repertory grid technique to assess whether recruiters form perceptions of an applicant based on:

- the match between the person and the requirements of a specific job; or
- the match between the applicant and the broader organizational attributes.

In the first part of the study, thirty-one recruiters from four consulting organizations participated in the study. The repertory grid method was chosen because it allowed recruiters to articulate their own criteria for evaluating applicants. The recruiters watched a video recording showing a series of short mock interviews with job applicants, who were also MBA students, and then they reviewed the applicants' curriculum vitae. This allowed recruiters to view applicants' verbal and non-verbal behaviour, appearance, and interpersonal skills in a realistic setting. After the recruiters had watched the video, individual interviews were carried out with each recruiter. Each person was presented with the details of three randomly selected applicants, and questions were asked about the degree to which each one matched (*a*) the job, and (*b*) the organization. For example, the researcher might ask: 'Comparing applicants four, five, and two, which of these people is the best fit with your company?'

After having identified the best-fitting applicant in terms of the person and the job, recruiters were then asked to describe the characteristics of the applicant that had led them to make this choice. The process of presenting three applicants at a time to recruiters was repeated until all applicants had been evaluated and this information could be represented in the form of a repertory grid.

The researchers then coded the data from the interviews to generate a list of 119 characteristics of applicants, which were judged by five independent raters for similarity, resulting in the eventual generation of 62 applicant characteristics. The coders then analysed the responses from each interview to generate frequency data, including the number and type of characteristics that were reported by each recruiter. The study thus combined qualitative data collection with quantitative analysis of data that were generated using the repertory grid technique.

In sum, the repertory grid technique has been used as a supplement and as an alternative to structured interviewing, both as a basis for qualitative exploration and analysis and as a device for generating data that can be statistically analysed using quantitative methods. For an illustration of some of the potential applications of the repertory grid interview in management research you might want to consult the following website: ***www.enquirewithin.co.nz*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

# Problems with structured interviewing

While the structured interview is a commonly used method of business research, certain problems associated with it have been identified over the years. These problems are not necessarily unique to the structured interview, in that they can sometimes be attributed to kindred methods, such as the self-completion questionnaire in survey research or even semi-structured interviewing in qualitative research. However, it is common for the structured interview to be seen as a focus for the identification of certain limitations that are briefly examined below.

## Characteristics of interviewers

There is evidence that interviewers' attributes can have an impact on respondents' replies, but, unfortunately, the literature on this issue does not lend itself to definitive

generalizations. In large part, this ambiguity in the broader implications of experiments relating to the effects of interviewer characteristics is due to several problems, such as: the problem of disentangling the effects of interviewers' different attributes from each other ('race', gender, socio-economic status); the interaction between the characteristics of interviewers and the characteristics of respondents; and the interaction between any effects observed and the topic of the interview. Nonetheless, there is undoubtedly some evidence that effects due to characteristics of interviewers can be discerned.

The ethnicity of interviewers is one area that has attracted some attention. Schuman and Presser (1981) cite a study that asked respondents to nominate two or three of their favourite actors or entertainers. Respondents were much more likely to mention black actors or entertainers when interviewed by black interviewers than when interviewed by white ones. Schuman and Converse (1971) interviewed 619 black Detroiters shortly after Martin Luther King's assassination in 1968. The researchers found significant differences between black and white interviewers in around one-quarter of the questions asked.

Although this proportion is quite disturbing, the fact that the majority of questions appear to have been largely unaffected does not give rise to a great deal of confidence that a consistent biasing factor is being uncovered. Similarly inconclusive findings tend to occur in relation to experiments with other sets of characteristics of interviewers. These remarks are not meant to play down the potential significance of interviewers' characteristics for measurement error, but to draw attention to the limitations of drawing conclusive inferences about the evidence. All that needs to be registered at this juncture is that almost certainly the characteristics of interviewers do have an impact on respondents' replies but that the extent and nature of the impact are not clear and are likely to vary from context to context.

## Response sets

Some writers have suggested that the structured interview is particularly prone to the operation among respondents of what Webb et al. (1966) call 'response sets', which they define as 'irrelevant but lawful sources of variance' (1966: 19). This form of response bias is especially relevant to multiple-indicator measures (see Chapter 6), where respondents reply to a battery of related questions or items, of the kind found in a Likert scale (see Research in focus 6.3). The idea of a **response set** implies that people respond to the series of questions in a consistent way but one that is irrelevant to the concept being measured. Two of the most prominent types of response set are known as the 'acquiescence' (also known as the 'yeasaying' and 'naysaying' effect) and the 'social desirability' effect.

### Acquiescence

Acquiescence refers to a tendency for some people consistently to agree or disagree with a set of questions or items. Imagine respondents who replied to all the items in Research in focus 6.3 stating that they believed they were all unethical (scale = 5) and judging that they and their peers acted in the way implied by the statement infrequently (scale = 1). The problem with this multiple-item measure is that none of the item measure statements is written in a way that implies an opposite stance. In other words, there are no items that are ethical or likely to be engaged in frequently by many ethically responsible people. This could be seen as a potential source of bias in this multiple-item measure. A wording that would imply an opposite stance might be 'being prepared to take responsibility for errors' or 'refusing to accept gifts/favours in exchange for preferential treatment'. This would help to weed out those respondents who were replying within the framework of an acquiescence response set.

### Social desirability bias

The social desirability effect refers to evidence that some respondents' answers to questions are related to their perception of the social desirability of those answers. An answer that is perceived to be socially desirable is more likely to be endorsed than one that is not. This phenomenon has been demonstrated in studies of ethical behaviour and managerial decision-making (see Research in focus 8.15). In order to try to prevent **social desirability bias**, Terence Jackson (2001) framed the questions in a way that was intended to enable the respondents to distance themselves from their responses, by imagining what a peer might do rather than having to state what they would do. It was expected that this would reduce the likelihood that individuals would respond in a way that they anticipated would be more acceptable.

In so far as these forms of response error go undetected, they represent sources of error in the measurement of concepts. However, while some writers have proposed outright condemnation of social research on the basis of evidence of response sets (e.g. Phillips 1973), it is important not to get carried away with such findings. We cannot be sure how prevalent these effects are, and to some extent awareness of them has led to measures to limit their impact on data (for example, by weeding out cases obviously affected by them) or by instructing interviewers to limit



## Research in focus 8.15
## Reducing social desirability bias

Terence Jackson (2001) wanted to understand the effect of underlying cultural values on ethical attitudes towards management decision-making. He proposed that national differences could be attributed to differences in underlying cultural values. His research design therefore relied upon exploration of Hofstede's (1984) cultural dimensions of 'individualism-collectivism' and 'uncertainty avoidance' (see Research in focus 1.12), which Jackson took to be important in determining ethical attitudes.

The study involved 425 managers across ten nations and four continents who were chosen to reflect diverse positions along the two cultural dimensions. In each country a postal questionnaire survey was carried out using samples drawn from university business schools, of part-time MBA participants, most of whom were middle-ranking managers. Although the study was based on postal questionnaires (which will be covered in Chapter 9), it raises issues concerning the management of bias that are also very relevant to the conduct of structured interviewing. In an attempt to reduce social desirability response bias, managers were asked to respond to each questionnaire item according to:

1. 'what I believe; what I would do', i.e. as a 'participant';
2. 'what my peers believe; what my peers would do', i.e. as an 'observer'.

However, an almost universal finding to emerge from the study was that managers appeared to see others as less ethical than themselves. In this case, did the former represent a biased response and the latter a 'true' response, as other researchers had suggested? This would be to imply that the 'observer' response was actually a projection of the respondents' own attitudes, rather than a reflection of how they perceived the attitudes of others. However, the finding may indicate that managers really do judge their colleagues to be less ethical than they are in an absolute sense. The conclusions drawn thus depend ultimately on how one interprets these data.

the possible impact of the social desirability effect by not becoming overly friendly with respondents and by not being judgemental about their replies.

## The problem of meaning

A critique of survey interview data and findings gleaned from similar techniques was developed by social scientists influenced by phenomenological and other interpretivist ideas of the kinds touched on in Chapter 1 (Cicourel 1964, 1982; Filmer et al. 1972; Briggs 1986; Mishler 1986). This critique revolves around what is often referred to in a shorthand way as the 'problem of meaning'. The kernel of the argument is that when humans communicate they do so in a way that not only draws on commonly held meanings but also simultaneously creates meanings. 'Meaning' in this sense is something that is worked at and achieved—it is not simply pre-given. Allusions to the problem of meaning in structured interviewing draw attention to the notion that survey researchers presume that interviewer and respondent share the same meanings of terms employed in the interview questions and answers. In fact, the problem of meaning implies that the possibility that interviewer and respondent may not be sharing the same meaning systems and hence imply different things in their use of words is simply sidestepped in structured interview research. The problem of meaning is resolved by ignoring it.

## The feminist critique

The feminist critique of structured interviewing is difficult to disentangle from the critique launched against quantitative research in general, which was briefly outlined in Chapter 1. However, for many feminist social researchers the structured interview symbolized more readily than other methods the limitations of quantitative research, partly because of its prevalence but also partly because of its nature. By 'its nature' is meant the fact that the structured interview epitomizes the asymmetrical relationship between researcher and subject that is seen as an ingredient of quantitative research: the researcher extracts information from the research subject and gives nothing in return. For example, standard textbook advice of the kind provided in this chapter implies that *rapport* is useful to the interviewer but that he or she should guard against becoming

too familiar. This means that questions asked by respondents (for example, about the research or about the topic of the research) should be politely but firmly rebuffed on the grounds that too much familiarity should be avoided and because the respondents' subsequent answers may be biased.

This is perfectly valid and appropriate advice from the vantage point of the canons of structured interviewing with its quest for standardization and for valid and reliable data. However, from the perspective of feminism, when women interview women, a wedge is hammered between them that, in conjunction with the implication of a hierarchical relationship between the interviewer and respondent, is incompatible with its values. An impression of exploitation is created, but exploitation of women is precisely what feminist social science seeks to fight against. Hence Cotterill (1992) claims the methods that feminists adopt are crucially important in developing an understanding of women that relies on breaking down the artificial split between researcher and researched. According to Oakley (1981), this entails the interviewer investing her own personal identity in the research relationship, by answering questions, giving support, and sharing knowledge and experience in a way that can lead to long-term friendships with interviewees. Oakley's point is that to act according to the canons of textbook practice would be impossible for a feminist in such a situation. It was this kind of critique of structured interviewing and indeed of quantitative research in general that ushered in a period in which a great many feminist social researchers found qualitative research more compatible with their goals and norms. In terms of interviewing, this trend resulted in a preference for forms of interviewing such as unstructured and semi-structured interviewing and focus groups. These will be the focus of later chapters. However, as noted in Chapter 1, there has been some softening of attitudes towards the role of quantitative research among feminist researchers, although there is still a tendency for qualitative research to remain the preferred research strategy.



## Key points

- The structured interview is a research instrument that is used to standardize the asking and often the recording of answers in order to keep interviewer-related error to a minimum.
- The structured interview can be administered in person or over the telephone.
- It is important to keep to the wording and order of questions when conducting social survey research by structured interview.
- While there is some evidence that interviewers' characteristics can influence respondents' replies, the findings of experiments on this issue are somewhat equivocal.
- Response sets can be damaging to data derived from structured interviews and steps need to be taken to identify respondents exhibiting them.
- The structured interview symbolizes the characteristics of quantitative research that feminist researchers find distasteful—in particular, the lack of reciprocity and the taint of exploitation.



## Questions for review

### *The structured interview*

- Why is it important in interviewing for survey research to keep interviewer variability to a minimum?
- How successful is the structured interview in reducing interviewer variability?
- Why might a survey researcher prefer to use a structured rather than an unstructured interview approach for gathering data?
- Why do structured interview schedules typically include mainly closed questions?

### *Interview contexts*

- Are there any circumstances in which it might be preferable to conduct structured interviews with more than one interviewer?
- 'Given the lower cost of telephone interviews as against personal interviews, the former are generally preferable.' Discuss.

### *Conducting interviews*

- Prepare an opening statement for a study of manual workers in a firm, in which access has already been achieved.
- To what extent is rapport an important ingredient of structured interviewing?
- How strong is the evidence that question order can significantly affect answers?
- How strong is the evidence that interviewers' characteristics can significantly affect answers?
- What is the difference between probing and prompting? How important are they and what dangers are lurking with their use?

### *Other approaches to structured interviewing*

- What is the critical incident method and how has it been applied in business and management research?
- Make a list of the projective methods that could be used in a study of organizational culture and consider how they might be applied.
- How might repertory grids be used in qualitative analysis?

### *Problems with structured interviewing*

- What are response sets and why are they potentially important?
- What are the main issues that lie behind the critique of structured interviewing by feminist researchers?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Structured Interviewing.*

# 9

# Self-completion questionnaires

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 231

**Self-completion questionnaire or postal questionnaire?** 231

**Evaluating the self-completion questionnaire in relation to the structured interview** 232

- Advantages of the self-completion questionnaire over the structured interview 232
- Disadvantages of the self-completion questionnaire in comparison to the structured interview 233
- Steps to improve response rates to postal questionnaires 234

**Designing the self-completion questionnaire** 238

- Do not cramp the presentation 238
- Clear presentation 238
- Vertical or horizontal closed answers? 238
- Identifying response sets in a Likert scale 240
- Clear instructions about how to respond 240
- Keep question and answers together 240

**Diaries as a form of self-completion questionnaire** 240

- Advantages and disadvantages of the diary as a method of data collection 243

***Key points*** 245

***Questions for review*** 246



## Chapter outline

Questionnaires that are completed by respondents themselves are one of the main instruments for gathering data using a social survey design, along with the structured interview that was covered in the previous chapter. Probably the most common form is the mail or postal questionnaire. The term *self-completion questionnaire* is often used because it is somewhat more inclusive than *postal questionnaire*. This chapter explores:

- the advantages and disadvantages of the questionnaire in comparison to the structured interview;
- how to address the potential problem of poor response rates, which is often a feature of the postal questionnaire;
- how questionnaires should be designed in order to make answering easier for respondents and less prone to error;
- the use of diaries as a form of self-completion questionnaire.

# Introduction

In a very real sense, the bulk of the previous chapter was about questionnaires. The structured interview is in many, if not most, respects a questionnaire that is administered by an interviewer. However, there is a tendency, which borders on a convention, to reserve the term 'questionnaire' for contexts in which a battery of usually closed questions is completed by respondents themselves.



# Self-completion questionnaire or postal questionnaire?

The *self-completion questionnaire* is sometimes referred to as a *self-administered questionnaire*. The former term will be followed in this book. With a self-completion questionnaire, respondents answer questions by completing the questionnaire themselves. As a method, the self-completion questionnaire can come in several forms. Probably the most prominent of these forms is the **mail** or **postal questionnaire**, whereby, as its name implies, a questionnaire is sent through the post to the respondent. The latter, following completion of the questionnaire, is usually asked to return it by post; an alternative form of return is when respondents are requested to deposit their completed questionnaires in a certain location, such as a box in a supervisor's office in a firm or on the top of a cashier's desk in a restaurant or shop. The self-completion questionnaire also covers forms of administration, such as when a researcher hands out questionnaires to all students in a class and collects them back after they have been completed. However, a slightly different way of administering a self-completion questionnaire was used by Faulkner and Culwin (2005; see Research in focus 9.6) in their study of patterns of text messaging. A short questionnaire was distributed by students taking a final-year option in Usability Engineering at a London university. The students were asked to distribute the questionnaires widely but not to other students at the university. One of the students also took a batch of the questionnaires to the mobile phone shop where he worked and asked customers if they wanted to take part. As a result of this method of distribution, 565 usable questionnaires were returned. 'Self-completion questionnaire' is, therefore, a more inclusive term than 'postal questionnaire', though it is

probably true to say that the latter is the most prominent form of the self-completion questionnaire.

In the discussion that follows, when points apply to more or less all forms of self-completion questionnaire, this term will be employed. When points apply specifically or exclusively to questionnaires sent through the post, the term 'postal questionnaire' will be used.



# Evaluating the self-completion questionnaire in relation to the structured interview

In many ways, the self-completion questionnaire and the structured interview are very similar methods of business research. The obvious difference between them is that, with the self-completion questionnaire, there is no interviewer to ask the questions; instead, respondents must read each question themselves and answer the questions themselves. Beyond this obvious, but central, difference, they are remarkably similar. However, because there is no interviewer in the administration of the self-completion questionnaire, the research instrument has to be especially easy to follow and its questions have to be particularly easy to answer. After all, respondents cannot be trained in the way interviewers can be; nor do they know their way around a research instrument in the way a 'lone researcher' might.

As a result, self-completion questionnaires, as compared to structured interviews, tend to:

- have fewer open questions, since closed ones tend to be easier to answer;
- have easy-to-follow designs to minimize the risk that the respondent will fail to follow filter questions or will inadvertently omit a question;
- be shorter, to reduce the risk of 'respondent fatigue', since it is manifestly easier for a respondent who becomes tired of answering questions in a long questionnaire to consign it to a waste paper bin than to terminate an interview.

## Advantages of the self-completion questionnaire over the structured interview

### Cheaper to administer

Interviewing can be expensive. The cheapness of the self-completion questionnaire is especially advantageous if you have a sample that is geographically widely dispersed. When this is the case, a postal questionnaire will be much cheaper, because of the time and cost of travel for interviewers. This advantage is obviously less pronounced in connection with telephone interviews, because of the lower costs of telephone charges relative to travel and time spent travelling. But, even in comparison to telephone interviewing, the postal questionnaire enjoys cost advantages.

### Quicker to administer

Self-completion questionnaires can be sent out by post or otherwise distributed in very large quantities at the same time. A thousand questionnaires can be sent out by post in one batch, but, even with a team of interviewers, it would take a long time to conduct personal interviews with a sample of that size. However, it is important to bear in mind that the questionnaires do not all come back immediately and that they may take several weeks to be returned. Also, there is invariably a need to send out follow-up letters and/or questionnaires to those who fail to return them initially, an issue that will be returned to below.

### Absence of interviewer effects

It was noted in Chapter 5 that various studies have demonstrated that characteristics of interviewers (and respondents) may affect the answers that people give. While the findings from this research are somewhat equivocal in their implications, it has been suggested that such characteristics as ethnicity, gender, and the social background of interviewers may combine to bias the answers that respondents provide. Obviously, since there is no interviewer present when a self-completion questionnaire is being completed, interviewer effects are eliminated. However, this advantage probably has to be regarded fairly cautiously, since few consistent patterns have emerged over the years from research to suggest what kinds of interviewer characteristics bias answers. Probably of greater importance to the presence of an interviewer is the tendency for people to be more likely

to exhibit social desirability bias when an interviewer is present. Research by Sudman and Bradburn (1982) suggests that postal questionnaires work better than personal interviews when a question carries the possibility of such bias. There is also evidence to suggest that respondents are less likely to under-report activities that induce anxiety or about which they feel sensitive in self-completion questionnaires than in structured interviews (Tourangeau and Smith 1996).

### No interviewer variability

Self-completion questionnaires do not suffer from the problem of interviewers asking questions in a different order or in different ways.

### Convenience for respondents

Self-completion questionnaires are more convenient for respondents, because they can complete a questionnaire when they want and at the speed that they want to go.

## Disadvantages of the self-completion questionnaire in comparison to the structured interview

### Cannot prompt

There is no one present to help respondents if they are having difficulty answering a question. It is always important to ensure that the questions that are asked are clear and unambiguous, but this is especially so with the self-completion questionnaire, since there is no interviewer to help respondents with questions they find difficult to understand and hence to answer. Also, great attention must be paid to ensure that the questionnaire is easy to complete; otherwise questions will be inadvertently omitted if instructions are unclear.

### Cannot probe

There is no opportunity to probe respondents to elaborate an answer. Probing can be very important when open-ended questions are being asked. Interviewers are often trained to get more from respondents. However, this problem largely applies to open questions, which are not used a great deal in self-completion questionnaire research.

### Cannot ask many questions that are not salient to respondents

Respondents are more likely than in interviews to become tired of answering questions that are not very salient to them, and that they are likely to perceive as boring. Because of the risk of a questionnaire being consigned to a waste paper bin, it is important to avoid including many non-salient questions in a self-completion questionnaire. However, this point suggests that, when a research issue *is* salient to the respondent, a high response rate is feasible (Altschuld and Lower 1984). This means that, when questions are salient, the self-completion questionnaire may be a good choice for researchers, especially when the much lower cost is borne in mind.

### Difficulty of asking other kinds of question

In addition to the problem of asking many questions that are not salient to respondents, as previously suggested, it is also important to avoid asking more than a very small number of open questions (because respondents frequently do not want to write a lot). Questions with complex structures, such as filters, should be avoided as far as possible (because respondents often find them difficult to follow).

### Questionnaire can be read as a whole

Respondents are able to read the whole questionnaire before answering the first question. When this occurs, none of the questions asked is truly independent of the others. It also means that you cannot be sure that questions have been answered in the correct order. It also means that the problems of question order effects, of the kind discussed in Chapter 8, may occur.

### Do not know who answers

With postal questionnaires, you can never be sure that the right person has answered the questionnaire. If a questionnaire is sent to a certain person in a household, it may be that someone else in that household completes the questionnaire. It is also impossible to have any control over the intrusion of non-respondents (such as other members of a household) in the answering of questions. Similarly, if a questionnaire is sent to a manager in a firm, the task may simply be delegated to someone else. This advantage of the structured interview over the postal questionnaire does not apply when the former is administered by telephone, since the same problem applies. There is a feeling among some commentators that when a self-completion questionnaire is administered over the Internet (see Chapter 26 for more on this), the problem of not knowing who is replying is exacerbated because of the propensity of some Web users to assume online identities (Couper 2004).

### Cannot collect additional data

With an interview, interviewers might be asked to collect snippets of information about the workplace, firm,

manager, or whatever. This is not going to be possible in connection with a postal questionnaire, but, if self-completion questionnaires are handed out in an organization, it is more feasible to collect such additional data.

### Difficult to ask a lot of questions

As signalled above, because of the possibility of 'respondent fatigue', long questionnaires are rarely feasible. They may even result in a greater tendency for questionnaires not to be answered in the first place, since they can be offputting.

### Not appropriate for some kinds of respondent

Respondents whose literacy is limited or whose facility with English is restricted will not be able to answer the questionnaire, as the example in Research in focus 7.10, of the exclusion of manual workers in a cement factory from a questionnaire survey owing to low levels of literacy, illustrates. The second of these difficulties cannot be entirely overcome when interviews are being employed, but the difficulties are likely to be greater with postal questionnaires.

### Greater risk of missing data

Partially answered questionnaires are more likely, because of a lack of prompting or supervision, than is possible in interviews. It is also easier for respondents actively to decide not to answer a question when on their own than when being asked by an interviewer. For example, questions that appear boring or irrelevant to the respondent may be especially likely to be skipped. If questions are not answered, this creates a problem of **missing data** for the variables that are created.

### Lower response rates

One of the most damaging limitations is that surveys by postal questionnaire typically result in lower response rates (see Key concept 7.5) than comparable interview-based studies. The significance of a response rate is that, unless it can be proven that those who do not participate do not differ from those who do, there is likely to be the risk of bias. In other words, if, as is likely, there are differences between participants and refusals, it is probable that the findings relating to the sample will be affected. If a response rate is low, it seems likely that the risk of bias in the findings will be greater.

The problem of low response rates seems to apply particularly to postal questionnaires. This explains why some researchers who use postal questionnaires as a data collection method tend to employ a mixed-methods research design (see Chapter 25 for a discussion of this kind of research). This is because they anticipate the likelihood of a low response rate to the questionnaire survey and therefore seek to increase the validity of their research through **triangulation** (see Thinking deeply 25.1) with other methods. However, there are strategies that can be employed by researchers to improve self-completion questionnaire response rates. These can sometimes include the provision of a small financial incentive. Alternatively, researchers may choose to administer self-completion questionnaires to samples drawn from a population that is more within their control—for example, by sampling from a group of practising managers who are part-time students at the university where the researcher also works. Lucas's (1997) research involved a survey by self-completion questionnaire that was answered by all students to whom it was administered; the only non-respondents were those who were absent from the lecture (see Research in focus 7.7). When a self-completion questionnaire is employed in this kind of context, it seems less vulnerable to the problem of a low response rate.

Mangione (1995: 60–1) has provided the following classification of bands of response rate to postal questionnaires:

| | |
|---|---|
| over 85 per cent | excellent |
| 70–85 per cent | very good |
| 60–70 per cent | acceptable |
| 50–60 per cent | barely acceptable |
| below 50 per cent | not acceptable. |

## Steps to improve response rates to postal questionnaires

Because of the tendency for postal questionnaire surveys to generate lower response rates than comparable structured interview surveys (and the implications this has for the validity of findings), a great deal of thought and research has gone into ways of improving survey response. The following steps are frequently suggested:

- Write a good covering letter explaining the reasons for the research, why it is important, and why the recipient has been selected; mention sponsorship if any, and provide guarantees of confidentiality. The advice provided in Tips and skills 'Topics and issues to include in an introductory statement', (Chapter 8) in connection with the kind of letter that might go out in advance of a respondent being asked to be interviewed can be followed to good effect.

- Postal questionnaires should always be accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope or, at the very least, return postage.
- Follow up individuals who do not reply at first, possibly with two or three further mailings. The importance of reminders cannot be overstated—they do work. Our preferred and recommended approach is to send out a reminder letter to non-respondents two weeks after the initial mailing, reasserting the nature and aims of the survey and suggesting that the person should contact either the researcher or someone else in the research team to obtain a replacement copy of the questionnaire if the initial mailing has been mislaid or lost. Then, two weeks after that, all further non-respondents should be sent another letter along with a further copy of the questionnaire. These reminders have a demonstrable effect on the response rate. Some writers argue for further mailings of reminder letters to non-respondents. If a response rate is worryingly low, such further mailings would certainly be desirable. Some of the tactics used by Fey and Denison (2003; see Research in focus 9.1) can also be used.
- Unsurprisingly, shorter questionnaires tend to achieve better response rates than longer ones. However, this is not a clear-cut principle, because it is difficult to specify when a questionnaire becomes 'too long'. Also, the evidence suggests that the effect of the length of questionnaires on response rates cannot be separated very easily from the salience of the topic(s) of the research for respondents and from the nature of the sample. Respondents may be highly tolerant of questionnaires that contain many questions on topics that interest them.
- Clear instructions and an attractive layout improve postal questionnaire response rates. Dillman (1983), as part of what he calls the Total Design Method (TDM) for postal questionnaire research, recommends lower case for questions and upper case for closed-ended answers. However, with the growing use of email and the associated rise of 'netiquette', upper case is increasingly associated with shouting, so that this recommendation may become less desirable as this medium of communication spreads.
- Do not allow the questionnaire to appear unnecessarily bulky. Dillman (1983) recommends a booklet format for the questionnaire and using the photocopier to reduce the size of the questionnaire to fit the booklet format. This approach also gives the impression of a more professional approach.
- As with structured interviewing (see Chapter 8), begin with questions that are more likely to be of interest to the respondent. This advice is linked to the issue of salience (see above) but has particular significance in the context of research that may have limited salience for the respondent.
- There is some controversy about how significant for response rates it is to personalize covering letters, by including the respondent's name and address (Baumgartner and Heberlein 1984). However, one of the features of the TDM approach advocated by Dillman (1983) is that these details are supplied on covering letters and each is individually signed.
- We are inclined to the view that, in general, postal questionnaires should comprise as few open questions as possible, since people are often deterred by



## Research in focus 9.1
## Following up on a questionnaire survey

In a survey of foreign firms operating in Russia, Fey and Denison (2003) describe how they personally delivered a copy of the questionnaire to each firm for a senior manager to complete. 'Wherever possible, the researcher described the project and had the manager complete the questionnaire at that time. However, sometimes the manager opted to complete the questionnaire later and return it by fax' (2003: 690). They then go on to explain how they followed up on individuals who did not initially respond: 'If questionnaires were not received within one week, we began a follow-up procedure including three telephone calls, faxing another questionnaire, and a fourth telephone call as a final reminder. Companies whose questionnaires had not been returned by the end of this procedure were considered nonrespondents' (2003: 690–1). However, even with all of this effort on the part of the researchers, it is worth noting that they obtained only 179 usable questionnaires, representing a 37 per cent response rate.



## Tips and skills
## Response rates

As we have explained, response rates are important because, the lower a response rate, the more questions are likely to be raised about the representativeness of the achieved sample. This is likely, however, to be an issue only with randomly selected samples. With samples that are not selected on the basis of a probability sampling method, it could be argued that the response rate is less of an issue, because the sample would not be representative of a population, even if everyone participated! Postal questionnaire surveys in particular are often associated with low response rates and, as Mangione's classification illustrates, according to some authorities a response rate of below 50 per cent is not acceptable. On the other hand, many published articles report the results of studies that are well below this level. In an examination of published studies in the field of organizational research in the years 1979–83, Terence Mitchell (1985) found a range of response rates of 30–94 per cent. Bryman (1989*a*: 44) points to two articles in the early 1980s that achieved response rates of 21 and 25 per cent. Moreover, these articles were published in two of the most highly regarded journals in the field: *Academy of Management Journal* and *Strategic Management Journal*. One of the surveys reported by Cunha and Cooper (2002; see Research in focus 7.10) achieved a sample of just 18 per cent. The point we are making is that, if you achieve a low response rate, do not despair. Although writers like Mangione (1995) may regard response rates of 18, 21, and 25 per cent as unacceptable (and he may be right about this judgement), a great deal of published research also achieves low response rates. The key point is to recognize and acknowledge the implications of the possible limitations of a low response rate. On the other hand, if your research is based on a convenience sample, ironically it could be argued that a low response rate is less significant. Many students find postal and other forms of self-completion questionnaire attractive because of their low cost and quick administration. The point of this discussion is that you should not be put off using such techniques because of the prospect of a low response rate.

the prospect of having to write a lot. In fact, many writers on the subject recommend that open questions are used as little as possible in self-completion questionnaires.

- Providing monetary incentives can be an effective way of increasing the response rate, although it is very unlikely to be an option for most students undertaking project work or research for their dissertation. Incentives are more effective if the money comes with the questionnaire rather than if it is promised once the questionnaire has been returned. Apparently, respondents typically do not cynically take the money and discard the questionnaire! The evidence also suggests that quite small amounts of money have a positive impact on the response rate, but that larger amounts do not necessarily improve the response rate any further.

Several of the steps taken by the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS) research team, mentioned in Research in focus 2.14 and Research in focus 8.7, follow the recommendations that we have outlined; this was suggested by the researchers to have improved response rates in both the structured interview and the postal questionnaire surveys. Some advantages and disadvantages of the self-completion questionnaire, as compared to the structured interview, are illustrated by the example provided in Research in focus 9.2. The WERS study employed a research design that combined both of these methods in order to overcome some of the limitations of each and to represent the perspectives of managers, worker representatives, and employees on a range of employment relations issues. Table 9.1 illustrates their combined use of these methods and provides details of the response rates obtained in each case. The main advantage with this triangulated approach is that it enabled a much larger and more diverse sample to be represented within the financial and temporal constraints of the study.

In a sense, the choice between structured interviews or self-administered questionnaires as a method of data collection is an issue that is primarily about mode of administration. The advantages and disadvantages of postal questionnaires versus other modes of questionnaire administration, including telephone interviewing, email, and Web-based surveys, are summarized in Table 26.1.



## Research in focus 9.2

# Combining the use of structured interviews with self-completion questionnaires

Structured interviews can be used in conjunction with self-completion questionnaires to gain understanding of the perspectives of different groups of participants. The 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS 2004) (see also Research in focus 2.14 and Research in focus 8.7) is an example of a project that has been concerned to use different research methods to reach different categories of respondent.

- The principal method of data collection used is a structured face-to-face interview with the senior member of management at each workplace who deals with industrial relations, employee relations, or personnel matters. These interviews are based on a pre-piloted questionnaire and cover a range of issues such as trade union membership and recognition, patterns of flexible working, training and development, working hours and payment systems, and employee communication. Although the approach is quite structured, the interviewer, who is formally trained, is encouraged to follow up any inconsistent responses within the interview.
- The second group of respondents included in the cross-sectional survey is worker representatives. They are interviewed about the state of employment relations at their workplaces. The researchers explain that, although the majority of questions covered by the survey are factual, the reason for inclusion of worker representatives is the differences in frames of reference. 'For example, a manager may state that the workplace operates a staff suggestion scheme, but a worker representative may think it dormant or non-existent if no one has made a suggestion for several years' (Cully et al. 1999: 7).
- The third group of respondents is employees; in the 1998 survey up to twenty-five employees were randomly selected from each workplace. This new element to the survey was introduced partly because of a decline in worker representation evident from the 1990 survey. A postal questionnaire was sent to each of these employees. The aim of this part of the study was to understand how employees themselves see the employment relationship and to build up a picture of their experience based on their access to training, their participation in workplace decision making, and their interpretation of the psychological contract.

The WERS survey is designed to combine the views of different groups of participants in order to overcome the limitations and partiality of any one group of respondents. The combined use of structured interviews and self-completion questionnaires enables this aim to be achieved, despite the vast scale of the project.

## Table 9.1

**Outcomes from the WERS fieldwork 1998 cross-section survey**

| Type of respondent | Total responses (number) | Response rate (%) | Average duration (minutes) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Management (structured interview) | 2,191 | 80 | 108 |
| Worker representative (structured interview) | 947 | 82 | 47 |
| Employee (postal questionnaire) | 28,237 | 64 | – |

*Source*: adapted from Cully et al. (1999).

# Designing the self-completion questionnaire

## Do not cramp the presentation

Because of the well-known problem of low response rates to the postal questionnaire in particular, it is sometimes considered preferable to make the instrument appear as short as possible in order for it to be less likely to deter prospective respondents from answering. However, this is almost always a mistake. As Dillman (1983) observes, an attractive layout is likely to enhance response rates, whereas the kinds of tactics that are sometimes employed to make a questionnaire appear shorter than it really is—such as reducing margins and the space between questions—make it look cramped and thereby unattractive. Also, if questions are too close together, there is a risk that they will be inadvertently omitted.

This is not to say that you should be ridiculously liberal in your use of space, as this does not necessarily provide for an attractive format either and may run the risk of making the questionnaire look bulky. As with so many other issues in business research, a steady course needs to be steered between possible extremes.

## Clear presentation

Far more important than making a self-completion questionnaire appear shorter than is the case is to make sure that it has a layout that is easy on the eye, as Dillman emphasizes, and that it facilitates the answering of all questions that are relevant to the respondent. Dillman's recommendation of lower case for questions and upper case for closed answers is an example of one consideration, but at the very least a variety of print styles (for example, different fonts, print sizes, bold, italics, and capitals) can enhance the appearance *but must be used in a consistent manner*. This last point means that you should ensure that you use one style for general instructions, one for headings, perhaps one for specific instructions (e.g., 'Go to question 7'), one for questions, and one for closed-ended answers. Mixing print styles, so that one style is sometimes used for both general instructions and questions, can be very confusing for respondents.

## Vertical or horizontal closed answers?

Bearing in mind that most questions in a self-completion questionnaire are likely to be of the closed kind, one consideration is whether to arrange the fixed answers vertically or horizontally. Very often, the nature of the answers will dictate a vertical arrangement because of their sheer length. Many writers prefer a vertical format whenever possible, because, in some cases where either arrangement is feasible, confusion can arise when a horizontal one is employed (Sudman and Bradburn 1982). Consider the following:

> **What do you think of the CEO's performance in his job since he took over the running of this company?** (*Please tick the appropriate response*)
>
> Very good ____ Good ____ Fair ____ Poor ____ Very poor ____

There is a risk that, if the questionnaire is being answered in haste, the required tick will be placed in the wrong space—for example, indicating Good when Fair was the intended response. Also, a vertical format more clearly distinguishes questions from answers. To some extent, these potential problems can be obviated through the judicious use of spacing and print variation, but they represent significant considerations. A further reason why vertical alignments can be superior is that they are probably easier to code, especially when **pre-codes** appear on the questionnaire. Very often, self-completion questionnaires are arranged so that to the right of each question are two columns: one for the column in which data relating to the question will appear in a data matrix; the other for all the pre-codes. The latter allows the appropriate code to be assigned to a respondent's answer by circling it for later entry into the computer. Thus, the choice would be between the formats presented in Tips and skills 'Closed question with a horizontal format' and Tips and skills 'Closed question with a vertical format'. In the second case, not only is there less ambiguity about where a tick is to be placed; the task of coding is easier. However, when there is to be a battery of questions with identical answer formats, as in a Likert scale, a vertical format will take up too much space. One way of dealing with this kind of questioning is to use abbreviations with an accompanying explanation. An example can be found in Tips and skills 'Formatting a Likert scale'. The four items presented here are taken from an eighteen-item Likert scale designed to measure job satisfaction (Brayfield and Rothe 1951).



## Tips and skills
## Closed question with a horizontal format

What do you think of the CEO's performance in his job since he took over the running of this company?
*(Please tick the appropriate response)*

Very good ____ Good ____ Fair ____ Poor ____ Very poor ____ 5 4 3 2 1



## Tips and skills
## Closed question with a vertical format

What do you think of the CEO's performance in his job since he took over the running of this company?
*(Please tick the appropriate response)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very good | ____ | 5 |
| Good | ____ | 4 |
| Fair | ____ | 3 |
| Poor | ____ | 2 |
| Very poor | ____ | 1 |



## Tips and skills
## Formatting a Likert scale

In the next set of questions, you are presented with a statement. You are being asked to indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by indicating whether you: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), are Undecided (U), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD).

*Please indicate your level of agreement by circling the appropriate response.*

**23.** My job is like a hobby to me.

SA A U D SD

**24.** My job is usually interesting enough to keep me from getting bored.

SA A U D SD

**25.** It seems that my friends are more interested in their jobs.

SA A U D SD

**26.** I enjoy my work more than my leisure time.

SA A U D SD

## Identifying response sets in a Likert scale

One of the advantages of using closed questions is that they can be pre-coded, thus turning the processing of data for computer analysis into a fairly simple task (see Chapter 10 for more on this). However, some thought has to go into the scoring of the items of the kind presented in Tips and skills 'Formatting a Likert scale'. We might for example score question 23 as follows:

Strongly agree = 5

Agree = 4

Undecided = 3

Disagree = 2

Strongly disagree = 1

Accordingly, a high score for the item (5 or 4) indicates satisfaction with the job and a low score (1 or 2) indicates low job satisfaction. The same applies to question 24. However, when we come to question 25, the picture is different. Here, agreement indicates a *lack* of job satisfaction. It is disagreement that is indicative of job satisfaction. We would have to reverse the coding of this item, so that:

Strongly agree = 1

Agree = 2

Undecided = 3

Disagree = 4

Strongly disagree = 5

The point of including such items is to identify people who exhibit response sets, like acquiescence (see Chapter 8). If someone were to agree with all eighteen items, when some of them indicated *lack* of job satisfaction, it is likely that the respondent was affected by a response set and the answers are unlikely to provide a valid assessment of job satisfaction for that person.

## Clear instructions about how to respond

Always be clear about how you want respondents to indicate their replies when answering closed questions. Are they supposed to place a tick by or circle or underline the appropriate answer, or are they supposed to delete inappropriate answers? Also, in many cases it is feasible for the respondent to choose more than one answer—is this acceptable to you? If it is not, you should indicate this in your instructions, for example:

*(Please choose the one answer that best represents your views by placing a tick in the appropriate box.)*

If you do not make this clear and if some respondents choose more than one answer, you will have to treat their replies as if they had not answered. This possibility increases the risk of missing data from some respondents.

If it is acceptable to you for more than one category to be chosen, you need to make this clear, for example:

*(Please choose all answers that represent your views by placing a tick in the appropriate boxes).*

It is a common error for such instructions to be omitted and for respondents either to be unsure about how to reply or to make inappropriate selections.

## Keep question and answers together

This is a simple and obvious, though often transgressed, requirement—namely, that you should never split up a question so that it appears on two separate pages. A common error is to have some space left at the bottom of a page into which the question can be slotted but for the closed answers to appear on the next page. Doing so carries the risk of the respondent forgetting to answer the question or providing an answer in the wrong group of closed answers (a problem that is especially likely when a series of questions with a common answer format is being used, as with a Likert scale).



# Diaries as a form of self-completion questionnaire

When the researcher is specifically interested in precise estimates of different kinds of behaviour, the diary warrants serious consideration, though it is still a relatively underused method. Unfortunately, the term 'diary' has somewhat different meanings in business research (see Key concept 9.3). It is the first of the three meanings—what Elliott (1997) calls the *researcher-driven diary*—that is the focus of attention here, especially in the context

of its use in relation to quantitative research. When employed in this way, the researcher-driven diary functions in a similar way to the self-completion questionnaire. Equally, it could be said that the researcher-driven diary is an alternative method of data collection to observation. It can be thought of as the equivalent of structured observation (see Chapter 11) in the context of research questions that are framed in terms of quantitative research, or of ethnography (see Chapter 17) in the context of research questions in terms of qualitative research.



## Key concept 9.3
## What is a research diary?

There are three major ways in which the term 'diary' has been employed in the context of business research.

*The diary as a method of data collection*. Here the researcher devises a structure for the diary and then asks a sample of diarists to complete the instruments so that they record what they do more or less contemporaneously with their activities. Elliott (1997) refers to this kind of use of the diary as *researcher-driven diaries*. Such diaries can be employed for the collection of data within the context of both quantitative and qualitative research. Sometimes, the collection of data in this manner is supplemented by a personal interview in which the diarist is asked questions about such things as what he or she meant by certain remarks. This *diary-interview*, as it is often referred to (Zimmerman and Wieder 1977), is usually employed when diarists record their behaviour in prose form rather than simply indicating the amount of time spent on different kinds of activity.

*The diary as a document*. The diary in this context is written spontaneously by the diarist and not at the behest of a researcher. Diaries in this sense are often used by historians but have some potential for business researchers working on issues that are of social scientific significance. As John Scott (1990) observes, the diary in this sense often shades into autobiography. Diaries as documents will be further addressed in Chapter 21.

*The diary as a log of the researcher's activities*. Researchers sometimes keep a record of what they do at different stages as an *aide-mémoire*. For example, the famous social anthropologist Malinowski (1967) kept an infamous log of his activities ('infamous' because it revealed his distaste for the people he studied and his inappropriate involvement with females). This kind of diary often shades into the writing of field notes by ethnographers, about which more is written in Chapter 17.

Corti (1993) distinguishes between 'structured diaries' and 'free text diaries'. Either may be employed by quantitative researchers. The research on managers and their jobs by R. Stewart (1967) is an illustration of the structured kind of diary (see Research in focus 9.4). The diary has the general appearance of a questionnaire with largely closed questions. The kind of diary employed in this research is often referred to as a 'time-use' diary, in that it is designed so that diarists can record more or less contemporaneously the amount of time engaged in certain activities, such as time spent travelling, doing paperwork, in committee meetings, and so on. Estimates of the amount of time spent in different activities are often regarded as more accurate, because the events are less subject to memory problems or to the tendency to round up or down. Structured diaries are also regarded as more accurate in tracking events as they occur, as the example in Research in focus 9.4 illustrates. However, the diary method is more intrusive than answering a questionnaire, and it could be argued that it causes changes in behaviour or behavioural awareness of an issue. For example, in their study of psychological contract breach, Conway and Briner (2002; see Research in focus 9.5) note that their research design may have encouraged respondents to report very minor breaches of the psychological contract that they perhaps otherwise would not have regarded as significant. They thus conclude that 'it is a matter of debate as to what can be considered as lying inside or outside a psychological contract' (2002: 299).

An example of a free-text diary is provided by Huxley et al.'s (2005) study of stress and pressures among mental health social workers. In this study, a diary relating to the previous working week was sent to each of the



## Research in focus 9.4
## A diary study of managers and their jobs

R. Stewart's (1967) now classic study of managerial time use focused on:

- the amount of time managers spent on particular activities;
- the frequency with which they undertook particular tasks.

'The diary method was chosen instead of observation because the research aimed to study more than 100 managers in a large number of companies. This aim could not be achieved by observation without a large team of observers' (1967: 7). In addition to recording the nature of the task that was being undertaken (such as paperwork, telephone calls, discussions, and so on), managers were asked to record in their diary:

1. the duration of the incident (hours and minutes);
2. where the work was done (own office, travelling, etc.);
3. who else was involved (boss, secretary, colleagues, etc.).

The diary entry took the form of a grid, which was filled in by ticking the appropriate boxes, which were subsequently coded. A distinction was made between episodes of work lasting five minutes or more, and 'fleeting contacts' of less than five minutes. The latter were recorded separately from the main section of the diary so managers could record as many of these short incidents as possible. Each day, the managers completed in addition to the main diary entry a form asking them to describe the three activities that had taken up the most work time. Each week, the managers filled in a form designed to check how well they had kept the diary, asking for example, 'How often did you fill in the diary?' 160 managers kept diaries for a period of four weeks, a time period that Stewart considered was long enough to gain an impression of variations in the job but not so long that managers would lose interest in the exercise.



## Research in focus 9.5
## A diary study of responses to psychological contract breach

Conway and Briner (2002) suggest that one of the limitations of existing studies of psychological contract breach—when an organization breaks a promise made to the employee—stems from the methods that are used for study—that is, questionnaire surveys. In particular, 'breaches of an employee's psychological contract are *events* that happen at work or in relation to work. For accurate measurement they therefore need to be assessed soon after they occur' (2002: 288).

This led the researchers to conduct a daily diary study in order to develop a better understanding of the psychological contract. The sample comprised:

- 21 managers who worked for a UK bank; and
- a convenience sample of 24 participants who were part-time M.Sc. students at Birkbeck College, where both of the researchers were employed.

All 45 participants were in employment, mostly in professional occupations. The researchers anticipated that exceeded promises would be construed positively, whereas broken promises would be construed negatively.

The diary was completed over ten consecutive working days. Participants were posted their diary booklets and asked to complete their daily diary schedules immediately at the end of each working day. The first three pages of the daily diary booklet provided instructions on how to complete the diary (2002: 291).

On each occasion, participants were first asked how they had felt at work on that particular day; items were assessed on a six-point scale denoting the frequency with which certain emotions were felt by workers on that day. The scale categories were: 'not at all'; 'occasionally'; 'some of the time'; 'much of the time'; 'most of the time'; and 'all of the time'. For example, workers were asked to indicate how frequently they felt depressed rather than enthusiastic on the day on question. They were then asked (*a*) if the organization had broken any promises to them on that day, and (*b*) if the organization had exceeded any promises during that day. If a promise had been either broken or exceeded, they were asked to provide written details of the event and to complete emotion checklists by responding to a list of words that represented possible reactions, such as 'resentment' (reaction to broken promise) and 'excitement' (reaction to exceeded promise).

The research suggests a far greater incidence of psychological contract breach than previous survey studies had suggested. This, suggest the authors, may be in part attributable to the method used, in particular the sensitivity of the diary method in picking up events as they occur on a day-to-day basis.

237 respondents, along with a postal questionnaire. The issues that diarists were invited to cover were based on findings from two focus groups the researchers ran prior to the diary study involving mental health social workers. The diary invited open-ended responses, which were entered into the qualitative software analysis package NVivo and these were analysed thematically. One of the advantages of the diary in conjunction with a self-completion questionnaire in this study was that it provided contextual information about factors that had an impact on employee stress, such as the burden of paperwork and bureaucratic procedures, staff shortages and excessive workloads, and constant change and restructuring. This kind of information would probably have been much more difficult to glean from the questionnaires alone.

Using free-text recording of behaviour carries the same kinds of problems as those associated with coding answers to structured interview open questions—namely, the time-consuming nature of the exercise and the increased risks associated with the coding of answers. However, the free-text approach is less likely to be problematic when, as in Huxley et al. (2005), diarists can be instructed on what kind of information to write about, such as that relating to pressures of work, their affective commitment, and job satisfaction. It would be much more difficult to code free-text entries relating to more general questions such as in R. Stewart's (1967) study of how managers use their time.

Corti (1993) recommends that the person preparing the diary should:

- provide explicit instructions for diarists;
- be clear about the time periods within which behaviour is to be recorded—for example, day, twenty-four hours, week;
- provide a model of a completed section of a diary;
- provide checklists of 'items, events, or behaviour' that can jog people's memory—but the list should not become too daunting in length or complexity;
- include fixed blocks of time or columns showing when the designated activities start and finish (for example, diaries of the kind used by R. Stewart (1967), which show how managers spend their time).

## Advantages and disadvantages of the diary as a method of data collection

The two studies that have been used to illustrate the use of diaries also suggest its potential advantages.

- When fairly precise estimates of the frequency and/or amount of time spent in different forms of behaviour are required, the diary may provide more valid and reliable data than questionnaire data (see Research in focus 9.6).
- When information about the sequencing of different types of behaviour is required, it is likely to perform better than questionnaires or interviews.
- The first two advantages could be used to suggest that structured observation would be just as feasible, but structured observation is probably less appropriate for producing data on behaviour that is personally sensitive, such as work-related gossip (see Research in focus 9.7). Moreover, although data on such behaviour can be collected by structured interview, it is likely that respondents will be less willing to divulge personal details. If such information were collected by questionnaire, there is a greater risk of recall and rounding problems (see the first point in this list).

On the other hand, diaries may suffer from the following problems:

- They tend to be more expensive than personal interviews (because of the costs associated with recruiting diarists and of checking that diaries are being properly completed).
- Diaries can suffer from a process of attrition, as people decide they have had enough of the task of completing a diary.
- This last point raises the possibility that diarists become less diligent over time about their record keeping.
- There is sometimes failure to record details sufficiently quickly, so that memory recall problems set in.

However, diary researchers argue that the resulting data are more accurate than the equivalent data based on interviews or questionnaires.



## Research in focus 9.6
## A diary study of text messaging

Faulkner and Culwin (2005) used a questionnaire and a diary study to explore the uses of text messaging among UK university students. The diary study involved twenty-four mobile phone users who had also used text messaging. The researchers used a convenience sample made up of students in their mid-20s on a computer studies course at a UK university and the study formed part of their course work. The group was asked to keep diaries of sent and received text messages for a two-week period. 'The study started at midnight on February 15th to avoid the sample being affected by Valentine's Day greetings' (2005: 176). The following information was recorded in a structured format:

Book number

Message number

Date

Time

Send or receive

The original message

A translation if it was not in English

Sender's details

Relationship of sender to receiver.

Although structured observation could have been used in this study, it would have entailed researchers following users around and waiting for participants to text someone, so a diary study is in this case a more directed method of focusing on one particular type of activity. This study focused on text messages that were predominantly of a personal nature, but text messaging is increasingly being recognized as a method of communication within business, where similar research methods could be applied.



## Research in focus 9.7
## Using diaries to study a sensitive topic: work-related gossip

K. Waddington (2005) argues that diary methods offer a solution to the problems of researching the often private, unheard, and unseen world of gossip in organizations. However, she also argues that diary methods alone are insufficient. Her mixed-method research design of nursing and health care organizations thus involved three phases; the first was aimed at exploring the characteristics of gossip and individual differences in relation to

gender and organizational position; repertory grid technique (see Chapter 8) was used to ascertain categories related to these distinctions. Phase two of the research addressed the role of gossip in sense-making, socialization, and as an aspect of the expression and management of emotion in relation to workplace stress; in-depth interviews with nurses were used as the main method of data collection. The third phase of the study is where diary methods were used, along with a critical incident method (see Chapter 8) and telephone interviewing. The aim of this stage of the study was to add to the findings of the first two phases. Twenty health care workers were asked to keep an event-contingent structured diary record. When an incident of gossip occurred, they were asked to record it on the incident sheet (see Figure 9.1) as soon as possible after it had occurred and at least once a day. The respondents were also asked to reflect upon an episode of work-related gossip in the form of a critical incident account detailing: (1) reasons for choosing the incident; (2) how they felt at the time it took place; (3) where and when it occurred and who was involved; (4) the content of the gossip; and (5) organizational factors contributing to the occurrence of the incident. Within four weeks of completion and return of the diaries and critical incident accounts, follow-up telephone interviews were carried out to clarify details relating to the critical incident accounts and to discuss the perceived accuracy and practicality of the diary records.

## Figure 9.1

### A sample diary record sheet

**Record Sheet**

Date…… Time……am/pm  Length of time incident approx…….. minutes

Number of people involved…….. Females/……Males

Where the incident took place:

Nature of *your* interpersonal relationship with the person(s) involved (please circle):
Work relationship only/friends at work/friends outside of work/partner/family member/other—please specify

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| I disclosed | Very little | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | A great deal |
| Others disclosed | Very little | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | A great deal |
| Social integration | I didn't feel part of the group | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | I felt part of the group |
| Quality | Unpleasant | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Very unpleasant |
| Initiation | I initiated | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 | Others initiated |

What did you gossip about?
How did you feel at the time the above took place?

*Source*: K. Waddington (2005).



## Key points

- Many of the recommendations relating to the self-completion questionnaire apply equally or almost equally to the structured interview, as has been mentioned on several occasions.
- Closed questions tend to be used in survey research rather than open ones. Coding is a particular problem when dealing with answers to open questions.

- Structured interviews and self-completion questionnaires both have their respective advantages and disadvantages, but a particular problem with questionnaires sent by post is that they frequently produce a low response rate. However, steps can be taken to boost response rates for postal questionnaires.
- Presentation of closed questions and the general layout constitute important considerations for the self-completion questionnaire.
- The researcher-driven diary was also introduced as a possible alternative to using questionnaires and interviews when the research questions are very specifically concerned with aspects of people's behaviour.



## Questions for review

***Self-completion questionnaire or postal questionnaire?***

- Are the self-completion questionnaire and the postal questionnaire the same thing?

***Evaluating the self-completion questionnaire in relation to the structured interview***

- 'The low response rates frequently achieved in research with postal questionnaires mean that the structured interview is invariably a more suitable choice.' Discuss.
- What steps can be taken to boost postal questionnaire response rates?

***Designing the self-completion questionnaire***

- Why are self-completion questionnaires usually made up mainly of closed questions?
- Why might a vertical format for presenting closed questions be preferable to a horizontal format?

***Diaries as a form of self-completion questionnaire***

- What are the main kinds of diary used in the collection of business research data?
- Are there any circumstances when the diary approach might be preferable to the use of a self-completion questionnaire?



### Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Self-Completion Questionnaires.*

# 10

# Asking questions

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 248

**Open or closed questions?** 248

Open questions 248

Closed questions 250

**Types of question** 253

**Rules for designing questions** 255

General rules of thumb 255

Specific rules when designing questions 255

**Vignette questions** 261

**Piloting and pre-testing questions** 262

**Using existing questions** 263

***Checklist*** 265

***Key points*** 266

***Questions for review*** 267






## Chapter outline

This chapter is concerned with the considerations that are involved in asking questions that are used in structured interviews and questionnaires of the kinds discussed in the two previous chapters. As such, it continues the focus upon survey research that began in Chapter 7 and moves on to the next stage in the process that we outlined in Figure 7.1. The chapter explores:

- the issues involved in deciding whether or when to use open or closed questions;
- the different kinds of question that can be asked in structured interviews and questionnaires;
- rules to bear in mind when designing questions;
- vignette questions in which respondents are presented with a scenario and are asked to reflect on the scenario;
- the importance of piloting questions;
- the possibility of using questions that have been used in previous survey research.

# Introduction

To many people, how to ask questions represents the crux of considerations surrounding the use of survey instruments such as the structured interview or the self-completion questionnaire. As the previous two chapters have sought to suggest, there is much more to the design and administration of such research instruments than how best to phrase questions. However, there is no doubt that the issue of how questions should be asked is a crucial concern for the survey researcher and it is not surprising that this aspect of designing survey instruments has been a major focus of attention over the years and pre-occupies many practising researchers.



# Open or closed questions?

One of the most significant considerations for many researchers is whether to ask a question in an open or closed format. This distinction was first introduced in Chapter 5. The issue of whether to ask a question in an open or closed format is relevant to the design of both structured interview and self-administered questionnaire research.

With an open question, respondents are asked a question and can reply however they wish. With a closed question, they are presented with a set of fixed alternatives from which they have to choose an appropriate answer. All of the questions in Tips and skills 'Instructions for interviewers in the use of a filter question' (Chapter 8) are of the closed kind. So too are the Likert-scale items in Research in focus 6.3 and Research in focus 6.4, as well as Tips and skills 'Closed question with a horizontal format', and Tips and skills 'Closed question with a vertical format' (Chapter 9); these form a particular kind of closed question. What, then, are some of the advantages and limitations of these two types of question format?

## Open questions

Open questions present both advantages and disadvantages to the survey researcher, though, as the following discussion suggests, the problems associated with the processing of answers to open questions tend to mean that closed questions are more likely to be used.

### Advantages

Although survey researchers typically prefer to use closed questions, open questions do have certain advantages over closed ones, as outlined in the list below.

- Respondents can answer in their own terms. They are not forced to answer in the same terms as those foisted on them by the closed answers.
- They allow unusual responses to be derived. Replies that the survey researcher may not have contemplated (and that would therefore not form the basis for fixed-choice alternatives) are possible.
- The questions do not suggest certain kinds of answer to respondents. Therefore, respondents' levels of knowledge and understanding of issues can be tapped. The salience of issues for respondents can also be explored.
- They are useful for exploring new areas or ones in which the researcher has limited knowledge.
- They are useful for generating fixed-choice format answers. This is a point that will be returned to below.

### Disadvantages

However, open questions present problems for the survey researcher, as the following list reveals:

- They are time-consuming for interviewers to administer. Interviewees are likely to talk for longer than is usually the case with a comparable closed question.
- Answers have to be 'coded'. This is very time-consuming. For each open question, it entails reading through answers, deriving themes that can be employed to form the basis for codes, and then going through the answers again so that the answers can be coded for entry into a computer spreadsheet. The process is essentially identical to that involved in *content analysis* and is sometimes called *post-coding* to distinguish it from *pre-coding*, whereby the researcher designs a coding frame in advance of administering a survey instrument and often includes the pre-codes in the questionnaire (as in Tips and skills 'Processing a closed question'). However, in addition to being time-consuming, post-coding can be an unreliable process, because it can introduce the possibility of variability in the coding of answers and therefore of measurement error (and hence lack of validity). This is a form of data processing error (see Figure 7.8). Research in focus 10.1 deals with aspects of the coding of open questions.
- They require greater effort from respondents. Respondents are likely to talk for longer than would be the case for a comparable closed question, or, in the case of a self-completion questionnaire, would need to write for much longer. Therefore, it is often suggested that open questions have limited utility in the context of self-completion questionnaires. Because of the greater effort involved, many prospective respondents are likely to be put off by the prospect of having to write extensively, which may exacerbate the problem of low response rates with postal questionnaires in particular (see Chapter 9).
- There is the possibility in research based on structured interviews of variability between interviewers in the recording of answers. This possibility is likely to arise as a result of the difficulty of writing down verbatim



## Research in focus 10.1
## Coding a very open question

Coding an open question usually entails reading and rereading transcripts of respondents' replies and formulating distinct themes in their replies. A *coding frame* then needs to be designed that identifies the types of answer associated with each question and their respective codes (i.e. numbers). A **coding schedule** may also be necessary to keep a record of rules to be followed in the identification of certain kinds of answer in terms of a theme. The numbers allocated to each answer can then be used in the computer processing of the data.

Foddy (1993) reports the results of an exercise in which he asked a small sample of his students, 'Your father's occupation is (was) . . . ?' and requested three details: nature of business; size of business; and whether owner or employee. In answer to the size of business issue, the replies were particularly variable in kind, including: 'big', 'small', 'very large', '3,000 acres', 'family', 'multinational', '200 people', and 'Philips'. The problem here is obvious: you simply cannot compare and therefore aggregate people's replies. In a sense, the problem is only partly to do with the difficulty of coding an open question. It is also due to a lack of specificity in the question. If, instead, Foddy had asked, 'How many employees are (were) there in your father's organization?', a more comparable set of answers should have been forthcoming. Whether his students would have known this information is, of course, yet another issue. However, the exercise does illustrate the potential problems of asking an open question, particularly one like this that lacks a clear reference point for gauging size.



## Tips and skills
## Processing a closed question

What do you think of the CEO's performance in his job since he took over the running of this company?
*(Please tick the appropriate response)*

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Very good | ____ | 5 |
| Good | ✓ | ④ |
| Fair | ____ | 3 |
| Poor | ____ | 2 |
| Very poor | ____ | 1 |

what respondents say to interviewers. The obvious solution is to use a tape recorder; however, this may not be practicable, for example, in a noisy environment. Also, the transcription of answers to tape-recorded open questions is immensely time-consuming and adds additional costs to a survey. The problem of transcription is one continually faced by qualitative researchers using semi-structured and unstructured interviews (see Chapter 18).

## Closed questions

The advantages and disadvantages of closed questions are in many respects implied in some of the considerations relating to open questions.

### Advantages

Closed questions offer the following advantages to researchers:

- It is easy to process answers. For example, the respondent in a self-completion questionnaire or the interviewer using a structured interview schedule will place a tick or circle an answer for the appropriate response. The appropriate code can then be almost mechanically derived from the selected answer, since the pre-codes are placed to the side of the fixed-choice answers. See Tips and skills 'Processing a closed question' for an example based on Tips and skills 'Closed question with a vertical format' (Chapter 9).
- Closed questions enhance the comparability of answers, making it easier to show the relationship between variables and to make comparisons between respondents or types of respondents. For example, in the research described in Research in focus 10.2, Guest and Dewe (1991) were able to generate a contingency table on the basis of their pre-coding of respondents' answers. Although contingency tables can also be generated by post-coding respondents' answers to open questions, with post-coding there is always a problem of knowing how far respondents' answers that receive a certain code are genuinely comparable. As previously noted, the assignment of codes to people's answers may be unreliable (see the sixth point in Tips and skills 'Common sources of error in survey research' (Chapter 8)). Checks are necessary to ensure that there is a good deal of agreement between coders and that coders do not change their coding conventions over time. Closed questions essentially circumvent this problem.
- Closed questions may clarify the meaning of a question for respondents. Sometimes respondents may not be clear about what a question is getting at, and the availability of answers may help to clarify the situation for them.
- Closed questions are easy for interviewers and/or respondents to complete. Precisely because interviewers and respondents are not expected to write extensively and instead have to place ticks or circle answers, closed questions are easier and quicker to complete.
- In interviews, closed questions reduce the possibility of variability in the recording of answers in structured interviewing. As noted in Chapter 8, if interviewers do not write down exactly what respondents say to them when answering questions, a source of bias and hence of invalidity is in prospect. Closed questions reduce this possibility, though there is still the potential problem that interviewers may have to *interpret* what is said to them in order to assign answers to a category.



## Research in focus 10.2

# Coding closed questions to create a contingency table

In order to establish whether employees were more strongly committed to their company or their union, Guest and Dewe (1991) selected a sample of 716 workers at random from three electronics plants in the south-east of England as the basis for a self-completion questionnaire survey. Just under half of the sample belonged to a trade union. The questions were developed and piloted specifically for the survey and covered a broad range of issues, including:

- *management role*: 'How well do the decisions of local management on this site reflect your opinions?' Responses were on a five-point scale from 'very well' to 'I do not expect anything from the management';
- *union role*: 'How far are the unions successful in properly representing the interests of employees at plant *X*?' Responses were on a five-point scale from 1 = very successful to 5 = unsuccessful.

The results were used to construct a *contingency table* (see Table 10.1). This included, on the one hand, employees who perceived both management and unions to represent their interests very well or fairly well (dual identity), and, at the other extreme, employees who perceived that neither management nor unions represented their interests at all (alienated). This showed that the majority of employees did not identify either with the union or with the company.

Table 10.1

**A contingency table to show employee identity**

| Identity | Union members (%) | Non-unionists (%) | Total sample (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dual identity | 16.9 | 2.5 | 9.7 |
| Union identity | 27.1 | 1.2 | 14.2 |
| Management identity | 11.1 | 35.7 | 23.4 |
| No identity | 44.9 | 60.6 | 52.8 |
| *Of which*: Alienated | *8.0* | *22.1* | *15.1* |

*Source*: adapted from Guest and Dewe (1991).

### Disadvantages

However, closed questions exhibit certain disadvantages.

- There is a loss of spontaneity in respondents' answers. There is always the possibility that they might come up with interesting replies that are not covered by the fixed answers that are provided. One solution to this possible problem is to ensure that an open question is used to generate the categories (see Research in focus 10.3). Also, there may be a good case for including a possible response category of 'Other' and to allow respondents to indicate what they mean by this category.
- It can be difficult to make forced-choice answers mutually exclusive. The fixed answers with which respondents are provided should not overlap. If they do overlap, respondents will not know which one to choose and so will arbitrarily select one or the other or alternatively may tick both answers. If a respondent were to tick two or more answers when one is required, it would mean that you would have to treat the respondent's answer as missing data, since you would not know which of the ticked answers represented the true one. One of the most frequently encountered forms of this problem can be seen in the following age bands:



## Research in focus 10.3

## A comparison of results for a closed and an open question

Schuman and Presser (1981) conducted an experiment to determine how far responses to closed questions can be improved by asking the questions first as open questions and then developing categories of reply from respondents' answers. They asked a question about what people look for in work in both open and closed format. Different samples were used. They found considerable disparities between the two sets of answers (40 per cent of the open-format categories were not capable of being subsumed by the closed-format answers). They then revised the closed categories to reflect the answers they had received from people's open-ended answers. They readministered the open question and the revised closed question to two large samples of Americans. The question and the answers they received are as follows:

This next question is on the subject of work. People look for different things in a job. Which one of the following five things do you most prefer in a job? [closed question]. What would you most prefer in a job? [open question]

| Closed format | | Open format | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Answer | % | Answer | % |
| Work that pays well | 13.2 | Pay | 16.7 |
| Work that gives a feeling of accomplishment | 31.0 | Feeling of accomplishment | 14.5 |
| Work where there is not too much supervision and you make most decisions yourself | 11.7 | Control of work | 4.6 |
| Work that is pleasant and people are nice to work with | 19.8 | Pleasant work | 14.5 |
| Work that is steady + little chance of being laid off | 20.3 | Security | 7.6 |
| | 96% of sample | | 57.9% of sample |
| | | Opportunity for promotion | 1.0 |
| | | Short hours/lots of free time | 1.6 |
| | | Working conditions | 3.1 |
| | | Benefits | 2.3 |
| | | Satisfaction/liking a job | 15.6 |
| Other/DK/NA | 4.0 | Other responses | 18.3 |

With the revised form for the closed question, Schuman and Presser were able to find a much higher proportion of the sample whose answers to the open question corresponded to the closed one. They argue that the new closed question was superior to its predecessor and is also superior to the open question. However, it is still disconcerting that only 58 per cent of respondents answering the open question could be subsumed under the same categories as those answering the closed one. Also, the distributions are somewhat different: for example, twice as many respondents answer in terms of a feeling of accomplishment with the closed format than with the open one. Nonetheless, the experiment demonstrates the desirability of generating forced-choice answers from open questions.

18–30
30–40
40–50
50–60
60 and over.

In which band would a 40-year-old position him or herself?

- It is difficult to make forced-choice answers exhaustive. All possible answers should really be catered for, although in practice this may be difficult to achieve, since this rule may result in excessively long lists of possible answers. Again, a category of 'Other' may be desirable to provide a wide range of answers.
- There may be variation among respondents in the interpretation of forced-choice answers. There is always a

problem when asking a question that certain terms may be interpreted differently by respondents. If this is the case, then validity will be jeopardized. The presence of forced-choice answers can exacerbate this possible problem, because there may be variation in the understanding of key terms in the answers.

- Closed questions may be irritating to respondents when they are not able to find a category that they feel applies to them.
- In interviews, a large number of closed questions may make it difficult to establish rapport, because the respondent and interviewer are less likely to engage with each other in a conversation. The interview is more likely to have an impersonal feel to it. However, because it is difficult to determine the extent to which rapport is a desirable attribute of structured interviewing (see Chapter 8), this is not necessarily too much of a problem.

## Types of question

It is worth bearing in mind that, when you are employing a structured interview or self-completion questionnaire, you will probably be asking several different types of question. There are various ways of classifying these, but here are some prominent types of question.

- *Personal factual questions*. These are questions that ask the respondent to provide *personal information*, such as age, gender, education, employment status, income, and so on. This kind of question also includes questions about *behaviour*. Such factual questions may have to rely on the respondents' memories, as when they are asked about such things as frequency of individual performance appraisal meetings, how often they visit certain shops, or when they last had any time off work. For example, in the study by Deery, Iverson, and Walsch (2002; see Research in focus 10.5), in addition to being asked to provide demographic details, telephone call centre workers were asked about the number of calls they took on an average day and the average length of calls taken.
- *Factual questions about others*. Like the previous type of question, this one asks for personal information about others, sometimes in combination with the respondent. An example of such a question would be one about team performance, which would require respondents to consider their own productivity (measured in terms of such things as daily work rate, frequency of lateness for work, and so on) in conjunction with the productivity of fellow team members. However, a criticism of such research is precisely that it relies on the possibly distorted views of respondents concerning their own and others' behaviour. Like personal factual questions, an element of reliance on memory recall is likely to be present.
- *Informant factual questions*. Sometimes, we place people who are interviewed or who complete a questionnaire in the position of informants rather than as respondents answering questions about themselves. This kind of question can also be found in such contexts as when people are asked about such things as the size of the firm for which they work, who owns it, whether it employs certain technologies, and whether it has certain specialist functions. Such questions are essentially about characteristics of an entity of which they have knowledge, in this case, a firm. However, informant factual questions may also be concerned with behaviour; for example, in the study by Deery, Iverson, and Walsch (2002; see Research in focus 10.5), telephone call centre employees were asked about the demands placed upon them by customers and priorities of the call centre management.
- *Questions about attitudes*. Questions about attitudes are very common in both structured interview and self-completion questionnaire research. The Likert scale is one of the most frequently encountered formats for measuring attitudes. Tips and skills 'Response formats for scales' provides a number of ways of presenting response formats.
- *Questions about beliefs*. Respondents are frequently asked about their beliefs. Another form of asking questions about beliefs is when respondents are asked whether they believe that certain matters are true or false—for example, a question asking whether or not the respondent believes the UK is better off as a result of being a member of the European Union. Or a survey about workplace stress might ask respondents to indicate whether or not they believe that the incidence of stress-related absence from work is increasing.
- *Questions about normative standards and values*. Respondents may be asked to indicate what principles of behaviour influence them or they hold dear. The elicitation of such norms of behaviour is likely to have considerable overlap with questions about attitudes and beliefs, since norms and values can be construed as having elements of both.
- *Questions about knowledge*. Questions can sometimes be employed to 'test' respondents' knowledge in an area. For example, a study of health and safety in the workplace might ask questions about the legal requirements that companies must comply with, in order to test respondents' awareness of these issues.

Most structured interview schedules and self-completion questionnaires will comprise more than one, and often several, of these types of question. It is important to bear in mind the distinction between different types of question. There are a number of reasons for this.

- It is useful to keep the distinctions in mind because they force you to clarify in your own mind what you are asking about, albeit in rather general terms.
- It will help to guard against asking questions in an inappropriate format. For example, a Likert scale is entirely unsuitable for asking factual questions about behaviour.
- When building scales like a Likert scale, it is best not to mix different types of question. For example, attitudes and beliefs sound similar and you may be tempted to use the same format for mixing questions about them. However, it is best not to do this and instead to have separate scales for attitudes and beliefs. If you mix them, the questions cannot really be measuring the same thing, so that measurement validity is threatened.



## Tips and skills
## Response formats for scales

There are several ways of presenting the response formats for the individual items that make up a scale like a Likert scale. The kind used in Tips and skills 'Formatting a Likert scale' (Chapter 9) is an example of a verbal format (see below).

*Binary response format*
My job is usually interesting enough to keep me from getting bored
Agree ____ Disagree ____
(This format is sometimes elaborated to include a 'don't know' response.)

*Numerical response format*
My job is usually interesting enough to keep me from getting bored
5 4 3 2 1
(where 5 means Strongly agree and 1 means Strongly disagree)

*Verbal format*
My job is usually interesting enough to keep me from getting bored
Strongly agree ____ Agree ____ Undecided ____ Disagree ____ Strongly disagree ____

*Bipolar numerical response format*
I love my job 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 I hate my job

*Frequency format*
My job is usually interesting enough to keep me from getting bored
All of the time ____ Often ____ Fairly often ____ Occasionally ____ None of the time ____

The bipolar numerical response format is used in connection with semantic differential scales. With such scales, the respondent is given lists of pairs of adjectives. Each pair represent adjectival opposites (for example, masculine/feminine). A well-known example is the Fiedler (1967) least-preferred co-worker (LPC) scale. With this scale, each leader in a sample of leaders is given a set of between sixteen and twenty-five pairs of adjectives and is asked to describe with whom he or she has least preferred co-working. Examples of the pairs are:

| | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pleasant | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Unpleasant |
| Friendly | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Unfriendly |
| Rejecting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | Accepting |
| Distant | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | Close |

Each leader's score on each pair is aggregated to give a total score for that leader. Fiedler argued that leaders who describe their least-preferred co-workers in largely positive terms (pleasant, friendly, accepting, close) were predominantly relationship-oriented; those who described their least-preferred co-workers in largely negative terms (unpleasant, unfriendly, rejecting, distant) were predominantly task-oriented.



# Rules for designing questions

Over the years, numerous rules (and rules of thumb) have been devised in connection with the dos and don'ts of asking questions. In spite of this, it is one of the easiest areas for making mistakes. There are three simple rules of thumb as a starting point; beyond that the rules specified below act as a means of avoiding further pitfalls.

## General rules of thumb

### Always bear in mind your research questions

The questions that you will ask in your self-completion questionnaire or structured interview should always be geared to answering your research questions. This first rule of thumb has at least two implications. First, it means that you should make sure that you ask questions that relate to your research questions. Ensure, in other words, that the questionnaire questions you ask will allow your research questions to be addressed. You will definitely not want to find out at a late stage that you forgot to include some crucial questions. Secondly, it means that there is little point in asking questions that do not relate to your research questions. It is also not fair to waste your respondents' time answering questions that are of little value.

### What do you want to know?

Rule of thumb number two is to decide exactly what it is you want to know. Consider the seemingly harmless question:

Do you have a car?

What is it that the question is seeking to tap? Is it car ownership? If it is car ownership, the question is inadequate, largely because of the ambiguity of the word 'have'. The question can be interpreted as: personally owning a car; having access to a car in a household; and 'having' a company car or a car for business use. Thus, an answer of 'yes' may or may not be indicative of car ownership. If you want to know whether your respondent owns a car, ask him or her directly about this matter. Similarly, there is nothing wrong with the question:

How many people does your company employ?

However, this question does not clarify whether you are interested in the workplace, the company, or in the business as a whole—which may include a number of subsidiary companies. In addition, it does not distinguish between full- and part-time workers, or temporary and permanent employees. Hence, if you are interested in knowing how many full-time or full-time equivalent employees there are, then you need to specify this. Similarly, if you are interested only in people who are employed directly by the firm (rather than temporary or contract staff who work on the premises), you need to make this clear in your question.

### How would *you* answer it?

Rule of thumb number three is to put yourself in the position of the respondent. Ask yourself the question and try to work out how you would reply. If you do this, there is at least the possibility that the ambiguity that is inherent in the 'Do you have a car?' question will manifest itself and its inability to tap car ownership would become apparent. Let us say as well that there is a follow-up question to the previous one:

Have you driven the car this week?

Again, this looks harmless, but, if you put yourself in the role of a respondent, it will be apparent that the phrase 'this week' is vague. Does it mean the last seven days or does it mean the week in which the questioning takes place, which will, of course, be affected by such things as whether the question is being asked on a Monday or a Friday? In part, this issue arises because the question designer has not decided what the question is about. Equally, however, a moment's reflection in which you put yourself in the position of the respondent might reveal the difficulty of answering this question.

Taking account of these rules of thumb and the following rules about asking questions may help you to avoid the more obvious pitfalls.

## Specific rules when designing questions

### Avoid ambiguous terms in questions

Avoid terms such as 'often' and 'regularly' as measures of frequency. They are very ambiguous, because respondents will operate with different frames of reference when employing them. Sometimes their use is unavoidable, but, when there is an alternative that allows actual frequency to be measured, this will nearly always be preferable. So, a question like

How often do you usually visit the cinema?

Very often ____
Quite often ____
Not very often ____
Not at all ____

suffers from the problem that, with the exception of 'not at all', the terms in the response categories are ambiguous. Instead, try to ask about actual frequency, such as:

How frequently do you usually visit the cinema? (*Please tick whichever category comes closest to the number of times you visit the cinema.*)

More than once a week ____
Once a week ____
Two or three times a month ____
Once a month ____
A few times a year ____
Once a year ____
Less than once a year ____

Alternatively, you might simply ask respondents about the number of times they have visited the cinema in the previous four weeks.

Words like 'colleagues' or 'management' are also ambiguous, because people will have different notions of who their colleagues are or who makes up the management. As previously noted, words like 'have' can also be sources of ambiguity.

It is also important to bear in mind that certain common words, such as 'quality' and 'customer', mean different things to different people. For some, quality is dependent on the purpose of the product, whereas for others it is an absolute measure of the standard of the product. Similarly, some people refer to colleagues from different departments as customers, whereas others take the word to mean those external to the organization who consume the products or services that the firm provides. In such cases, it will be necessary to define what you mean by such terms.

### Avoid long questions

It is commonly believed that long questions are undesirable. In a structured interview the interviewee can lose the thread of the question, and in a self-completion questionnaire the respondent may be tempted to omit such questions or to skim them and therefore not give them sufficient attention. However, Sudman and Bradburn (1982) have suggested that this advice applies better to attitude questions than to ones that ask about behaviour. They argue that, when the focus is on behaviour, longer questions have certain positive features in interviews—for example, they are more likely to provide memory cues and they facilitate recall because of the time taken to complete the question. However, by and large, the general advice to keep questions short is the main piece of advice to be followed.

### Avoid double-barrelled questions

Double-barrelled questions are ones that in fact ask about two things. The problem with this kind of question is that it leaves respondents unsure about how best to respond. Take the question:

How satisfied are you with pay and conditions in your job?

The problem here is obvious: the respondent may be satisfied with one but not the other. Not only will the respondent be unclear about how to reply, but any answer that is given is unlikely to be a good reflection of the level of satisfaction with pay *and* conditions. Similarly,

How frequently does your boss give you information concerning your daily work schedule and new developments within the company?

suffers from the same problem. A boss may provide extensive information about the daily work schedule but be totally uninformative about what is going on in the company more generally, so any stipulation of frequency of information is going to be ambiguous and will create uncertainty for respondents.

The same rule applies to fixed-choice answers. In Research in focus 10.3, one of Schuman and Presser's (1981) answers is:

Work that is pleasant and people are nice to work with.

While there is likely to be a symmetry between the two ideas in this answer—pleasant work and nice people—there is no necessary correspondence between them. Pleasant work may be important for someone, but he or she may be relatively indifferent to the issue of how pleasant their co-workers are. Further instances of double-barrelled questions are provided in Tips and skills 'Matching question and answers in closed questions'.

### Avoid very general questions

It is easy to ask a very general question when in fact what is wanted is a response to a specific issue. The problem with questions that are very general is that they lack a frame of reference. Thus,

How satisfied are you with your job?



## Tips and skills
# Matching question and answers in closed questions

You can sometimes find examples of badly designed questions in situations that you encounter in your everyday life. A recent example we have come across is of a feedback questionnaire produced by a publisher and inserted into the pages of a novel that one of us was reading. At one point in the questionnaire there was a series of Likert-style items regarding the book's quality. In each case, the respondent is asked to indicate whether the attribute being asked about is: poor; acceptable; average; good; or excellent. However, in each case, the items are presented as questions, for example:

> Was the writing elegant, seamless, imaginative?

The problem here is that an answer to this question is 'yes' or 'no'. At most, we might have gradations of yes and no, such as: definitely; to a large extent; to some extent; not at all. However, 'poor' or 'excellent' cannot be answers to this question. The problem is that the questions should have been presented as statements, such as:

Please indicate the quality of the book in terms of each of the following criteria:

> The elegance of the writing:
>
> Poor ____ Acceptable ____ Average ____ Good ____ Excellent ____

Of course, we have changed the sense slightly here, because, as it was stated, a further problem with the question is that it is a double-barrelled question. In fact, it is 'treble-barrelled', because it actually asks about three attributes of the writing in one. The reader's views about the three qualities may vary. A similar question asked:

> Did the plot offer conflict, twists, and a resolution?

Again, not only does the question imply a 'yes' or 'no', it actually asks about three attributes. How would you answer if you had different views about each of the three criteria?

It might be argued that the issue is a nit-picking one: someone reading the question obviously knows that he or she is being asked to rate the quality of the book in terms of each attribute. The problem is that we simply do not know what the impact might be of a disjunction between question and answer, so you may as well get the connection between question and answers right (and do not ask double- or treble-barrelled questions either!).

seems harmless, but it lacks specificity. Does it refer to pay, conditions, the nature of the work, or all of these? If there is the possibility of such diverse interpretations, respondents are likely to vary in their interpretations too, and this will be a source of error. One of our favourite general questions comes from Karl Marx's *Enquête Ouvrière*, a questionnaire that was sent to 25,000 French socialists and others (though there is apparently no record of any being returned). The final (one-hundredth) question reads:

```
What is the general, physical,
intellectual, and moral condition of men
and women employed in your trade?
(Bottomore and Rubel 1963: 218)
```

### Avoid leading questions

Leading or loaded questions are ones that appear to lead the respondent in a particular direction. Questions of the kind 'Do you agree with the view that . . . ?' fall into this class of question. The obvious problem with such a question is that it is suggesting a particular reply to respondents, although invariably they do have the ability to rebut any implied answer. However, it is the fact that they might feel pushed in a certain direction that they do not naturally incline towards. Such a question as

> Do you think that UK corporate directors receive excessive financial compensation?

is likely to make it difficult for some people to answer in a way that indicates they do not believe that UK corporate

directors are overpaid for what they do. But once again, Marx is the source of a favourite leading question:

> If you are paid piece rates, is the quality of the article made a pretext for fraudulent deductions from wages? (Bottomore and Rubel 1963: 215)

### Avoid questions that are actually asking two questions

The double-barrelled question is a clear instance of the transgression of this rule, but in addition there is the case of a question like:

> When did you last discuss your training needs with your supervisor/line manager?

What if the respondent has never discussed his or her training needs with the line manager? It is better to ask two separate questions:

> Have you ever discussed your training needs with your supervisor/line manager?
>
> Yes ____
>
> No ____
>
> If yes, when did your most recent discussion take place?

Another way in which more than one question can be asked is with a question like:

> How effective have your different job search strategies been?
>
> Very effective ____
>
> Fairly effective ____
>
> Not very effective ____
>
> Not at all effective ____

The obvious difficulty is that, if the respondent has used more than one job search strategy, his or her estimation of effectiveness will vary for each strategy. A mechanism is needed for assessing the success of each strategy, rather than forcing respondents to average out their sense of how successful the various strategies were.

### Avoid questions that include negatives

The problem with questions with 'not' or similar formulations in them is that it is easy for the respondent to miss the word out when completing a self-completion questionnaire or to miss it when being interviewed. If this occurs, a respondent is likely to answer in the opposite way from the one intended. There are occasions when it is impossible to avoid negatives, but a question like the following should be avoided as far as possible:

> Do you agree with the view that students should not have to take out loans to finance higher education?

Instead, the question should be asked in a positive format. Questions with double negatives should be totally avoided, because it is difficult to know how to respond to them. Oppenheim (1966) gives the following as an example of this kind of question:

> Would you rather not use a non-medicated shampoo?

It is quite difficult to establish what an answer of 'yes' or 'no' would actually mean in response to this question.

One context in which it is difficult to avoid using questions with negatives is when designing Likert scale items. Since you are likely to want to identify respondents who exhibit response sets and will therefore want to reverse the direction of your question asking (see Chapter 9), the use of negatives will be difficult to avoid.



## Tips and skills
## Common mistakes when asking questions

Over the years, we have read many projects and dissertations based on structured interviews and self-completion questionnaires. We have noticed that a small number of mistakes recur. Here is a list of some of them.

1. An excessive use of open questions. Students sometimes include too many open questions. While a resistance to closed questions may be understandable, although not something we would agree with, open questions are likely to reduce your response rate and will cause you analysis problems. Keep the number to an absolute minimum.
2. An excessive use of yes/no questions. Sometimes students include lots of questions that provide just a yes/no form of response. This is usually the result of lazy thinking and preparation. The world rarely fits into this kind of response. Take a question like:

Are you satisfied with opportunities for promotion in the firm?

Yes ____ No ____

This does not provide for the possibility that respondents will vary in their satisfaction. So why not rephrase it as:

How satisfied are you with opportunities for promotion in the firm?

Very satisfied ____

Satisfied ____

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied ____

Dissatisfied ____

Very dissatisfied ____

3. Students often fail to give clear instructions on self-completion questionnaires about how the questions should be answered. Make clear whether you want a tick, something to be circled or deleted, or whatever. If only one response is required, make sure you say so—for example, 'Tick the answer that comes closest to your view'.
4. Be careful about letting respondents choose more than one answer. Sometimes it is unavoidable, but questions that allow more than one reply are often a pain to analyse.
5. In spite of the fact that we always warn about the problems of overlapping categories, students still formulate closed answers that are not mutually exclusive. In addition, some categories may be omitted. For example:

   How many times per week do you consult with your line manager?

   1–3 times ____ 3–6 times ____ 6–9 times ____ More than 10 times ____

   Not only does the respondent not know where to answer if his or her answer might be 3 or 6; there is no answer for someone who would want to answer 10.
6. Students sometimes do not ensure the answers correspond to the question. For example:

   Do you regularly meet with your appraiser for an appraisal interview?

   Never ____

   Once a year ____

   Twice a year ____

   More than twice a year ____

   The problem here is that the answer to the question is logically either 'yes' or 'no'. However, the student quite sensibly wants to gain some idea of frequency (something that we would agree with in the light of our second point in this list!). The problem is that the question and the response categories are out of kilter. The question should be:

   How frequently do you meet with your appraiser in any year (January to December)?

   Never ____

   Once a year ____

   Twice a year ____

   More than twice a year ____

If you never committed any of these 'sins', you would be well on the way to producing a questionnaire that would stand out from the rest, provided you took into account the other advice we give in this chapter as well!

### Avoid technical terms

Use simple, plain language and avoid jargon. Do not ask a question like

Do you sometimes feel alienated from work?

The problem here is that many respondents will not know what is meant by 'alienated', and furthermore they are likely to have different views of what it means, even if it is a remotely meaningful term to them.

Consider the following question:

The influence of the TUC on management–worker relations has declined in recent years.

Strongly agree __ Agree __ Undecided __ Disagree __ Strongly disagree __

The use of acronyms like TUC can be a problem, because some people may be unfamiliar with what they stand for.

### Does the respondent have the requisite knowledge?

There is little point in asking respondents lots of questions about matters of which they have no knowledge. It is very doubtful whether or not meaningful data about computer use could be extracted from respondents who have never used or come into direct contact with one.

### Make sure that there is a symmetry between a closed question and its answers

A common mistake is for a question and its answers to be out of phase with each other. Tips and skills 'Matching question and answers in closed questions' describes such an instance.

### Make sure that the answers provided for a closed question are balanced

A fairly common error when asking closed questions is for the answers that are provided to be unbalanced. For example, imagine that a respondent is given a series of options such as:

Excellent ____
Good ____
Acceptable ____
Poor ____

In this case, the response choices are balanced towards a favourable response. Excellent and Good are both positive; Acceptable is a neutral or middle position; and Poor is a negative response. In other words, the answers are loaded in favour of a positive rather than a negative reply, so that a further negative response choice (perhaps Very Poor) is required.

### Memory problems

Do not rely too much on stretching people's memories to the extent that the answers for many of them are likely to be inaccurate. It would be nice to have accurate replies to a question about the number of times respondents have visited the cinema in the previous twelve months, but it is highly unlikely that most will in fact recall events accurately over such a long space of time (other perhaps than those who have not gone at all or only once or twice in the preceding twelve months). It was for this reason that, in the question on cinema visiting above, the time frame was predominantly just one month.

### Don't know

One area of controversy when asking closed questions is whether to offer a 'don't know' or 'no opinion' option. The issue chiefly relates to questions concerning attitudes. The chief argument for including the 'don't know' option is that *not* to include one risks forcing people to express views that they do not really hold. Converse and Presser (1986: 35–6) strongly advocate that survey respondents should be offered a 'don't know' option but argue that it should be implemented by a filter question to filter out those who do not hold an opinion on a topic. This means that the interviewer needs to ask two questions, with the second question just relating to those respondents who do not hold an opinion.

The alternative argument in connection with 'don't know' is that presenting it as an option allows respondents to select it when they cannot be bothered to think about the issue. In other words, presenting the option may prevent some respondents from thinking about the issue. A series of experiments conducted in the USA suggests that many respondents who express a lack of opinion on a topic do in fact hold an opinion (Krosnick et al. 2002). It was found that respondents with lower levels of education were especially prone to selecting the 'don't know' option and that questions that are later on in a questionnaire are more likely to suffer from a tendency for 'don't know' to be selected. The latter finding implies a kind of question order effect, a topic that was addressed in Chapter 8. It implies that respondents become increasingly tired or bored as the questioning proceeds and therefore become prone to laziness in their answers. The researchers conclude that data quality is not enhanced by the inclusion of a 'don't know' option and that it may even be the case that some respondents become inhibited from expressing an opinion that they probably hold. Consequently, these researchers err on the side of *not* offering a 'don't know' option unless it is felt to be absolutely necessary.



# Vignette questions

A form of asking mainly closed questions that has been used in connection with the examination of people's normative standards is the vignette technique. The technique essentially comprises presenting respondents with one or more scenarios and then asking them how they would respond when confronted with the circumstances of that scenario. Research in focus 10.4 describes a vignette that was employed in the context of a study of the ethical behaviour of marketing professionals in different situations. The study focused on marketing professionals because, of all the functional areas of business, marketing has been the one most frequently charged with unethical practices.



## Research in focus 10.4
## Two vignette questions about ethical behaviour

The following vignettes were used by Lund (2000: 334) in a study of marketing professionals. Each of the vignettes reflects a different aspect of the marketing mix (place, promotion, price, and product) and each poses a different kind of ethical dilemma. These vignettes were developed for an earlier study of marketing professionals conducted by Fritzsche (1988); the fact that they have been pre-tested gives us greater confidence in the validity of their use as a measure of ethical behaviour. Two of the four vignettes are presented below.

**Vignette 1 [Price]: conflict of interest**

Jack Brown is vice-president of marketing for Tangy Spices, a large spice manufacturer. Brown recently joined in a private business venture with Tangy's director of purchasing to import black pepper from India. Brown's private venture is about to sign a five-year contract with Tangy to supply its black pepper needs, but the contract is set at a price of 3 cents per pound above contracts available from other spice importers that provide comparable service and quality. If you were Brown, what are the chances that you would sign the contract?

Definitely would ( )
Probably would ( )
Neither would nor would not ( )
Probably would not ( )
Definitely would not ( )

**Vignette 2 [Promotion]: deceit and falsehood**

Dave Smith is developing an advertisement for a new housing development his firm is about to start. The development is located in a low area which has flooded in the past. The company has recently done some work to reduce the danger of flooding in the future. In the preliminary advertisement, Smith has included a statement indicating that the firm has solved the flooding problem. The fact is that if a flood occurs, the homes are still likely to be flooded with up to five feet of water. If you were Smith, what are the chances that you would include the statement in the advertisement?

Definitely would ( )
Probably would ( )
Neither would nor would not ( )
Probably would not ( )
Definitely would not ( )

Four different vignettes were used in this study to tease out respondents' responses to ethical dilemmas of different kinds. Of the two dilemmas presented in Research in focus 10.4, the first is concerned with a conflict of interest (this is where an individual has more than one interest, which, if both are pursued, may lead to personal gain at the expense of the firm); the second dilemma is concerned with a case of false advertising aimed at deception and falsehood. Each dilemma deals with a different aspect of the marketing mix, such as price or promotion. For each vignette, respondents are asked how they would act and responses are recorded on a five-point scale, from 1 = definitely would, to 5 = definitely would not. Many aspects of the issues being tapped by the vignette questions could be accessed through attitude items, such as:

> If a senior marketing professional has private business interests that are also related to the business of the firm, he has a duty to declare these interests to other senior executives immediately they arise.
>
> Strongly __ Agree __ Undecided __ Disagree __ Strongly __
> agree disagree

The advantage of the vignette over such an attitude question is that it anchors the choice in a situation and as such reduces the possibility of an unreflective reply. In addition, when the subject matter is a sensitive area (in this case, dealing with ethical behaviour), there is the possibility that the questions may be seen as threatening by respondents. Respondents may feel that they are being judged by their replies. If the questions are about other people (and imaginary ones at that), this permits a certain amount of distance between the questioning and the respondent and results in a less threatening context. However, it is hard to believe that respondents will not feel that their replies will at least in part be seen as reflecting on them, even if the questions are not about them as such.

One obvious requirement of the vignette technique is that the scenarios must be believable, so that considerable effort needs to go into the construction of credible situations. Finch (1987) points out two further considerations in relation to this style of questioning. First, it is more or less impossible to establish how far assumptions are being made about the characters in the scenario (such as their ethnicity) and what the significance of those assumptions might be for the validity and comparability of people's replies. Secondly, it is also difficult to establish how far people's answers reflect their own normative views or indeed how they themselves would act when confronted with the kinds of choices revealed in the scenarios. However, in spite of these reservations, the vignette technique warrants serious consideration when the research focus is concerned with an area that lends itself to this style of questioning.



## Piloting and pre-testing questions

It is always desirable, if at all possible, to conduct a pilot study before administering a self-completion questionnaire or structured interview schedule to your sample. In fact, the desirability of piloting such instruments is not solely to do with trying to ensure that survey questions operate well; piloting also has a role in ensuring that the research instrument as a whole functions well. Pilot studies may be particularly crucial in relation to research based on the self-completion questionnaire, since there will not be an interviewer present to clear up any confusion. Also, with interviews, persistent problems may emerge after a few interviews have been carried out, and these can then be addressed. However, with self-completion questionnaires, since they are sent or handed out in large numbers, considerable wastage may occur prior to any problems becoming apparent.

Here are some uses of pilot studies in survey research.

- If the main study is going to employ mainly closed questions, open questions can be asked in the pilot to generate the fixed-choice answers. Glock (1988), for example, extols the virtues of conducting qualitative interviews in preparation for a survey for precisely this kind of reason.
- Piloting an interview schedule can provide interviewers with some experience of using it and can infuse them with a greater sense of confidence.
- If everyone (or virtually everyone) who answers a question replies in the same way, the resulting data are unlikely to be of interest because they do not form a variable. A pilot study allows such a question to be identified.
- In interview surveys, it may be possible to identify questions that make respondents feel uncomfortable and to detect any tendency for respondents' interest to be lost at certain junctures.

- Questions that seem not to be understood (more likely to be realized in an interview than in a self-completion questionnaire context) or questions that are often not answered should become apparent. The latter problem of questions being skipped may be due to confusing or threatening phrasing, poorly worded instructions, or confusing positioning in the interview schedule or questionnaire. Whatever the cause might be, such missing data are undesirable, and a pilot study may be instrumental in identifying the problem.
- Pilot studies allow the researcher to determine the adequacy of instructions to interviewers, or to respondents completing a self-completion questionnaire.
- It may be possible to consider how well the questions flow and whether it is necessary to move some of them around to improve this feature.

The pilot should not be carried out on people who might have been members of the sample that would be employed in the full study. One reason for this is that, if you are seeking to employ probability sampling, the selecting-out of a number of members of the population or sample may affect the representativeness of any subsequent sample. If possible, it is best to find a small set of respondents who are comparable to members of the population from which the sample for the full study will be taken.



# Using existing questions

One final observation regarding the asking of questions is that you should also consider using questions that have been employed by other researchers for at least part of your questionnaire or interview schedule. This may seem like stealing and you would be advised to contact the researchers concerned regarding the use of questions they have devised. However, employing existing questions allows you to use questions that have in a sense been piloted for you. If any reliability and validity testing has taken place, you will know about the measurement qualities of the existing questions you use. A further advantage of using existing questions is that they allow you to draw comparisons with other research. This might allow you to indicate whether change has occurred or whether place makes a difference to findings. For example, if you are researching job satisfaction, using one of the standard job satisfaction scales would allow you to compare your findings with another researcher's. Alternatively, using the same questions as another researcher may allow you to explore whether the location of your sample appears to make a difference to the findings. While you need to be cautious about inferring too much from such comparisons between your own and other researchers' data, the findings can none the less be illuminating. At the very least, examining questions used by others might give you some ideas about how best to approach your own questions, even if you decide not to make use of them as they stand. An example of how questions developed by other researchers were used in a study of telephone call centre operators is given in Research in focus 10.5.

The process of finding questions has been made a great deal easier by the creation of 'question banks', which act as repositories of questions employed in surveys and elsewhere. The UK Data Archive (UKDA), which aims to improve standards in UK survey research, has a very good question bank providing access to questionnaires from major surveys (including the Census) and associated commentary to assist survey design. It is freely available and can be found at the following site:
***surveynet.ac.uk/sqb/questionnaires.asp*** (accessed 27 September 2010)



## Research in focus 10.5

## Using scales developed by other researchers in a survey of call centre operators

In a study of call centre operators working in the telecommunications industry in Australia, Deery, Iverson, and Walsch (2002) were interested in the possible negative effects of this form of work on the psychological well-being of employees. Specifically, they sought:

1. to identify the factors leading to feelings of emotional exhaustion among operators; and
2. to analyse the effects of emotional exhaustion on employee absence.

Emotional exhaustion was defined as the extent to which individuals feel emotionally drained from their work. It was predicted that emotional exhaustion would be higher among employees who felt they had a high workload and among those who felt they lacked the skills needed to do the job.

In designing the questionnaire used to test these relationships, Deery, Iverson, and Walsch used scales that had been devised by other researchers in earlier studies. These included:

- a five-item scale taken from Wharton (1993) used to measure emotional exhaustion; item statements included: 'I feel emotionally drained from my work';
- emotional expressivity measured by four items adapted from Kring, Smith, and Neale (1994), including, 'I can't hide the way I'm feeling when talking to customers';
- workload and role overload measured by items taken from Caplan et al. (1975), including, 'My job requires me to work very fast';
- team leader and team member support measured using items adapted from House (1981), such as, 'My team members are willing to listen to my job-related problems'.

Deery, Iverson, and Walsch supplemented these scales with items they developed themselves to measure other variables in the study, such as:

- *customer interactions*—with the statement, 'I now have more abusive customer calls than I used to have'; and
- *management focus on quality*—using item statements such as, 'I believe senior management are more concerned about the quantity rather than the quality of work'.

The study illustrates how item scales developed by other researchers can be combined with those developed by those conducting the present study to create a questionnaire instrument that is sensitive to the context and relevant to the questions that the research is seeking to address.



## Telling it like it is
## Using a questionnaire designed by another researcher

Karen used a questionnaire designed by an author that she had identified during her literature review to measure the cultural profile of the company where she was doing her research. For each of the fifty-four characteristics of the culture, each respondent had to 'identify whether it was highly characteristic, moderately characteristic or not characteristic at all of the culture'. This quantitative element of her research project was combined with qualitative semi-structured interviews involving a sample of fifteen managers within the business from different departments and different levels of the organization. Each research participant completed the questionnaire and was also interviewed. In explaining her research design, she said: 'I chose [a sample of] fifteen because I only had a limited amount of time and I thought, "If I go for more than that, then I'm going to end up with like an overwhelming amount of data and information to sift through." I thought, "I'd rather get more valuable information and sort of have longer interviews and get more sort of time to explore things, than to just cut them short and only have a few."' For a detailed discussion of the issues involved in combining quantitative and qualitative research see Chapter 25.



*To hear more about Karen's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymahbrm3/***



## Tips and skills
## Getting help in designing questions

When designing questions, as we suggested earlier, try to put yourself in the position of someone who has been asked to answer the questions. This can be difficult, because some (if not all) of the questions may not apply to you—for example, if you are a student doing a survey of managers. However, try to think about how you would reply. This means concentrating not just on the questions themselves but also on the links between the questions. For example, do filter questions work in the way you expect them to? Then try the questions out on some people you know, as in a pilot study. Ask them to be critical and to consider how well the questions connect to each other. Also, do look at the questionnaires and structured interview schedules that experienced researchers have devised. They may not have asked questions on your topic, but the way they have asked the questions and the flow of the questions should give you an idea of what to do and what to avoid when designing such instruments.



## *Checklist*

### Issues to consider for your structured interview schedule or self-completion questionnaire

- ○ Have you devised a clear and comprehensive way of introducing the research to interviewees or questionnaire respondents?
- ○ Have you considered whether or not there are any existing questions used by other researchers to investigate this topic that could meet your needs?
- ○ Do the questions allow you to answer all your research questions?
- ○ Could any questions that are not strictly relevant to your research questions be dropped?
- ○ Have you tried to put yourself in the position of answering as many of the questions as possible?
- ○ Have you piloted the questionnaire with some appropriate respondents?
- ○ If it is a structured interview schedule, have you made sure that the instructions to yourself and to anyone else involved in interviewing are clear (for example, which questions should be answered next with filter questions)?
- ○ If it is a self-completion questionnaire, have you made sure that the instructions to yourself and to anyone else involved in interviewing are clear (for example, which questions should be answered next with filter questions)?
- ○ Are instructions about how to record responses clear (for example, whether to tick or circle; whether or not more than one response is allowable)?
- ○ Have you included as few open questions as possible?
- ○ Have you allowed respondents to indicate levels of intensity in their replies, so that they are not forced into 'yes' or 'no' answers where intensity of feeling may be more appropriate?
- ○ Have you ensured that questions and their answers do not span more than one page?
- ○ Have socio-demographic questions been left until the end of the questionnaire?

- ◯ Are questions relating to the research topic at or very close to the beginning?
- ◯ Have you taken steps to ensure that the questions you are asking really do supply you with the information you need?
- ◯ Have you taken steps to ensure that there are no:
  - ◯ ambiguous terms in questions or closed answers?
  - ◯ long questions?
  - ◯ double-barrelled questions?
  - ◯ very general questions?
  - ◯ leading questions?
  - ◯ questions that are asking about two or more things?
  - ◯ questions that include negatives?
  - ◯ questions using technical terms?
- ◯ Have you made sure that your respondents will have the requisite knowledge to answer your questions?
- ◯ Is there an appropriate match between your questions and your closed answers?
- ◯ Do any of your questions rely too much on your respondents' memory?
- ◯ If you are using a Likert scale approach:
  - ◯ Have you included some items that can be reverse scored in order to minimize response sets?
  - ◯ Have you made sure that the items really do relate to the same underlying cluster of attitudes so that they can be aggregated?
- ◯ Have you ensured that your closed answers are exhaustive?
- ◯ Have you ensured that your closed answers do not overlap?
- ◯ Have you ensured that there is a category of 'other' (or similar category such as 'unsure' or 'neither agree nor disagree') so that respondents are not forced to answer in a way that is not indicative of what they think or do?



## *Key points*

- While open questions undoubtedly have certain advantages, closed questions are typically preferable for a survey, because of the ease of asking questions and recording and processing answers.
- This point applies particularly to the self-completion questionnaire.
- Open questions of the kind used in qualitative interviewing have a useful role in relation to the formulation of fixed-choice answers and piloting.
- It is crucial to learn the rules of question asking to avoid some of the more obvious pitfalls.
- Remember always to put yourself in the position of the respondent when asking questions and to make sure you will generate data appropriate to your research questions.
- Piloting or pre-testing may clear up problems in question formulation.



# Questions for review

### *Open or closed questions?*

- What difficulties do open questions present in survey research?
- Why are closed questions frequently preferred to open questions in survey research?
- What are the limitations of closed questions?
- How can closed questions be improved?

### *Types of question*

- What are the main types of question that are likely to be used in a structured interview or self-administered questionnaire?

### *Rules for designing questions*

- What is wrong with each of the following questions?

  What is your annual salary?

  Below £10,000

  £10,000–15,000

  £15,000–20,000

  £20,000–25,000

  £25,000–30,000

  £30,000–35,000

  £35,000 and over.

  Do you ever feel alienated from your work?

  All the time

  Often

  Occasionally

  Never.

  How satisfied are you with the customer services and products provided by this company?

  Very satisfied

  Fairly satisfied

  Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

  Fairly dissatisfied

  Very dissatisfied.

### *Vignette questions*

- In what circumstances are vignette questions appropriate?

### *Piloting and pre-testing questions*

- Why is it important to pilot questions?

*Using existing questions*

- Why might it be useful to use questions devised by others?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Asking Questions.*

# 11

# Structured observation

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 270

**Problems with survey research on behaviour** 270

**So why not observe behaviour?** 271

**The observation schedule** 275

**Strategies for observing behaviour** 276

**Sampling** 277

- Sampling people 277
- Sampling in terms of time 277
- Further sampling considerations 277

**Issues of reliability and validity** 279

- Reliability 279
- Validity 280

**Other forms of structured observation** 281

- Field stimulation 281
- Organizational simulation 283

**Criticisms of structured observation** 285

- On the other hand . . . 285

***Checklist*** 286

***Key points*** 286

***Questions for review*** 286



## Chapter outline

Structured observation attracted a good deal of attention in business and management research during the 1970s and early 1980s. However, in more recent years it has been less commonly employed as a research method. It entails the direct observation of behaviour and the recording of that behaviour in terms of categories that have been devised prior to the start of data collection. This chapter explores:

- the limitations of survey research for the study of behaviour;
- the different forms of observation in business research;
- the potential of structured observation for the study of behaviour;
- how to devise an observation schedule;
- different strategies for observing behaviour in structured observation;
- sampling issues in structured observation research; with this method, the issue of sampling is to do not just with people but also with the sampling of time and contexts;
- issues of reliability and validity in structured observation;
- field stimulations, whereby the researcher actively intervenes in social life and records what happens as a consequence of the intervention, as a form of structured observation;
- some criticisms of structured observation.

# Introduction

Structured observation is a method for systematically observing the behaviour of individuals in terms of a schedule of categories. It is a technique in which the researcher employs explicitly formulated rules for the observation and recording of behaviour. One of its main advantages is that it allows behaviour to be observed directly, unlike in survey research, which only allows behaviour to be inferred. In survey research, respondents frequently report their behaviour, but there are good reasons for thinking that such reports may not be entirely accurate. Structured observation constitutes a possible solution in that it entails the direct observation of behaviour. Interest in structured observation within business and management stemmed initially from the fact that it was seen as having the potential to provide researchers with far greater insight into the issue of what managers actually do. In this respect it was seen by many as providing an alternative to the diary study method (see Chapter 9) used by R. Stewart (1967).



# Problems with survey research on behaviour

Chapters 7–10 have dealt with several different aspects of survey research. In the course of outlining procedures associated with the social survey, certain problems with the techniques with which it is typically associated have been identified. For example, in the field of leadership research, which relies a great deal on questionnaire measures, researchers have relied heavily on the responses of subordinates and what they say leaders do, rather than what leaders actually do (the two are often used interchangeably). To some extent the deficiencies associated with the survey are recognized by researchers, who have developed ways of dealing with them, or at least of offsetting their impact to some degree. When survey techniques such as the structured interview or the self-completion

questionnaire are employed in connection with the study of respondents' *behaviour*, certain characteristic difficulties are encountered, some of which have been touched on in earlier chapters. Tips and skills 'Problems with using social survey research to investigate behaviour' identifies some of the difficulties entailed in using survey methods to research behaviour. The list is by no means exhaustive but it does capture some of the main elements.



## Tips and skills
## Problems with using social survey research to investigate behaviour

- *Problem of meaning*. People may vary in their interpretations of key terms in a question.
- *Problem of omission*. When answering the question, respondents may inadvertently omit key terms in the question.
- *Problem of memory*. They may misremember aspects of the occurrence of certain forms of behaviour.
- *Social desirability effect*. They may exhibit a tendency towards replying in ways that are meant to be consistent with their perceptions of the desirability of certain kinds of answer.
- *Question threat*. Some questions may appear threatening and result in a failure to provide an honest reply.
- *Interviewer characteristics*. Aspects of the interviewer may influence the answers provided.
- *Gap between stated and actual behaviour*. How people say they are likely to behave and how they actually behave may be inconsistent.



# So why not observe behaviour?

An obvious solution to the problems identified is to observe people's behaviour directly rather than to rely on research instruments like questionnaires to elicit such information. In this chapter, we are going to outline a method called *structured observation* (see Key concept 11.1), also often called **systematic observation**.

Much like the interview (see Key concept 8.2), there are many different forms of the observation approach in business research. Key concept 11.2 outlines some major ways of conducting observation studies in business research.

It has been implied that structured observation can be viewed as an alternative to survey methods of research. After all, in view of the various problems identified in Tips and skills 'Problems with using social survey research to investigate behaviour', it would seem an obvious solution to observe people instead. However, structured observation has not attracted a large following and instead tends to be in use in certain specific research areas, such as in educational research, where it is used to study the behaviour of school teachers and pupils and the interaction between them.

Central to any structured observation study will be the *observation schedule* or *coding scheme*. This specifies the categories of behaviour that are to be observed and how behaviour should be allocated to those categories. It is best to illustrate what this involves by looking at examples. One of the best-known studies to have used structured observation is Mintzberg's (1973) study of managerial work. Mintzberg studied five chief executives, each for one week, as they went about their normal business day, took phone calls, attended scheduled and unscheduled meetings, scanned mail, received visitors, and walked around buildings. The detailed nature of his investigation restricted the amount of quantitative data that could be generated but it also enabled more detailed analysis of the kind of work that managers do. The activity categories used in the study were: scheduled meetings, unscheduled meetings, desk work, telephone calls, and tours (see Research in focus 11.3).



## Key concept 11.1
## What is structured observation?

*Structured observation*, often also called *systematic observation*, is a technique in which the researcher employs explicitly formulated rules for the observation and recording of behaviour. The rules inform observers about what they should look for and how they should record behaviour. Each person who is part of the research (we will call these people 'participants') is observed for a predetermined period of time using the same rules. These rules are articulated in what is usually referred to as an *observation schedule*, which bears many similarities to a structured interview schedule with closed questions. The aim of the observation schedule is to ensure that each participant's behaviour is systematically recorded so that it is possible to aggregate the behaviour of all those in the sample in respect of each type of behaviour being recorded. The rules that constitute the observation schedule are as specific as possible in order to direct observers to exactly what aspects of behaviour they are supposed to be looking for. The resulting data resemble questionnaire data considerably, in that the procedure generates information on different aspects of behaviour that can be treated as variables. Moreover, structured observation research is typically underpinned by a cross-sectional research design (see Key concept 2.12 and Figures 2.2 and 2.3).



## Key concept 11.2
## Major types of observation research

- *Structured observation*. See Key concept 11.1.
- *Systematic observation*. See Key concept 11.1.
- *Participant observation*. This is one of the best-known methods of data collection in business and management research. It is primarily associated with qualitative research and entails the relatively prolonged immersion of the observer in a social setting in which he or she seeks to observe the behaviour of members of that setting (group, organization, community, etc.) and to elicit the meanings they attribute to their environment and behaviour. Participant observers vary considerably in how much they participate in the social settings in which they locate themselves. See Key concept 17.1 and Chapter 17 generally for a more detailed treatment.
- *Non-participant observation*. This is a term that is used to describe a situation in which the observer observes but does not participate in what is going on in the social setting. Structured observers are usually non-participants in that they are in the social setting being observed but rarely participate in what is happening. The term can also be used in connection with unstructured observation.
- *Unstructured observation*. As its name implies, unstructured observation does not entail the use of an observation schedule for the recording of behaviour. Instead, the aim is to record in as much detail as possible the behaviour of participants, with the aim of developing a narrative account of that behaviour. In a sense, most participant observation is unstructured, but the term unstructured observation is usually employed in conjunction with non-participant observation.
- **Simple observation** and *contrived observation*. Webb et al. (1966) write about forms of observation in which the observer is unobtrusive and is not observed by those being observed. With simple observation, the observer has no influence over the situation being observed; in the case of contrived observation, the observer actively alters the situation to observe the effects of an intervention. These two types of observation are invariably forms of non-participant observation and can entail either structured or unstructured observation.



## Research in focus 11.3

# Mintzberg's categories of basic activities involved in managerial work

Mintzberg (1973) identified five categories into which the activities of managerial work could be placed. They are listed below.

- *Scheduled meeting*. A prearranged face-to-face meeting involving the manager and one or more other participants is defined as scheduled.
- *Unscheduled meeting*. A meeting is defined as unscheduled if it is arranged hastily, as when someone just 'drops in'.
- *Desk work*. This refers to the time the manager spends at his or her desk, processing mail, scheduling activities, writing letters, or communicating with the secretary.
- *Call*. This category refers to telephone calls.
- *Tour*. This refers to a chance meeting in the hall, or to the 'promenades' taken by the manager to observe activity and to deliver information.

Structured data were collected using three records:

- *chronology record*: described activity patterns, noting the time, nature, and duration of the activity;
- *mail record*: described each piece of incoming/outgoing mail and the action that was taken in order to respond to it;
- *contact record*: described each verbal contact, noting the participants and where it took place.

In Mintzberg's coding scheme, time and activities were coded separately, so that the distribution of clock time might overlap an activity or vice versa. For example, 'tours' of the work site and 'desk work' included time spent talking. Almost 40 per cent of activities were meetings; this accounted for 70 per cent of the managers' work time. From such data a number of features could be derived. Mintzberg's main conclusions were that managerial work is highly fragmented, varied, and brief, and that managers have a need for instant communication, on which to base further verbal contact and action. These findings ran contrary to the traditional view that was dominant at the time, which suggested that managerial activity was planned and rational. Research in focus 11.4 gives two examples of studies that involve a replication of Mintzberg's methods.

It is interesting to think about how a scheme like this might be employed in connection with higher-education teaching and in particular in tutorials and seminars. In the following imaginary scheme, the focus is on the tutor. The categories might be:

*Tutor*

1. asking question addressed to group;
2. asking question addressed to individual;
3. responding to question asked by member of group;
4. responding to comment by member of group;
5. discussing topic;
6. making arrangements;
7. silence.

*Student(s)*

8. asking question;
9. responding to question from tutor;
10. responding to comment from tutor;
11. responding to question from another student;
12. responding to comment from another student;
13. talking about arrangements.

We might want to code what is happening every 5 seconds. The coding sheet for a 5-minute period in the tutorial might look like Figure 11.1. In this grid, each cell represents a 5-second interval so that a row constitutes twelve 5-second intervals—that is, a minute. The numbers in each cell are the codes used to represent the classification of behaviour. Thus, the top left-hand cell has a 3 in it, which refers to a tutor 'responding to question asked by member of group'. We might try to relate the amount of time that the tutor is engaged in particular activities to such things as: number of students in the group; layout of the room; subject discipline; gender of tutor; age of tutor; and so on.



## Research in focus 11.4
# Structured observation of managerial work

Mintzberg's (1973) research was highly influential and generated several other studies that replicated and extended his study of what managers do in their day-to-day work. In part, these later studies are an attempt to redress two of the criticisms that have been made of Mintzberg's study: not actually reflecting the variation between different kinds of managerial work and not relating managerial work to managerial and organizational efficiency and effectiveness.

The first example described here by Martinko and Gardner (1990) extends the research question that informs Mintzberg's study from 'How do senior managers spend their work time?' to 'How does senior managers' use of work time affect their performance?' Their sample consisted of forty-one school principals. This group of managers was selected because they have a relatively high level of autonomy in their work (and therefore an ability to influence organizational performance). Also, because they are a relatively homogenous group, their performance levels can be more easily compared. The observations were conducted mainly by doctoral students who attended a two-day training session in which they were taught the principles of structured observation. Minute-by-minute observation led to the production of written protocols that recorded managerial events, the time they started and ended, and their purpose. The mean number of observations was 6.7 days per principal. The sample was stratified into high- and moderate-performing managers, based on the assumption that the performance of the principal would be reflected by the performance of the school. Although the research confirmed Mintzberg's earlier finding that managerial work is brief, varied, fragmented, and interpersonal, there was no evidence to suggest that managerial behaviour was related to performance level. In other words, there was no significant difference in the behaviours of highly effective and less effective managers in terms of how they organized their daily activities. It is interesting to note that the researchers deliberately excluded low-performing managers from their sample because they had anticipated difficulties in securing the cooperation of individuals who had been labelled as low performers. However, it may have been that a comparison of high- and low-performing managers would have revealed greater differences between principals in terms of the time spent on events and the number of events that were associated with certain activities.

O'Gorman, Bourke, and Murray (2005) also used Mintzberg's (1973) observational study of managerial work as the basis for their investigation into managerial work in small growth-oriented businesses. A purposive sample of ten owner-managers of small high-growth manufacturing companies was selected based on their participation in growth seminars at the Department of Business Studies at Trinity College in Dublin. The CEOs were all male and their businesses represented the printing, construction, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and agri-food sectors. The researchers describe their observational method as follows: 'two days were spent with the CEO, during the Spring and Summer of 1992. . . . Using a chronological record, based on the data-recording format used by Mintzberg, the daily activities of each CEO were recorded' (O'Gorman, Bourke, and Murray 2005: 9). In addition, two other types of activity were recorded: the first recorded CEOs' attendance at social functions related to the business, and the second classified the type of functional duty being performed in each activity (production, research and development, sales and marketing, market research, finance, engineering, legal affairs, distribution, personnel, and general management). They found that managerial work in these organizations was even more fragmented than for the managers in Mintzberg's study.

# Figure 11.1

**Coding sheet for imaginary study of university tutors**

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 8 |
| 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 |
| 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 |
| 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 7 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 4 | 1 |

*Note*: Each cell represents a 5-second interval and each row is 1 minute. The number in each cell refers to the code used to represent a category of behaviour that has been observed.



## The observation schedule

Devising a schedule for the recording of observations is clearly a crucial step in the structured observation project. The considerations that go into this phase are very similar to those involved in producing a structured interview schedule. The following considerations are worth taking into account.

- A clear focus is necessary. There are two aspects to this point. First, it should be clear to the observer exactly who or what (and possibly both) is to be observed. For example, if people are the focus of attention, the observer needs to know precisely who is to be observed. Also, the observer needs to know which if any aspects of the setting are to be observed and hence recorded. The second sense in which a clear focus is necessary is that the research problem needs to be clearly stated so that the observer knows which of the many things going on in any setting are to be recorded.
- As with the production of a closed question for a structured interview schedule or self-completion questionnaire, the forms taken by any category of behaviour must be both mutually exclusive (that is, not overlap) and inclusive. Taking the earlier example of coding behaviour in a university tutorial, we might conceivably run into a problem of the twelve categories not being exhaustive if a student knocks on the tutor's door and quickly asks him or her a question (perhaps about the tutorial topic, if the student is from another of the tutor's groups). An observer unfamiliar with the ways of university life might well be unsure about whether this behaviour needs to be coded in terms of the twelve categories and whether the coding should be temporarily suspended. Perhaps the best approach would be to have another category of behaviour to be coded as what we might term 'interruption'. It is often desirable for a certain amount of unstructured observation to take place prior to the construction of the observation schedule and for there to be some piloting of it so that possible problems associated with a lack of inclusiveness can be anticipated.
- The recording system must be easy to operate. Complex systems with large numbers of types of behaviour will be undesirable. In a similar way to interviewers using a structured interview schedule, observers need to be trained, but even so it is easy for an observer to become flustered or confused if faced with too many options.
- One possible problem with some observation schedules is that they sometimes require a certain amount of interpretation on the part of the observer. For example, it might be difficult to distinguish in any meaningful sense between an unscheduled meeting and a discussion with two or three colleagues that takes place in a corridor, apart from the fact that in the first instance the participants are more likely to be seated! To the

extent that it may be difficult to distinguish between the two, a certain amount of interpretation on the part of the observer may be required. If such interpretation is required, there would need to be clear guidelines for the observer and considerable experience would be required (see Research in focus 11.5 for an illustration of a study in which a good deal of interpretation seems to have been necessary).



## Research in focus 11.5
## Observing jobs

Jenkins et al. (1975) report the results of an exploratory study employed to measure the nature of jobs. The research focused on several types of job in a number of types of organization. An observation schedule was devised to assess the nature of twenty aspects (dimensions) of the jobs in question. Most of the dimensions were measured through more than one indicator, each of which took the form of a question that observers had to answer on a six- or seven-point scale. These were then aggregated for each dimension. While the research has a predominantly psychological slant, many of the twenty dimensions relate to issues that have been raised in the sociology of work by labour process theorists and others (e.g. Braverman 1974). One dimension relates to 'Worker pace control' and comprises three observational indicators such as:

> How much control does the employee have in setting the pace of his/her work?

Another dimension was 'Autonomy', which comprised four indicators, such as:

> The job allows the individual to make a lot of decisions on his/her own.

Most of the observers were university students. The procedure for conducting the observations was as follows: 'Each respondent was observed twice for an hour. The observations were scheduled so that the two different observations were separated by at least 2 days, were usually made at different times of the day, and were always made by two different observers' (Jenkins et al. 1975: 173).



# Strategies for observing behaviour

There are different ways of conceptualizing how behaviour should be recorded.

- We can record in terms of *incidents*. This means waiting for something to happen and then recording what follows from it. Essentially, this is what Mintzberg (1973) did, as the following account of his method illustrates: 'The researcher observes the manager as he performs his work. Each observed event (a verbal contact or a piece of incoming or outgoing mail) is categorized by the researcher in a number of ways (for example, duration, participants, purpose) . . .' (1973: 231). In this study, the categories, or activity codes, are developed either during the observation or shortly after it takes place, rather than beforehand. Only after the observation had taken place did Mintzberg begin to draw connections between the activities in order to develop his final activity codes. Similarly, a newspaper story several years ago reported that someone placed a ladder over a pavement and then observed whether people preferred to go under the ladder or to risk life and limb in the face of oncoming traffic. A considerable number preferred the latter option, confirming the persistence of superstitious beliefs in an apparently secular society. Once again, an incident (someone approaching the ladder) triggered the observation. Webb et al. (1966) would regard this as an example of *contrived observation*, because the researchers fabricated the situation. The discussion later in this chapter of *field stimulations* provides further illustrations of this kind of research.

- We can observe and record in terms of short periods of time, observing one individual for a couple of minutes but returning at structured intervals to conduct further observations. This can help to ensure the generalizability of what goes on in the setting. For example, if a manager holds regular meetings each day at 4 p.m., three observations, each lasting twenty minutes, conducted in the morning, at lunchtime, and in the afternoon, will ensure a more representative sample of activities than would an observation lasting an hour at 4–5 p.m.
- We can observe and record observations for quite *long periods* of time. The observer watches and records more or less continuously. Consider, for example, the study of job characteristics by Jenkins et al. (1975), which entailed the observation of each worker on two occasions but for an hour on each occasion (see Research in focus 11.5): 'The observation hour was structured so that the observer spent 10 min becoming oriented to the job, 30 min observing specific job actions, and 20 min rating the job in situ. The observers then typically spent an additional 15 min away from the job completing the observation instrument' (Jenkins et al. 1975: 174). This last study is an example of what Martin and Bateson (1986) refer to as '**continuous recording**', whereby the observer observes for extended periods, thus allowing the frequency and duration of forms of behaviour to be measured. They contrast this approach with **time sampling**.
- *Time sampling* is a further approach to the observation of behaviour. An example here would be a study of schools known as the ORACLE (Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation) project (Galton, Simon, and Croll 1980). In this research, eight children (four of each gender) in each class in which observation took place were observed for around four minutes but on ten separate occasions. A mechanical device made a noise every twenty-five seconds and on each occasion this occurred the observer made a note of what the teacher or pupils were doing in terms of the observation schedule. The sampling of time periods was random.



# Sampling

Just like survey research, structured observation necessitates decisions about sampling. Mintzberg's study was somewhat unusual in that it relied on a very small sample of only five individuals—a decision that he explains was forced partly by practical constraints, as the research was done for his doctoral dissertation. This meant that 'the time of only one researcher was available, and that for only 12 months or so' (Mintzberg 1973: 237). However, with structured observation it is more usual not only to sample a larger number of people, but also to incorporate several other sampling issues as well.

## Sampling people

When people are being sampled, considerations very similar to those encountered in Chapter 7 in respect of probability sampling come to the fore. This means that the observer will ideally want to sample on a random basis. In the study of job characteristics (see Research in focus 11.5), the individuals who were observed at work were randomly selected (Jenkins et al. 1975). However, structured observation can also be based on non-probability sampling, such as in the example in Research in focus 11.6.

## Sampling in terms of time

As implied by the idea of time sampling (see above), it is often necessary to ensure that, if certain individuals are sampled on more than one occasion, they are not always observed at the same time of the day. This means that, if particular individuals are selected randomly for observation on several different occasions for short periods, it is desirable for the observation periods to be randomly selected. For example, it would not be desirable for a certain manager working in his office always to be observed at the end of the day. He or she might be tired and this would give a false impression of that manager's behaviour.

## Further sampling considerations

The sampling procedures mentioned so far conform to probability sampling principles, because it is feasible to construct a sampling frame for individuals. However, this is not always possible for different kinds of reason. Studies in public areas, like the research on superstition mentioned above, do not permit random sampling, because we cannot very easily construct a sampling frame of people walking



## Research in focus 11.6
## Structured observation with a sample of one

Louhiala-Salminen (2002) observed a Finnish business manager who works in a multinational corporation for one day to identify the features that characterize the discourse in a multinational corporation. The aim of the study 'was to describe the discourse activities of a professional who is a non-native speaker of English and uses English "as a business lingua franca"' (2002: 215). Most of the day was recorded using audio tapes, and an observation protocol was used to make notes about the nature of the activity, including type of communication and language used. Louhiala-Salminen undertook the observation between 09.00 and 16.00 and followed the manager all day except for one twenty-minute meeting that entailed confidential information. The manager stayed at work for a further ninety minutes after the observation ended 'catching up with some planning and writing which he was not able to do in the day' (2002: 217). On the day following the observation, the manager, his superior, and subordinates were interviewed to seek clarification of events the previous day and to gain background information about the manager's education, experience, and attitudes towards language, communication, and culture.

One of the issues this study had to deal with is the impact of technology on managerial time use, specifically the use of email as a communication medium as opposed to writing letters or making telephone calls. The researcher explains: 'The written documents that the manager read or wrote during the day were e-mail messages. Because of the large number of the messages (about 150 altogether) it would have been impossible to have copies of all without seriously disturbing the normal flow of work. Therefore about one third of the email messages were printed as examples' (2002: 214). Louhiala-Salminen notes the crucial role of email in structuring the events of the working day. The manager spent the first two hours of his day working through the ninety-five emails that had arrived for him during the previous two days when he had been out of the office, and the majority of subsequent interactions were initiated by email messages. The study also highlights the blurred boundaries between different kinds of activity: 'throughout the day spoken and written communication were totally intertwined, there was hardly any activity in either mode where the other would not be present as well; many of the phone calls were to confirm an issue in an e-mail message, e-mail messages referred to phone calls, and they were constantly discussed in face-to-face communication with colleagues' (2002: 217).

This study is also interesting in terms of reactive effects (see Key concept 11.8). When discussing the nature of the observation and in particular the low number of direct spoken encounters, which Louhiala-Salminen found puzzling, given the open-plan nature of the office, the manager suggested that more people would have stopped to talk to him had the researcher not been sitting near his desk. Finally, although this study involved the structured observation of just one manager for one day, it is intended to form part of a bigger international comparative study across four different countries once the research design and data collection methods have been tested. One of the things that Louhiala-Salminen discovered from the study was that, because of the hectic pace of work involving different communication media, the observation protocol was too detailed to be completed during the observation. She suggests that a video recording would make analysis of simultaneous and interconnected activities easier.

along a street. Similarly, it is not feasible to construct a sampling frame of interactions—for example, of meetings between managers and their subordinates. The problem with doing structured observation research on such a topic is that it does not lend itself to the specification of a sampling frame, and therefore the researcher's ability to generate a probability sample is curtailed.

As suggested in Chapter 7, considerations relating to probability sampling derive largely from concerns surrounding the external validity of findings. Such concerns are not necessarily totally addressed by resorting to probability sampling, however. For example, if a structured observation study is conducted over a relatively short span of time, issues of the representativeness of findings are likely to arise. If the research was conducted in estate agents' offices, observations conducted over the summer, when most people are on holiday and the housing market is quite quiet, may affect the results obtained compared

to observations at a different point in the year. Consequently, consideration has to be given to the question of the timing of observation. Furthermore, how are the sites in which structured observation is to take place selected? Can we presume that they are themselves representative? Clearly, a random sampling procedure for the selection of organizations may assuage any worries in this connection. However, in view of the difficulty of securing access to settings such as schools and business organizations, it is likely that the organizations to which access is secured may not be representative of the population of appropriate ones.

A further set of distinctions between types of sampling in structured observation have been drawn by Martin and Bateson (1986) between:

- '***ad libitum* sampling**', whereby the observer records whatever is happening at the time;
- '**focal sampling**', in which a specific individual is observed for a set period of time; the observer records all examples of whatever forms of behaviour are of interest in terms of a schedule;
- '**scan sampling**', whereby an entire group of individuals is scanned at regular intervals and the behaviour of all of them is recorded at that time; this sampling strategy allows only one or two types of behaviour to be observed and recorded; and
- '**behaviour sampling**', whereby an entire group is watched and the observer records who was involved in a particular kind of behaviour.

Most structured observation research seems to employ focal sampling, such as Mintzberg's (1973) study, and the research by Martinko and Gardner (1990) and O'Gorman, Bourke, and Murray (2005) (see Research in focus 11.4), and Jenkins et al. (1975; see Research in focus 11.5).



# Issues of reliability and validity

One writer has concluded that, when compared to interviews and questionnaires, structured observation 'provides (*a*) more reliable information about events; (*b*) greater precision regarding their timing, duration, and frequency; (*c*) greater accuracy in the time ordering of variables; and (*d*) more accurate and economical reconstructions of large-scale social episodes' (McCall 1984: 277). This is a very strong endorsement for structured observation, but, as McCall notes, there are several issues of reliability and validity that confront practitioners of the method. Some of these issues are similar to those faced by researchers when seeking to develop measures in business research in general (see Chapter 6) and by survey research in particular. However, certain concerns are specific to structured observation.

## Reliability

Practitioners of structured observation have been concerned with the degree of inter-observer consistency. Essentially, this issue entails considering the degree to which two or more observers of the same behaviour agree in terms of their coding of that behaviour on the observation schedule—that is, *inter-observer consistency*. The chief mechanism for assessing this component of reliability is a statistic called *kappa* (see Key concept 11.7; *this can be ignored if you feel unsure about addressing more complex statistical issues at this stage*).

A second consideration in relation to reliability is the degree of consistency of the application of the observation schedule over time—that is, *intra-observer consistency*. This is clearly a difficult notion, because of the capacity for and often necessity for people to behave in different ways on different occasions and in different contexts. Assessing the consistency of observation ratings across all possibilities is clearly a difficult undertaking. The procedures for assessing this aspect of reliability are broadly similar to those applied to the issue of inter-observer consistency. The Jenkins et al. (1975) research addressed the issue of inter-observer consistency over time and found that the measures fared even worse in this respect.

It is clearly not an easy matter to achieve reliability in structured observation. This is a point of some significance in view of the fact that validity presupposes reliability (see Chapter 6). Reliability may be difficult to achieve on occasions, because of the effects of such factors as observer fatigue and lapses in attention. However, this point should not be exaggerated, because some studies have been able to achieve high levels of reliability for many of their measures, and indeed two critics of structured observation have written that 'there is no



## Key concept 11.7
## What is Cohen's kappa?

Cohen's kappa is a measure of the degree of agreement over the coding of items by two people. As such, it could be applied to the coding of any textual information, as in the content analysis of newspaper articles or of answers to open interview questions, as well as to the coding of observation. Much like Cronbach's alpha (see Key concept 6.6), you will end up with a coefficient that will vary between 0 and 1. The closer the coefficient is to 1, the higher the agreement and the better the inter-observer consistency. A coefficient of 0.75 or above is considered very good; between 0.6 and 0.75, it is considered good; and between 0.4 and 0.6, it is regarded as fair. The meaning of kappa is that it measures the degree of agreement between observers beyond that which would occur by chance. Croll (1986) refers to a very similar statistic, the Scott coefficient of agreement, which can be interpreted in an identical way.

The values of kappa in the study of job characteristics referred to in Research in focus 11.5 were mainly in the 'fair' category. The two indicators referred to in Research in focus 11.5 achieved kappa values of 0.43 and 0.54, respectively (Jenkins et al. 1975). These are not very encouraging and suggest that the coding of job characteristics was not very reliable.

doubt that observers can be trained to use complex coding schedules with considerable reliability' (Delamont and Hamilton 1984: 32).

## Validity

Measurement validity relates to the question of whether or not a measure is measuring what it is supposed to measure. The validity of any measure will be affected by:

- whether or not the measure reflects the concept it has been designed to measure (see Chapter 6); and
- error that arises from the implementation of the measure in the research process (see Chapter 8).

The first of these issues simply means that in structured observation it is necessary to attend to the same kinds of issues concerning the checking of validity (assessing face validity, concurrent validity, and so on) that are encountered in research-based interviews and questionnaires. The second aspect of validity—error in implementation—relates to two matters in particular.

- Is the observation instrument administered as it is supposed to be? This is the equivalent of ensuring that interviewers using a structured interview schedule follow the research instrument and its instructions exactly as they are supposed to. If there is variability between observers or over time, the measure will be unreliable and therefore cannot be valid. Ensuring that observers have as complete an understanding as possible of how the observation schedule should be implemented is therefore crucial.
- Do people change their behaviour because they know they are being observed? This is an instance of what is known as the 'reactive effect' (see Key concept 11.8)—after all, if people adjust the way they behave because they know they are being observed (perhaps because they want to be viewed in a favourable way by the observer), their behaviour would have to be considered atypical. As a result, we could hardly regard the results of structured observation research as indicative of what happens in reality. As McCall (1984) notes, there is evidence that a reactive effect occurs in structured observation, but that by and large research participants become accustomed to being observed, so that the researcher essentially becomes less intrusive the longer he or she is present. Moreover, it should be borne in mind that frequently people's awareness of the observer's presence is offset by other factors. For example, managers have many tasks to accomplish that reflect the demands of the organization, so that the observer's ability to make a big impact on behaviour may be curtailed by the requirements of the situation.



## Key concept 11.8
## What is the reactive effect?

Webb et al. (1966) wrote about the 'reactive measurement effect', by which they meant that 'the research subject's knowledge that he is participating in a scholarly search may confound the investigator's data' (1966: 13). They distinguished four components of this effect.

- *The guinea pig effect—awareness of being tested*. Examples of the kind of concern that Webb et al. were writing about are such effects as the research participant wanting to create a good impression or feeling prompted to behave in ways (or express attitudes) that would not normally be exhibited.
- *Role selection*. Webb et al. argue that participants are often tempted to adopt a particular kind of role in research. An example is that there is a well-known effect in experimental research (but which may have a broader applicability) whereby some individuals seek out cues about the aims of the research and adjust what they say and do in line with their perceptions (which may, of course, be false) of those aims (this is also known as the Hawthorne effect—see Research in focus 2.8).
- *Measurement as a change agent*. The very fact of a researcher being in a context in which no researcher is normally present may itself cause things to be different. For example, the fact that there is an observer sitting in on a management meeting means that there is space and a chair being used that otherwise would be unoccupied. This very fact may influence behaviour.
- *Response sets*. This is an issue that primarily relates to questionnaire and interview research and occurs when the respondent replies to a set of questions in a consistent but clearly inappropriate manner. Examples of this kind of effect are measurement problems such as the social desirability effect and yeasaying and naysaying (consistently answering yes or no to questions or consistently agreeing or disagreeing with items regardless of the meaning of the question or item).

Reactive effects are likely to occur in any research in which participants know they are the focus of investigation. Webb et al. called for greater use of what they call *unobtrusive measures* or *non-reactive methods*, which do not entail participants' knowledge of their involvement in research (see Key concept 13.12 for a more complete explanation). The Hawthorne effect, mentioned in Chapter 2, is a form of reactive effect, but Webb et al.'s categories provide a more inclusive summary of this term.



# Other forms of structured observation

## Field stimulation

Salancik (1979) has used the term '**field stimulation**' to describe a form of observation research that shares many of structured observation's characteristics. Although he classifies field stimulations as a qualitative method, they are in fact better thought of as operating with a quantitative research strategy, since the researcher typically seeks to quantify the outcomes of his or her interventions. In terms of the classification offered in Key concept 11.2, it is in fact 'contrived observation'. A field stimulation is a study in which the researcher directly intervenes in and/or manipulates a natural setting in order to observe what happens as a consequence of that intervention. However, unlike most structured observation, in a field stimulation participants do not know they are being studied, which makes it a form of unobtrusive measure as defined by Webb et al. (1966; see Key concept 13.12). In business and management, consumer researchers use field stimulations to study the behaviour of retail front-line staff using the 'mystery shopper' technique (see Thinking deeply 11.9). An example of the use of this technique in the study of travel agents' recommendations is given in Research in focus 11.10.



## Thinking deeply 11.9
## Field stimulation and the mystery shopper

A popular technique used in consumer research to evaluate the effectiveness of retail staff is the 'mystery shopper' technique. This typically involves sending people into a shop to buy products. After the interaction, the shoppers typically fill out a rating sheet detailing the nature of the interaction and service they received. This information is then fed back via the consumer research organization to the firm concerned so that it can make any necessary improvements to front-line service. More recent developments have included supplying mystery shoppers with wireless hidden cameras that can be concealed in their cap, button, or cellphone in order to record the transactions and interaction between the customer and the assistant.

The mystery shopper technique is a type of field stimulation, because it involves the researcher entering the shop (a natural setting) and intervening in order to see what happens. In addition, the retail staff are not aware that they are being studied. However, because this involves observing people without their informed consent, the mystery shopper technique does raise ethical issues (see Chapter 5), particularly if the encounter is recorded in some way, as this has even greater potential to violate their privacy, also thereby potentially raising legal considerations.



## Research in focus 11.10
## A mystery shopper investigation into the selling behaviour of travel agents

In a study designed to assess the influence of travel agency recommendations on UK consumers who were choosing a holiday, Hudson et al. (2001) conducted research that combined focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and 'mystery shoppers'.

Travel agents have come under scrutiny for directional selling, placing pressure on consumers to purchase package holidays that are linked to their parent companies. The researchers wanted to investigate the extent to which this bias influenced consumer choice. They wanted to gain an insight into the interaction that occurs between travel agent and customer when the latter books a holiday. The focus groups and interviews provided the researchers with an insight into the process whereby consumers choose a holiday, and this formed the basis for the construction of scenarios that were used in the second stage of data collection, which relied on the mystery shopper technique.

Fifty-two agencies from the three largest UK travel agency chains, Lunn Poly (owned by Thomson), Going Places (owned by Airtours, now renamed MyTravel), and Thomas Cook/Carlson (owned by Thomas Cook), were selected using a quota sampling technique. A list of travel agents obtained from the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) constituted the sampling frame from which the travel agencies were selected.

A total of 36 visits and 120 telephone calls were made by the mystery shoppers to travel agents in the London area. The 'shoppers' were trained, using role plays, to ensure that they adopted a neutral rather than an aggressive or defensive approach in the encounter with agents. None of the respondents was aware that he or she was being studied. The mystery shoppers were given one of four different scenarios.

- *Scenario 1*. The customer has a specific holiday from one brochure/operator in mind. (It was hypothesized that, in this situation, the agent would not attempt to influence the customer but would book the holiday as requested.)
- *Scenario 2*. The customer has a number of alternatives chosen from different brochures. (In this situation it was suggested that the agent would attempt to influence the customer's choice, attempting to sell the holiday of the parent company.)

- *Scenario 3*. The customer has a certain amount of money in mind (£2,000), as well as a destination (Spain). (Here it was speculated that the travel agent would strongly influence the customer's choice, recommending the holiday of the parent company.)
- *Scenario 4*. The customer is looking for a last-minute holiday and calls the agent to see what is available. (In this circumstance it was predicted that the travel agent would exert strong influence over the customer's eventual decision.)

Each face-to-face interview lasted on average thirty minutes, while telephone encounters lasted an average of fifteen minutes. Following the interaction, 'shoppers' completed a report form, detailing, for example, how forcibly the agent used directional selling tactics (that is, did the agent try to guide the shopper towards purchasing a holiday offered by his or her parent company?) using a five-point scale.

Findings from the study showed that in the first scenario none of the agents made an attempt to guide the customer towards an alternative holiday, but in the third scenario all the agencies employed directional selling tactics. The study also found that the agencies owned by Airtours (MyTravel) and Thomas Cook gave more biased advice than those owned by Thomson. Of Going Places agencies, 90 per cent pushed the Airtours brand, while 75 per cent of agencies owned by Thomas Cook tried to sell their own brands, the largest being JMC holidays.

The use of the mystery shopper technique produced findings that appear to confirm the view of smaller agents and operators—that directional selling tactics are much more widespread than the larger operators or the Monopolies and Mergers Commission would like to admit. Moreover, given the publicity and interest in this issue, it is unlikely that the agents would have used directional selling tactics to such an extent if they had known that they were being studied.

While such research provides some quite striking findings and gets around the problem of reactivity by not alerting research participants to the fact that they are being observed, ethical concerns are sometimes raised, such as the use of deception. Moreover, the extent to which an observation schedule can be employed is inevitably limited (unless the researcher is carrying a hidden camera, as some 'mystery shoppers' have done), because excessive use will blow the observer's cover. All that can usually be done is to engage in limited coding at the time of the interaction, paying particular attention to the nature of the effect of the intervention, or to document the interaction immediately after the observation has taken place, as the Hudson et al. (2001) research in Research in focus 11.10 did.

## Organizational simulation

An alternative method for observing behaviour in which participants are made aware of the fact that they are being studied involves the organizational simulation. A simulation involves representing a situation by creating an artificial setting in which individual or group behaviour can be observed. An example of an organizational simulation is provided in Research in focus 11.11. In a sense, a simulation is similar to a laboratory experiment (see Chapter 2), except that it does not seek to control participants' activities as much as in an experimental research design. Simulations can thus give participants much greater freedom to act according to their judgement and to make decisions, and their actions become the focus of observation. McEnery and Blanchard (1999) used an adapted version of the Looking Glass simulation (see Research in focus 11.11) to examine the reliability and validity of assessor, peer, and self-ratings of management skills. The sample comprised 261 business undergraduate students in a university in the midwestern USA. The 'president' of Looking Glass was elected by class vote after a nomination speech. The president then collaborated with other participants to determine who would play which role. Once this was decided, participants were each provided with an annual report and various memos and reports to accompany individual roles.

The simulations were conducted in university laboratories that were intended to resemble organizational conference rooms, and students were expected to dress as though they were business professionals. The students were assessed by graduate students and faculty volunteers, who observed and rated them according to a behavioural checklist, which included items such as 'delegating: matches tasks with people effectively' and 'listening: gives feedback, does not interrupt, used a variety of listening skills and techniques'. After the simulation, students completed a self-rating checklist to rate their own managerial skills.



## Research in focus 11.11
## Looking Glass Inc.: an organizational simulation

Looking Glass Inc. is a simulation developed by the Centre for Creative Leadership (see McCall and Lombardo 1982), which requires participants to act as managers in a hypothetical glass-manufacturing organization. Unlike many other simulations, which tend to be developed for training, Looking Glass was based on research, involving interviews with executives, site visits, and the collection of data from business publications. The simulation lasts approximately six hours. Twenty participants are assigned to twenty top management roles ranging from President to Plant Manager and spanning three divisions. Their task is to run the company for a day in any way they want.

The simulation begins the evening before, with events that are designed to familiarize participants with the company, including a slide show explaining the structure of the company. Participants are assigned roles and spend some time in their offices; job descriptions and annual reports are distributed. The following morning, the simulation of a business day commences. 'Each participant spends the first 45 minutes at his or her desk reviewing an in-basket containing today's mail . . . After 45 minutes the telephone system is turned on and the managers are free to call meetings, send memos, place phone calls, etc. Using memo or phone, participants can contact anyone inside or outside the company' (1982: 535).

The simulation includes a wide range of management problems and issues that participants must deal with (or ignore if they see fit). These cover a range of functional areas and include:

- an opportunity to acquire a new plant;
- a lawsuit with a major customer;
- technological innovation and obsolescence.

The three divisions within the company face different external environments:

- *Advanced Products*: makes products for electronics and communications industries and exists in a highly uncertain and rapidly changing business environment;
- *Commercial Glass*: makes light bulb casings and flat glass, and faces a relatively predictable, stable market;
- *Industrial Glass*: faces a mixed environment because of the wide variety of products it makes, from auto glass (stable) to spacecraft windows (unstable).

The simulation enables a variety of data collection methods to be used, including the possibility of structured observation. Observers can be assigned to observe specific roles or to time sample all the roles on a scheduled basis. Memos sent by participants and telephone calls made provide a further unobtrusive source of data. However, McCall and Lombardo claim that, 'in many respects, studying Looking Glass presents the same challenges as studying a real organization' (1982: 540), because it is impossible to control the variables involved.

Each student was also assessed by a peer who had been working with him or her. The study found that the highest evaluation of managerial skill was made by peers, whereas the lowest was made by assessors. They suggest this was due to the fact that assessors were more likely to be objective because they did not know the students and because they had received more training.

Simulations create large amounts of data in a relatively short period of time, thereby overcoming some of the difficulties of cost and access that are often associated with business and management research. They also enable access to issues that may not be amenable to observation in real life, such as problem-solving or decision-making. Moreover, simulation enables the researcher to create and alter the situation in order to examine the effect of an intervention; if the effects of such interventions are studied in 'real' organizations, research is likely to take a considerable length of time. However, simulations are subject to the charge of artificiality. For example, by ensuring that participants dress as business professionals, as McEnery and Blanchard (1999) did in their study, there is no certainty that they will see themselves as business professionals (rather than undergraduate students) and act accordingly.



# Criticisms of structured observation

Although it is not very extensively used in business and management research, structured observation has, in the past, been quite controversial. Certain criticisms have been implied in some of the previous discussion of reliability and validity issues, as well as in connection with the issue of generalizability. However, certain other areas of criticism warrant further discussion.

- There is a risk of imposing a potentially inappropriate or irrelevant framework on the setting being observed. This point is similar to the problem of the closed question in questionnaires. This risk is especially great if the setting is one about which little is known. One solution is for the structured observation to be preceded by a period of unstructured observation, so that appropriate variables and categories can be specified.
- Because it concentrates upon directly observable behaviour, structured observation is rarely able to get at intentions behind behaviour. Sometimes, when intentions are of concern, they are imputed by observers. Thus, in Mintzberg's basic activity categories of managerial behaviour, it is not entirely clear what the difference is between an 'unscheduled meeting' and a 'tour' that involves a chance meeting. Essentially, the problem is that structured observation does not readily allow the observer to get a grasp of the meaning of behaviour.
- There is a tendency for structured observation to generate lots of bits of data. The problem here can be one of trying to piece them together to produce an overall picture, or one of trying to find general themes that link the fragments of data together. It becomes difficult, in other words, to see a bigger picture that lies behind the segments of behaviour that structured observation typically uncovers. It has been suggested, for example, that the tendency for structured observation studies of managers at work to find little evidence of planning in their everyday work (e.g. Mintzberg 1973) is due to the tendency for the method to fragment a manager's activities into discrete parts. As a result, something like planning, which may be an element in many managerial activities, becomes obscured from view (Snyder and Glueck 1980).
- It is often suggested that structured observation neglects the context within which behaviour takes place. For example, Martinko and Gardner (1990) found that some of Mintzberg's categories of basic activity were represented differently among school principals, rather than general managers, and, in particular, the amount of time spent on unscheduled meetings was much greater. Of course, were data about the context in which behaviour takes place collected, this criticism would have little weight, but the tendency of structured observation researchers to concentrate on overt behaviour tends to engender this kind of criticism.

## On the other hand . . .

It is clear from the previous section that there are undeniable limitations to structured observation. However, it also has to be remembered that, when overt behaviour is the focus of analysis and perhaps issues of meaning are less salient, structured observation is almost certainly more accurate and effective than getting people to report on their behaviour through questionnaires. It may also be that structured observation is a method that works best when accompanied by other methods. Since it can rarely provide reasons for observed patterns of behaviour, if it is accompanied by another method that can probe reasons, it is of greater utility.

In laboratory experiments in fields like social psychology and medical research, observation with varying degrees of structure is quite commonplace, but in business and management research, with the exception of Mintzberg's classic study, structured observation has not been used very frequently. Perhaps one major reason is that, although interviews and questionnaires are limited in terms of their capacity to tap behaviour accurately, as noted above, they do offer the opportunity to reveal information about both behaviour *and* attitudes and social backgrounds. In other words, they are more flexible and offer the prospect of being able to uncover a variety of correlates of behaviour (albeit reported behaviour), such as social background factors. They can also ask questions about attitudes and investigate explanations that people proffer for their behaviour. As a result, researchers using questionnaires are able to gain information about some factors that may lie behind the patterns of behaviour they uncover. Also, not all forms of behaviour are liable to be accessible to structured observation, and it is likely that survey research or researcher-driven diaries (see Key concept 9.3) are the only likely means of gaining access to them. However, greater use of structured observation may result in greater facility with the method, so that reliable measures might emerge.



# Checklist

## Structured observation research

- ◯ Have you clearly defined your research questions?
- ◯ Is the sample to be observed relevant to your research questions?
- ◯ Can you justify your sampling approach?
- ◯ Does your observation schedule indicate precisely which kinds of behaviour are to be observed?
- ◯ Have your observation categories been designed so that there is no need for the observer to interpret what is going on?
- ◯ Have you made sure that the categories of behaviour do not overlap?
- ◯ Do all the different categories of behaviour allow you to answer your research questions?
- ◯ Have you piloted your observation schedule?
- ◯ Are the coding instructions clear?
- ◯ Are the categories of behaviour inclusive?
- ◯ Is it easy to log the behaviour as it is happening?



# Key points

- Structured observation is an approach to the study of behaviour that is an alternative to survey-based measures.
- It comprises explicit rules for the recording of behaviour.
- Structured observation has tended to be used in relation to a rather narrow range of forms of behaviour, such as that of managers.
- It shares with survey research many common problems concerning reliability, validity, and generalizability.
- Reactive effects have to be taken into account but should not be exaggerated.
- Field stimulations represent a form of structured observation but suffer from difficulties concerning ethics.
- Problems with structured observation revolve around the difficulty of imputing meaning and ensuring that a relevant framework for recording behaviour is being employed.



# Questions for review

***Problems with survey research on behaviour***

- What are the chief limitations of survey research with regard to the study of behaviour?

### *So why not observe behaviour?*

- What are the chief characteristics of structured observation?
- To what extent does it provide a superior approach to the study of behaviour than questionnaires or structured interviews?

### *The observation schedule*

- What is an observation schedule?
- 'An observation schedule is much like a self-completion questionnaire or structured interview except that it does not entail asking questions.' Discuss.
- Devise an observation schedule of your own for observing an area of social interaction in which you are regularly involved. Ask people with whom you normally interact in those situations how well they think it fits what goes on. Have you missed anything out?

### *Strategies for observing behaviour*

- What are the main ways in which behaviour can be recorded in structured observation?

### *Sampling*

- Identify some of the main sampling strategies in structured observation.

### *Issues of reliability and validity*

- How far do considerations of reliability and validity in structured observation mirror those encountered in relation to the asking of questions in structured interviews and self-completion questionnaires?
- What is the reactive effect and why might it be important in relation to structured observation research?

### *Other forms of structured observation*

- What are field stimulations and what ethical concerns are posed by them?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of simulation as a form of structured observation?

### *Criticisms of structured observation*

- 'The chief problem with structured observation is that it does not allow us access to the intentions that lie behind behaviour.' Discuss.
- How far do you agree with the view that structured observation works best when used in conjunction with other research methods?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Structured Observation.*

# 12

# Content analysis

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 289

**What are the research questions?** 292

**Selecting a sample** 292

- Sampling media 292
- Sampling dates 293

**What is to be counted?** 295

- Significant actors 295
- Words 296
- Subjects and themes 297
- Dispositions 298
- Images 298

**Coding** 299

- Coding schedule 299
- Coding manual 300
- Potential pitfalls in devising coding schemes 300

**Advantages of content analysis** 305

**Disadvantages of content analysis** 308

***Checklist*** 309
***Key points*** 309
***Questions for review*** 309



## Chapter outline

Content analysis is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts (which may be printed or visual) that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner. It is a very flexible method that can be applied to a variety of media. In a sense, it is not a research method, in that it is an approach to the analysis of documents and texts rather than a means of generating data. However, it is usually treated as a research method because of its distinctive approach to analysis. This chapter explores:

- the kinds of research question to which content analysis is suited;
- how to approach the sampling of documents to be analysed;
- what kinds of features of documents or texts are counted;
- how to go about *coding*, which is probably the central and most distinctive stage of doing a content analysis;
- the advantages and disadvantages of content analysis.

# Introduction

Imagine that you are interested in the amount and nature of the interest shown by the mass media, such as newspapers, in a business news item such as the collapse of Enron and WorldCom and the impact this has had on corporate accountability and ethical behaviour. You might ask such questions as:

- When did news items on this topic first begin to appear?
- Which newspapers were fastest in generating an interest in the topic?
- Which newspapers have shown the greatest interest in the topic?
- At what point did media interest begin to wane?
- Have journalists' stances on the topic changed, for example, in terms of their support for business accountants and consultants, such as Arthur Andersen, or in calling for increased government regulation of corporate behaviour?

If you want to know the answers to research questions such as these, you are likely to need to use content analysis to answer them.

Probably the best-known definition of content analysis is as follows:

> Content analysis is a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication. (Berelson 1952: 18)

Another well-known and apparently similar definition is:

> Content analysis is any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages. (Holsti 1969: 14)

It is striking that both of these definitions contain a reference to two qualities: objectivity and being systematic. The former quality means that, as with something like an observation schedule (see Chapter 11), rules are clearly specified in advance for the assignment of the raw material (such as newspaper stories) to categories. Objectivity in this sense resides in the fact that there is transparency in the procedures for assigning the raw material to categories

so that the analyst's personal biases intrude as little as possible in the process. The content analyst is simply applying the rules in question. The quality of being systematic means that the application of the rules is done in a consistent manner so that bias is again suppressed. As a result of these two qualities, anyone could employ the rules and (hopefully) come up with the same results. The process of analysis is one that means that the results are not an extension of the analyst and his or her personal biases. The rules in question may, of course, reflect the researcher's interests and concerns and therefore these might be a product of subjective bias, but the key point is that, once formulated, the rules can be (or should be capable of being) applied without the intrusion of bias.



## Tips and skills
## Avoiding rater bias in a coding scheme

R. Weber (1990) recommends eight steps for creating, testing, and implementing a coding scheme in order to avoid rater bias. These steps are widely applied and are sometimes referred to as the Weber Protocol.

1. definition of the recording units (for example, word, phrase, sentence, paragraph);
2. definition of the coding categories;
3. test of coding on a sample of text;
4. assessment of the accuracy and reliability of the sample coding;
5. revision of the coding rules;
6. return to Step 3 until sufficient reliability is achieved;
7. coding of all the text;
8. assessment of the achieved reliability or accuracy.

Berelson's definition also makes reference to 'quantitative description'. Content analysis is firmly rooted in the quantitative research strategy, in that the aim is to produce quantitative accounts of the raw material in terms of the categories specified by the rules. The feature of quantification adds to the general sense of the systematic and objective application of neutral rules, so that it becomes possible to say with some certainty and in a systematic way that, for example, broadsheet newspapers carried far more coverage of a particular issue than tabloid newspapers.

Two other elements in Berelson's definition are striking, especially when juxtaposed against Holsti's. First, Berelson refers to 'manifest content'. This means that content analysis is concerned with uncovering the apparent content of the item in question: what it is clearly about. Holsti makes no such reference, alluding only to 'specified characteristics'. The latter essentially opens the door to conducting an analysis in terms of what we might term 'latent content'—that is, with meanings that lie beneath the superficial indicators of content. Uncovering such latent content means interpreting meanings that lie beneath the surface, such as whether the impression is given that the author construes the Enron scandal as an issue solely of concern to US shareholders and accountancy practices, or as having a broader set of implications for business practice and corporate accountability across the globe. A related distinction is sometimes made between an emphasis on the linguistic structure of the text (in particular, counting certain words) and an emphasis on themes within the text, which entails searching for certain ideas within the text (Beardsworth 1980).

A second element in Berelson's definition not found in Holsti's is the reference to 'communication'. Berelson's (1952) book was concerned with communication research, a field that has been especially concerned with newspapers, television, and other mass media. Holsti refers somewhat more generally to 'messages', which raises the prospect of quite a wide applicability of content analysis beyond the specific boundaries of the mass media and mass communications. Content analysis becomes applicable to many different forms of unstructured information, such as transcripts of semi- and unstructured interviews (e.g. Bryman, Stephens, and A Campo 1996) and even

qualitative case studies of organizations (e.g. Hodson 1996). Nor is it necessary for the medium being analysed to be in a written form. Research has been conducted on:

- the visual images (as well as the text) of company annual reports to explore how these reflect organizational beliefs about customers (Dougherty and Kunda 1990; see Research in focus 21.8);
- motivational videos featuring management guru Frederick Herzberg giving a live lecture to managers (Jackson and Carter 1998);
- the pictures drawn by managers to express their views about organizational change (Broussine and Vince 1996).

However, the main use of content analysis has been to examine mass media items, as well as texts and documents that are either produced by the organization, such as annual reports, or written about it, such as articles in the business press. For example, Bettman and Weitz (1983) examined letters to stockholders from the annual reports of 181 companies in 4 industries. A good year (1972) and a bad year (1974) were compared, based on GNP and stock market performance. In this regard, content analysis is one of a number of approaches to the examination of texts that have been developed over the years (see Key concept 12.1). Insch, Moore, and Murphy (1997) suggest that one of the reasons for the limited popularity of content analysis in business and management is because researchers are unsure how to use it. They advocate a step-by-step process whereby the researcher reviews the literature to develop understanding of the construct of interest and then identifies texts that are likely to capture it. It is the intention of this chapter to provide a framework through which systematic content analysis can be conducted. However, Duriau, Reger, and Pfarrer (2007) claim that the use of content analysis in organizational research has grown since the 1990s, not least because it is a relatively low-cost method that can be applied to small-scale studies such as student research projects. The advent of computer programs that facilitate the analysis of textual data and the increase in the number of searchable electronic databases available have also enabled some of the tediousness associated with the method to be removed, enhanced reliability and speed, and further lowered costs, and this may have further contributed to the increase in popularity of content analysis. Duriau, Reger, and Pfarrer (2007) further suggest that the potential of this method has yet to be fully exploited, particularly in relation to the vast amount of text and graphic content, as well as audio and video data, contained on organizational websites.



## Key concept 12.1
## What is content analysis?

- *Content analysis*. An approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner.

Content analysis can usefully be contrasted with two other approaches to the analysis of the content of communication:

- **Semiotics**. The study/science of signs. An approach to the analysis of documents and other phenomena that emphasizes the importance of seeking out the deeper meaning of those phenomena. A semiotic approach is concerned to uncover the processes of meaning production and how signs are designed to have an effect upon actual and prospective consumers of those signs. This approach will be explored in Chapter 21.
- *Ethnographic content analysis*. A term employed by Altheide (1996) to refer to an approach to documents that emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts. It is sometimes also referred to as qualitative content analysis. As with most approaches that are described as ethnographic, there is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognizing the significance for understanding meaning in the context in which an item being analysed (and the categories derived from it) appeared. This approach will be explored in Chapter 21.

When the term 'content analysis' is employed in this chapter, it will be referring to quantitative content analysis—that is, the first of the three forms of analysis referred to in the list above, which is the kind of analysis to which Berelson (1952) and Holsti (1969) refer.



# What are the research questions?

As with most quantitative research, it is necessary to specify the research questions precisely, as these will guide both the selection of the media to be content analysed and the coding schedule. If the research questions are not clearly articulated, there is a risk that inappropriate media will be analysed or that the coding schedule will miss out key dimensions. Most content analysis is likely to entail several research questions. For example, the aim of Harris's (2001) study was to investigate the way the word 'courage' was used in the business community. In itself this is not very specific and hardly directs you to a clear specification of the media to be examined or the development of a coding schedule. However, to achieve this aim Harris sought to content analyse stories in broadsheet newspapers that were about courage in order to compare a definition of courage derived from the literature with the way the word 'courage' is used in the community (especially in business, commerce, and government). This gave rise to other, more specific research questions, including:

- Is it possible to categorize the types of courage event described in the newspaper stories?
- What tools, if any, are said to have helped people show courage?
- Are obstacles identified in accounts of courage, and, if so, what are they?
- Are aspects of the accounts linked to specific professions or sectors of activity?
- Is courage used to describe dispositions, actions, or a virtue?

Such questions seem to revolve around the questions of: *who* (gets reported); *what* (gets reported); *where* (does the issue get reported); *location* (of coverage within the items analysed); *how much* (gets reported); and *why* (does the issue get reported).

As with much content analysis, the researchers were just as interested in omissions in coverage as in what *does* get reported. For example, details about the profession, qualifications, and beliefs of the courageous person were frequently omitted. Such omissions are in themselves potentially interesting, as they may reveal what is and is not important to reporters and their editors.

Another kind of issue that is frequently encountered in content analysis is:

> How far does the amount of coverage of the issue change over time?

This kind of research question or problem is particularly asked by researchers who are keen to note trends in coverage to demonstrate ebbs and flows in interest. An example of this kind of research is a study by Barley, Meyer, and Gash (1988), which used content analysis to assess whether or not members of two distinct subcultures, business and management academics and practitioners, have influenced each other's interpretations. Content analysis focused on 192 articles published on the subject of organizational culture between 1975 and 1984. This time span was chosen to reflect changes in discussion of organizational culture at a time when understanding of this topic in the business and management field was still emerging. Content analysis focused on changes in the language used by the two groups to frame this particular issue. The research showed that, although in the mid-1970s academics and practitioners conceptualized organizational culture quite differently, by the mid-1980s academics had moved towards greater appreciation of the practitioners' point of view while practitioners' interpretations were little influenced by academics.



# Selecting a sample

There are several phases in the selection of a sample for content analysis. Because it is a method that can be applied to many kinds of document, the case of applying it to the mass media will be explored here. However, the basic principles have a broader relevance to a wide range of applications of content analysis.

## Sampling media

Many studies of the mass media entail the specification of a research problem in the form of 'the representation of *X* in the mass media'. The *X* may be trade unions, HRM, or women and leadership. But which mass media might

one choose to focus upon? Will it be newspapers or television or radio or magazines, or whatever? And, if newspapers, will it be all newspapers or tabloids or broadsheets? And, if both tabloids and broadsheets, will it be all of them and will it include Sunday papers? If it will be a sample of newspapers, including Sunday ones, will these be national or local or both? And will it include free newspapers? And if newspapers, will all news items be candidates for analysis—for example, would feature articles and letters to the editor be included? And if newspapers, will newspapers from more than one country be included?

Typically, researchers will opt for one or possibly two of the mass media and may sample within that type or types. In the research described in Research in focus 12.2, Harris (2001) chose to focus on just four broadsheet newspapers over one year, 1996, which is just as well, since the author was able to locate a large number of appropriate items (news items containing one or more of the words 'courage', 'courageous', or 'courageously')—610 in total. However, the study also incorporated a cross-cultural element by sampling one newspaper from Australia, the UK, the USA, and China. However, other media that typically have a smaller, more carefully selected audience can also form the focus for content analysis. For example, Barley, Meyer, and Gash (1988) conducted content analysis on items from business and management journals. Although these periodicals cannot be classified as mass media in the conventional sense, as the average peer-reviewed journal article is read by only a handful of people, these journals do represent a highly influential medium for the subcultural groups that Barley and his colleagues were concerned to investigate.



## Research in focus 12.2
## A content analysis of courage and managerial decision making

The aim of Harris's (2001) study was to investigate the way the word 'courage' was used in the business community and to compare this with a theoretical definition of the construct defined prior to data collection—based on a selective review of the literature. The content analysis procedure that followed relied on searching through the 1996 editions of four daily newspapers—*the Australian Financial Review*, the *Guardian* (UK), the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *South China Morning Post*. These newspapers were selected because they all had substantial coverage of business and commerce, they covered a wide geographical spread, and they could provide information about the way that courage was perceived in the business community.

Using a searchable database, Harris included items where the word 'courage', or derivatives such as 'courageous', appeared in the text. This gave him a total population of 610 items. Each of the items was coded by the researcher using a specially designed form that allowed for inclusion of information about the nature of the article, the characteristics of the individual who was described as courageous, and the features of the courage that was being described. A coding 'dictionary' was devised that showed the coding rules, so that more than one coder could be involved in the classification and thereby increase validity. Findings showed that the newspaper stories about courage confirmed the theoretical definition of the construct that had been developed during the first stage of the study.

## Sampling dates

Sometimes, the decision about dates is more or less dictated by the occurrence of a phenomenon. For example, the timing of representation of the Enron scandal will have been more or less dictated by the speed of the US government investigation into the company's downfall and its accounting practices. One could hardly examine the issue fully prior to this investigation, though there may be an important consideration in deciding at what point the content analysis should cease, since discussions about Enron and what it means for other businesses could continue for some time after the cessation of the investigation and may entail a reappraisal as a result

of subsequent events, such as the demise of Andersen Consulting.

With a research question that entails an ongoing general phenomenon, such as the representation of courage in managerial decision-making or the cultural values of companies, the matter of dates is more open. The principles of probability sampling outlined in Chapter 7 can readily be adapted for sampling dates—for example, generating a systematic sample of dates by randomly selecting one day of the week and then selecting every *n*th day thereafter. Alternatively, Monday newspapers could provide the first set of newspapers for inclusion, followed by Tuesday the following week, Wednesday the week after, and so on.

One important factor is whether the focus will be on an issue that entails keeping track of representation as it happens, in which case the researcher may begin at any time and the key decision becomes when to stop, or whether or not it is necessary to go backwards in time to select media from one or more time periods in the past. For example, if Kabanoff, Waldersee, and Cohen (1995) had wanted to examine whether or not there had been a marked change in the way that companies represent their cultural values through annual reports and other documents (see Research in focus 12.3), they would obviously have needed to examine the reports, magazines, and newsletters of years prior to 1986. They might have taken comparable samples from ten and twenty years earlier, had the companies been in existence for this long, and perhaps even beyond. Similarly, because the topic of organizational culture had attracted 'only sporadic interest before the late 1970s', Barley, Meyer, and Gash (1988: 32) stipulated that content analysis should be carried out only on articles, written in English, that appeared in periodicals or collections of readings published after January 1975. The researchers' own informed judgement of interest in this topic thus determined their decision as to how far back to go in their sampling of the journals. Moreover, content analysis of texts was seen by the authors to be a more favourable method for studying the way that concepts of organizational culture have changed over time because journal articles are preserved at the point in time when they were written. This makes them less prone to retrospective construction than other, observational methods that could have been used to capture the author's point of view.



## Research in focus 12.3
## A computer-aided content analysis of organizational values

Kabanoff, Waldersee, and Cohen (1995) studied eighty-eight large, well-known Australian organizations, which comprised the sample based on content analysis of four kinds of organizational documents:

- annual reports;
- company-wide internal magazines;
- mission or corporate values statements;
- other documents produced for distribution to employees (for example, newsletters).

The organizations all provided documents of this type (or as many as they could) for the years 1986–90. Over 1,000 documents were analysed using computer-aided content analysis against the words specified in a content dictionary that was created by the researchers to identify value structures. The researchers claim that computer-aided content analysis provides a number of advantages over manual content analysis, not least that it offers perfect reliability in the classification of text, unlike human coders, and it is labour-saving in terms of time and effort. In dealing with the criticisms associated with computer-aided methods, the researchers suggest that the apparent advantage of manual coding—that human coders can better judge the meaning of a word in context—is less apparent than has previously been supposed. Because the research was concerned with organizational values rather than with individually held values, documents such as annual reports were seen as likely to represent the value consensus among senior managers within the firm.

Sections of the documents that referred to organizational goals and values were analysed, in addition to 'any "human interest" stories that made mention of "what it means to work for this organization"' (1995: 1081).

The documents were coded according to nine categories of organizational values, including authority, leadership, teamwork, participation, commitment, performance, and reward. The authors noted the frequency of occurrence of each type of organizational value within each organization and for each document type.

On the basis of this measurement of values, the organizations were measured against four prototypical value structures and categorized as:

- elite;
- meritocratic;
- leadership;
- collegial.

The next step of the research involved exploring how change was portrayed by each of the four types of organizations. The study found that descriptions of organizational change were consistent with the organization's value structure. For example, elite organizations tended to view change as a top-down process driven by the needs of the organization, whereas meritocratic organizations tended to emphasize the need to motivate employees to play a constructive role in the process. The authors conclude that the study supports the view that a key aspect of managing organizational change involves recognition of an organization's value structure.



# What is to be counted?

Obviously, decisions about what should be counted in the course of a content analysis are bound to be profoundly affected by the nature of the research questions under consideration. Content analysis offers the prospect of different kinds of 'units of analysis' being considered. The following kinds of units of analysis are frequently encountered and can be used as guides to the kinds of objects that might be the focus of attention. However, what you would actually *want* or *need* to count will be significantly dictated by your research question.

## Significant actors

Particularly in the context of mass media news reporting, the main figures in any news item and their characteristics are often important items to code. These considerations are likely to result in the following questions being asked in the course of a content analysis:

- What kind of person has produced the item (for example, general or specialist news reporter)?
- Who is or are the main focus of the item (for example, senior executive of an organization, manager, politician, or employee representative)?
- Who provides alternative voices (for example, consumer representative, official from a professional association, or employee)?
- What was the context for the item (for example, publication of financial results, major organizational event, or disaster)?

In the case of the content analysis of managerial courage (see Research in focus 12.2), the significant actors and their characteristics included:

- the courage event or events described in the newspaper story;
- the type of newspaper item (for example, long or short general article, biography or obituary, book review, etc.) in which the courage event was reported;
- the details of the actor associated with the courageous act or action in the item (for example, personal details, status, and the kinds of obstacles he or she faced and the tools he or she used to help him or her to take courageous action).

The chief objective in recording such details is to map the main protagonists in news reporting in an area and to begin to reveal some of the mechanics involved in the production of information for public consumption.

## Words

While it may seem a dull and time-consuming activity, counting the frequency with which certain words occur is sometimes undertaken in content analysis. Deciding what the unit of analysis will be, whether word, phrase, or sentence, is an important consideration in content analysis research. In Kabanoff, Waldersee, and Cohen's (1995) study (see Research in focus 12.3), the focus was on the sentence and a total of 40,593 sentences were analysed. It would be difficult to contemplate using manual analysis for such a large sample, and so the authors used computer-aided content analysis (see Key concept 12.4). Gephart (1993; see Research in focus 21.4) also used data analysis software to assist his qualitative study of accounts of a pipeline disaster, taking the phrase,



Tips and skills

### Counting words in electronic news reports

The growing availability of the printed media in electronic form, such as CD-ROM and electronic databases, greatly facilitates the search for and counting of keywords in this kind of context. Most of the main UK newspapers and many overseas ones are available in electronic format, either through their own websites or through a website like British Media Online:
***www.wrx.zen.co.uk/britnews.htm*** (accessed 27 May 2010)

which acts as a launch pad for a host of different electronic newspapers. An alternative source is Nexis UK, which allows you to search a number of newspapers at once. The newspapers can then usually be searched for keywords and phrases.



Key concept 12.4

### What is computer-aided content analysis?

Computer-aided content analysis refers to the use of software programs to facilitate the analysis of textual data (Wolfe, Gephart, and Johnson 1993). There are a number of advantages associated with using a computerized method for categorizing text instead of a manual approach. Whereas manual content analysis requires coders to read the text and code terms that are of interest, a computer-aided approach automatically searches and codes terms or phrases in the text. Since a great deal of text, including two of the most common sources of data used in content analysis, newspaper articles and journal papers, is now commonly available in digital electronic format, it is quite straightforward to use these documents as the basis for computer-aided content analysis. In addition to enabling faster coding of large amounts of textual data, several of these software tools also support the creation and maintenance of electronic dictionaries or coding schedules, either by providing a dictionary that the user can customize, or by keeping an electronic record of the dictionary that has been created by the user (Kabanoff, Waldersee, and Cohen 1995). There are a number of software programmes available to support computer-aided content analysis, some of which are free. Examples include:

General Inquirer: ***www.wjh.harvard.edu/~inquirer*** (accessed 26 May 2010)
TextSTAT: ***neon.niederlandistik.fu-berlin.de/textstat*** (accessed 26 May 2010)
Concordance: ***www.concordancesoftware.co.uk*** (accessed 26 May 2010)

There are also commercially available software programs designed to meet the needs of researchers such as WordStat. Further information can be found on the following website:
***www.provalisresearch.com/wordstat/Wordstat.html*** (accessed 26 May 2010)



## Tips and skills
## Making content analysis more efficient

The main disadvantages associated with content analysis arise from the fact that it can be very labour intensive. Franzosi (1995) therefore suggests several strategies for making it more efficient. The first involves identifying the different parts or the schemata that is associated with the genre of text that is being analysed. For example, newspaper articles have a schema that comprises a summary and a story, containing 'background' (history and context) and 'episode' (main events and consequences). He suggests that the time and cost of content analysis can be reduced by excluding parts of the article that contain summary and background information. 'The longer an event lasts, the more likely that the "background" section of the articles dealing with an event become increasingly repetitious. The percentage of new material in each article is thus likely to decrease with the temporal position of the article in the sequence of articles that report an event' (1995: 159). Franzosi also suggests that a Taylorist approach to coding can help to make it more efficient. In this, several coders read the same article, with each of them coding a specific type of information, such as keywords, within a limited set of coding categories. However, he acknowledges that such a Taylorist approach would not be suitable for more complex thematic analyses. His final strategy for increasing the efficiency of content analysis entails a focus on sampling, not just of the time period of interest and the data sources (for example, newspapers) to be used, but also of the articles that are going to be coded and the kinds of information coded within each article.

rather than the word, to be the unit of analysis. In Bettman and Weitz's (1983) study of corporate annual reports, the unit of analysis was defined as a phrase or sentence in which there is some sort of causal reasoning about a performance outcome. The use of some words rather than others can often be of some significance because they have the potential to reveal the interpretative frameworks used by different subcultural groupings. For example, Barley, Meyer, and Gash (1988) proposed that practitioner-oriented papers on organizational culture would use words associated with rational organizing strategies. In order to test their proposition, they calculated the percentage of a paper's paragraphs that contained words associated with bureaucracy, such as 'hierarchy', and words associated with structural differentiation, such as 'departments' or 'divisions'. Similarly, they suggested practitioner-oriented papers would make more references to external forces and environmental uncertainty that posed a threat to corporate performance. Words associated with this discourse included 'changing technology', 'foreign competition', 'fluctuating interests', and 'Japanese management'.

## Subjects and themes

Frequently in a content analysis the researcher will want to code text in terms of certain subjects and themes. Essentially, what is being sought is a categorization of the phenomenon or phenomena of interest. In the study by Barley, Meyer, and Gash (1988), the researchers further posited that academically orientated articles would exhibit a number of key themes. In addition, words associated with the causal framework employed in the papers that were written for a practitioner audience would be 'conspicuously absent'. While categorizations of specific words are often relatively straightforward, when the process of coding is thematic a more interpretative approach needs to be taken. At this point, the analyst is searching not just for manifest content but for latent content as well. It becomes necessary to probe beneath the surface in order to ask deeper questions about what is happening. One theme that cut across all the papers was the justification of organizational culture as an alternative paradigm for understanding organizational phenomena. Hence the researchers found that, 'although the precise nature of the alternative varied from article to article, the perception that culture offered a radical departure from traditional organizational theory was nearly invariant' (1988: 44). Like the practitioner-orientated articles, academic articles also viewed organizational culture as a source of social integration, but, unlike the articles aimed at practitioners, they did not seek to portray culture as a force for social control. The researchers therefore sought to classify academically orientated articles according to the percentage of paragraphs that contained sentences that expressed gain or loss of control through culture. They speculated that articles written for an academic audience from a functionalist perspective would see culture as a

means of gaining control, but that very few of the articles would see culture as leading to loss of control because this would not fit with the academics' anthropologically informed paradigm. To test the model, the three researchers therefore coded all 192 of the articles according to these indicators and arrived at a final score that comprised a percentage average of the three individual ratings. Their analysis showed that, although practitioners and academics initially saw culture quite differently, over time academics changed their understanding of organizational culture to incorporate the practitioner's point of view, even though practitioners' understanding of culture was little influenced by the academic viewpoint.

## Dispositions

A further level of interpretation is likely to be entailed when the researcher seeks to demonstrate a disposition in the texts being analysed. For example, it may be that the researcher wants to establish whether the journalists, in the reporting of an issue in the news media, are favourably inclined or hostile towards an aspect of it, such as their stances on the practice of paying chief executives large financial bonuses. Alternatively, the researcher may be interested in the views of a news article reader, rather than the writer. For example, in the case of the study by Chen and Meindl (1991), the authors wanted to discern the image formed by news article readers about the owner of the airline People Express, entrepreneur Donald Burr. Each item was coded in terms of whether the reader had interpreted the editorial commentary on the leader's image in a way that was positive or negative. In many cases, it was necessary to infer whether the editorial commentary was implicitly positive or negative on the basis of image themes. For example, positive image themes were defined by the authors to include 'motivation'—that is, Burr as an individual who is motivated, ambitious, and energetic—whereas the theme 'overdone' was interpreted by the authors as a negative image, characterized by descriptions of the leader as overzealous, idealistic, and lacking in realism. Such an analysis entails establishing whether a judgemental stance can be discerned in the items being coded and, if so, what the nature of the judgement is.

## Images

A further alternative focus for content analysis involves counting the frequency and type of images contained within a text. For example, Hunter (2008), a researcher in the field of tourism studies, analysed photographic representations appearing in tourist brochures and guidebooks relating to twenty-one destinations. In fact such methods are relatively common in tourism research and have been applied in the analysis of a wide range of documents such as postcards. Hunter (2008) analysed a sample of 10 per cent or 375 of the photographic images contained in the selected brochures and guidebooks. Images were categorized in terms of space, defined as 'the kind of physical tourism environment that is represented by means of the photograph' (Hunter 2008: 359); categories included 'natural landscapes', 'cultivated landscapes', 'heritage and material culture', and 'tourism products' such as cuisine. They were also categorized by 'subject', defined as the kinds of people found in the photograph; categories include 'no people', 'host only', 'guest only', and 'host and guest'. He could thereby analyse the frequency with which each category appeared, using this as the basis for critical analysis of the social effects of tourism on places and peoples.

A further example is provided by Prichard (2001), who uses content analysis to explore the representation of images of men and women in tourism marketing. Prichard used a content analysis technique called the 'consciousness scale' to classify more than 12,000 images contained in a random, stratified sample of UK tour operators' brochures along a four-point continuum from sexist to non-sexist portrayals of male and female roles and relationships as follows:

- *Level 1* includes images that depict men and women in very limited, essentially sexual and decorative roles;
- *Level 2* contains traditional images that show women and men engaged in highly traditional gender roles;
- *Level 3* is used to classify images that portray women and men in non-traditional gender roles—for example, men caring for children or women playing team sports;
- *Level 4* refers to images where women and men are represented as equal individuals.

Account was also taken of the size of the images as they appeared in the brochures, larger images being interpreted as more influential than smaller ones. This content analysis technique enabled Prichard to quantify the extent of gendered representations in UK tour operators' brochures, which were found to be extremely stereotypical, women being portrayed in sexual and 'decorative' poses with men playing more active roles. The content analysis of images has significant application in other areas of business research such as marketing, where the visual plays an influential role.



# Coding

As much of the foregoing discussion has implied, coding is a crucial stage in the process of doing a content analysis. There are two main elements to a content analysis coding scheme: designing a coding schedule and designing a **coding manual**. To illustrate its use, imagine a student who is interested in newspaper reports of employment tribunal hearings dealing with sex, race, or disability discrimination in the workplace and reported in a national daily newspaper over a three-month period. The student chooses to focus on the reporting of the employment tribunal hearing and the outcomes of the hearing. To simplify the issue, the following variables might be considered:

1. nature of the claim (for example, denial of promotion);
2. gender of the complainant;
3. ethnicity of the complainant;
4. occupation of the complainant;
5. age of the complainant;
6. marital status of the complainant;
7. nature of the employer's business;
8. number of employees;
9. outcome of tribunal (case sustained/not sustained; nature of award);
10. position of the news item;
11. number of words in the item.

Analysis would enable the student to record information about the kinds of sex, race, or disability discrimination issues that employment tribunals deal with and also to look for patterns in the characteristics of complainants and employers. The content analysis could thereby provide valuable insight—for example, into the way that gendered managerial structures, cultures, and organizational practices are reproduced. Content analysts would normally be interested in a much larger number of variables than this, but a simple illustration like this can be helpful to show the kinds of variables that might be considered.

## Coding schedule

The coding schedule is a form into which all the data relating to an item being coded will be entered. Figure 12.1

## Figure 12.1

### Coding schedule

| No. | Information about the actor | Code | No. | Features of courage displayed, sought, or observed | Code |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| i | Gender of actor | | viii | Word used to describe courage | |
| ii | Age of actor | | ix | Tools mentioned | |
| iii | Qualifications | | x | Obstacles mentioned | |
| iv | Profession | | xi | Involves choice between personal values and corporate values | |
| v | Place | | xii | Involves defence of corporate/ organizational values or vision | |
| vi | Rank | | xiii | Involves choice between personal advantage and corporate/community good | |
| vii | Evidence of being a risk-taker | | xiv | Courage refers to the action or to disposition of actor or to a virtue | |

*Source*: adapted from Harris (2001).

provides an example of a coding schedule based on the study of managerial courage and decision-making described in Research in focus 12.2. The schedule is very much a simplification in order to facilitate the discussion of the principles of coding in content analysis and of the construction of a coding schedule in particular.

Each of the roman numerals in Figure 12.1 relates to a specific dimension that is being coded—for example, 'iii' relates to the dimension 'qualifications' of the actor. The blank cells on the coding form are the places where codes are written. A new coding schedule form would be used for each media item coded. The codes can then be transferred to a computer data file for analysis with a software package like SPSS (see Chapter 15).

## Coding manual

On the face of it, the coding schedule in Figure 12.1 seems very bare and does not appear to provide much information about what is to be done or where. This is where the coding manual comes in. The coding manual, sometimes referred to as the content analysis dictionary, is a statement of instructions to coders that specifies the categories that will be used to classify the text based on a set of written rules that define how the text will be classified. It provides: a list of all the dimensions; the different categories subsumed under each dimension; the letters or numbers (that is, *codes*) that correspond to each category; and guidance on what each dimension is concerned with, the definitions or rules to be used in assigning words to categories, and any factors that should be taken into account in deciding how to allocate any particular code to each dimension. The coding manual enables the message content to be coded in a consistent manner. The coding categories for each dimension need to be mutually exclusive and exhaustive so that there is no sense of overlap. There are a number of off-the-shelf content analysis dictionaries (for example, Harvard VI Psychosocial Dictionaries) that are often used as a starting point from which the researcher him or herself constructs a coding manual that relates to the particular research project.

For example, in his study of managerial courage and managerial decision-making, Harris (2001) constructed a coding manual to define the features of courage that he was looking for in the newspaper stories. Figure 12.2 provides a simplified version of the coding manual that corresponds to the coding schedule developed by Harris in this study (see Figure 12.1 and Research in focus 12.5). The coding manual includes all the dimensions that would be employed in the coding process, indications of guidance for coders, and the lists of categories that were created for each dimension. The coding manual includes instructions for classification of information about the actor in addition to categories for various features of the courage referred to in the newspaper article, how it was displayed, sought, or observed. The coding schedule and manual permit only one obstacle or tool to be recorded in relation to a particular phrase or sentence in a newspaper article. However, if a phrase contains two or more obstacles or tools, the coder may break down the phrase and code a single word or a few words at a time.

The coding manual is crucial, because it provides coders with complete listings of all categories for each dimension they are coding and guidance about how to interpret the dimensions. At this stage, decisions must be made regarding the treatment of words that have more than one meaning. For example, Harris (2001) had to filter out items that were referring to 'Courage' as a brand of beer or its brewer from those that were dealing with courage as a quality or personal trait. It is on the basis of these lists and guidance that a coding schedule of the kind presented in Figure 12.1 will be completed. Even if you are a lone researcher, such as a student conducting a content analysis for a dissertation or thesis, it is important to spend a lot of time providing yourself with instructions about how to code. While you may not face the problem of **inter-coder reliability**, the issue of intra-coder reliability is still significant for you and you will probably need to use the coding manual to keep reminding yourself of your rules for coding the data.

Figure 12.3 illustrates how a fictitious example of a news item that presents an act of courage might be coded according to Harris's coding manual. The news story, published in the UK newspaper the *Guardian*, focuses on a 35-year-old female entrepreneur and small business-owner who is described as having acted courageously in taking the decision to turn down a contract with a major distributor and retailer because of concerns, which were subsequently proved correct, about the tactics being used to undermine the competition. The coding of the incident would then appear as in Figure 12.3 and the data would be entered into a computer program like SPSS as follows:

2 35 1 6 14 4 2 1 4 4 3 1 2 1

Each newspaper item that mentions the word 'courage' would create a row of data with an identical structure.

## Potential pitfalls in devising coding schemes

There are several potential dangers in devising a content analysis coding scheme, and they are very similar to the kinds of consideration that are involved in the design of structured interview and structured observation schedules.

# Figure 12.2

## Coding manual

| Information about the actor | Features of courage displayed, sought, or observed |
|---|---|
| **i. Gender of actor**<br>Male (1); Female (2); Unknown (3) | **viii. Word used to describe courage**<br>Courage/ous/ly (1); Moral courage (2); Brave/ry (3); Dare/ing (4); Moral fibre (5); Strong will (6); Persevere/nce (7) |
| **ii. Age of actor (at the time the event occurred)**<br>Record age in years (0 if unknown) | **ix. Tools mentioned (activities, circumstances, or events that facilitated the courage)**<br>Bind (1) = made a public statement so as to make it harder to avoid the intended action<br>Devil's advocate (2) = a person specifically designated to put contrary views<br>Example (3) = e.g. 'seeing what A did gave me courage'<br>Horror (4) = can't allow it to continue, sheer enormity (to the actor) of what is proposed/happening meant that major obstacles had to be overcome<br>Others (5) = support expressed by others who may not necessarily be being courageous themselves<br>Vision (6) = clear focus<br>Faith (7) = inspiration or belief in a higher force |
| **iii. Qualifications (only include if unambiguous)**<br>Degree/professional (1); Trade (2); Unknown (3) | **x. Obstacles mentioned (something faced or overcome, a difficulty, concern, temptation, or hurdle)**<br>Easy path (1) = temptation to avoid the hard work<br>Name calling (2) = personal abuse directed at the actor<br>Physical threat (3) = violence or threat of violence to actor, family, etc.<br>Commercial risk (4) = includes potential financial consequences<br>Unpopular (5) = what is planned is unpleasant or trenchantly opposed |
| **iv. Profession (only include if unambigious)**<br>Law (1); Medicine (2); Engineering (3); Accounting (4); Journalism (5); Other (6); Not clear or combined (7) | **xi. Involves choice between personal values and corporate values**<br>Yes, personal values chosen (1); Yes, corporate and community values chosen (2); Unknown (3) |
| **v. Place in which the event occurred**<br>Use 2-letter ISO country code (see Research in focus 12.5 for some examples); if many, code as World (–1) | **xii. Involves defence of corporate/organizational values or vision**<br>Yes (1); No (2) |
| **vi. Rank (only include if unambiguous)**<br>Minister and ranking opposition, US senator (1); Member of Parliament (2); Manager (3); Company owner (4); Board member (5); Self-employed (6); Corporate professional, e.g. engineer or lawyer (7); other (8) | **xiii. Involves choice between personal advantage and corporate/community good**<br>Yes, personal advantage chosen (1); Yes, corporate and community good chosen (2); Unknown (3) |
| **vii. Evidence of being a risk-taker (evidence in the item apart from courage event of the actor being a risk-taker)**<br>Yes (1); No (2) | **xiv. Courage refers to the action or to disposition of actor or to a virtue**<br>The word 'courage' is used to describe an act or action, or some other outcome—*a courageous act, acted courageously, acted with courage* (1); Courage is attributed to the actor in relation to the act(s)—*to show courage, to be courageous* (2); Courage is mentioned without attribution to either act or person— *e.g. reference to a disembodied virtue* (3) |

*Source*: adapted from Harris (2001).

- *Discrete dimensions*. Make sure that your dimensions are entirely separate; in other words, there should be no conceptual or empirical overlap between them. For example, coding manual rules may be needed to distinguish between 'management' positions (such as the administrators of a firm) and 'management' actions (like the management of innovation).



## Research in focus 12.5

## Some of the ISO country codes used in Harris's (2001) study

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) produces codes for the representation of names of countries and their subdivisions, some of which are listed below. Each one is also allocated a number to facilitate SPSS data entry.

AR Argentina (1)
AU Australia (2)
BR Brazil (3)
CH Switzerland (4)
CN China (5)
DK Denmark (6)
FI Finland (7)
JP Japan (8)
LK Sri Lanka (9)
MZ Mozambique (10)
PT Portugal (11)
RU Russian Federation (12)
TW Taiwan (13)
UK United Kingdom (14)
ZA South Africa (15)

This forms part of the organization's broader mission to produce documentary agreements, such as the ISO 9000 series, which are designed to enable international trade through establishing criteria that can be used consistently as rules, guidelines, or definitions. What this means in terms of coding is that their work could provide a basis for the development and definition of categories, as Harris (2001) has done (see Figure 12.2).

# Figure 12.3

### Completed coding schedule

| No. | Information about the actor | Code | No. | Features of courage displayed, sought, or observed | Code |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **i** | Gender of actor | 2 | **viii** | Word used to describe courage | 1 |
| **ii** | Age of actor | 35 | **ix** | Tools mentioned | 4 |
| **iii** | Qualifications | 1 | **x** | Obstacles mentioned | 4 |
| **iv** | Profession | 6 | **xi** | Involves choice between personal values and corporate values | 3 |
| **v** | Place | 14 | **xii** | Involves defence of corporate/ organizational values or vision | 1 |
| **vi** | Rank | 4 | **xiii** | Involves choice between personal advantage and corporate/community good | 2 |
| **vii** | Evidence of being a risk-taker | 2 | **xiv** | Courage refers to the action or to disposition of actor or to a virtue | 1 |

*Source*: adapted from Harris (2001).

- *Mutually exclusive categories*. Make sure that there is no overlap in the categories supplied for each dimension. If the categories are not mutually exclusive, coders will be unsure about how to code each item.
- *Exhaustive*. For each dimension, all possible categories should be available to coders.
- *Clear instructions*. Coders should be clear about how to interpret what each dimension is about and what factors to take into account when assigning codes to each category. Sometimes, these will have to be very elaborate. Coders should have little or no discretion in how to allocate codes to units of analysis.
- *Be clear about the unit of analysis*. For example, in Harris's (2001) study of courage and managerial decision-making, more than one courage event per media item can be recorded. The coding schedule needs to be clear in distinguishing between the media item (for example, a newspaper article) and the event being coded. In practice, a researcher is interested in both but needs to keep the distinction in mind.

In order to be able to enhance the quality of a coding scheme, it is highly advisable to pilot early versions of the scheme, as Todd, McKeen, and Gallupe (1995) did (see Research in focus 12.6). Piloting will help to identify difficulties in applying the coding scheme, such as uncertainty about which category to employ when considering a certain dimension or discovering that no code was available to cover a particular case. Piloting will also help to identify any evidence that one category of a dimension tends to subsume an extremely large percentage of items. If this occurs, it may be necessary to consider breaking that category down so that it allows greater discrimination between the items being analysed.



## Research in focus 12.6
## A content analysis of job advertisements

Todd, McKeen, and Gallupe (1995) carried out a content analysis of job advertisements in four major newspapers for information systems positions to determine changes in the knowledge and skill requirements for these posts over a twenty-year period from 1970 to 1990. One of the advantages of this methodology stems from the use of secondary data (see Chapter 13), which enables a bigger sample than is usually possible in interview or survey research and therefore enables assessment of a wider range of jobs. Three types of jobs were examined: program managers, systems analysts, and information systems managers. Data were collected from two US newspapers: the *Wall Street Journal* and the *New York Times*; and from two Canadian newspapers: the *Globe and Mail* and the *Toronto Star*, at five-year intervals—1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990. They explain that 'the choice of five-year intervals was made to have a window that was broad enough to allow for a reasonable chance to observe differences . . . Ads were chosen from each month of the year to avoid the possibility of seasonal or cyclical effects in the data . . . Selection from a given newspaper, for a given month, continued until between five and ten ads were extracted' (1995: 26–7). A total of 1,634 information systems job advertisements were collected; 581 for programmers, 348 for systems analysts, and 305 for information systems managers. The remaining 400 jobs were for a variety of other jobs that were excluded from the analysis. A coding scheme was developed based on the literature on skills needed by information systems workers. Phrases relating to skill mentioned in each advertisement were coded into one of three basic knowledge/skill categories: technical (subdivided into hardware and software knowledge), business (comprising functional or industry expertise, general management skills and social/interpersonal skills), and systems (consisting of problem-solving and development methodology knowledge/skills). These seven skill categories formed the basis for the analysis. Prior to the main study a pilot sample of 200 advertisements was analysed by research assistants who attempted to classify each word or phrase into the seven categories. 'From this, an index was built that included the specific phrases used in the ads and the coding categories to which they belonged' (1995: 26). They found that skill requirements specified in advertisements had grown during the time period under investigation, especially those relating to technical knowledge.



## Research in focus 12.7
## Issues of inter-coder reliability in a study of text messaging

The results of the diary study of patterns of text messaging carried out by Faulkner and Culwin (2005) described in Research in focus 9.6 were analysed according to the content of the text message by the participants in the study. The categories identified were:

1. advertisements;
2. questions;
3. rendezvous immediate and ongoing;
4. rendezvous near future;
5. events;
6. instructions;
7. reminders;
8. jokes;
9. signon;
10. signoff;
11. gossip;
12. dates;
13. information—personal;
14. Information— commercial;
15. Information—operational.

The results of the coding exercise were entered onto a Web-based database. To check for inter-coder reliability, the participants were then shown a random selection of text messages from the entire pool and asked to code them; a consensus was drawn up based on the number of times a text message was assigned to a particular category. However, the degree of consensus between coders was not high. Total consensus was achieved for approximately 16 per cent of the items and 50 per cent consensus was achieved for 75 per cent of the items. Faulkner and Culwin explain this in terms of the specificity of text messaging, which is a method of communication between one sender and receiver, unlike newspapers, which are a medium of mass communication. They conclude: 'these classifications were applied by people who had not necessarily received nor sent the individual text message. To a large extent the interpretation of content depends on the receiver of that content' (2005: 180).

The reliability of coding is a further potential area of concern. Coding must be done in a consistent manner. As with structured observation, coding must be consistent between coders (**inter-coder reliability**) and each coder must be consistent over time (**intra-coder reliability**). An important part of piloting the coding scheme will be testing for consistency between coders and, if time permits, intra-coder reliability. However, coding may not be consistent, and the extent of inter-coder reliability may vary depending on the type of content that is being analysed (see Research in focus 12.7 for an example). The process of gauging reliability is more or less identical to that briefly covered in the context of structured observation in Key concept 11.6.



# Advantages of content analysis

Kabanoff, Waldersee, and Cohen (1995) suggest that content analysis offers an important method for the cultural study of organizations because it enables researchers to analyse organizational values, traces of which can be observed in organizational documents. Moreover, by measuring the frequency with which values occur, researchers are able to discern their importance. Content analysis has several further advantages, which are outlined below.

- Content analysis is a very transparent research method. The coding scheme and the sampling procedures can be clearly set out so that replications and follow-up studies are feasible. It is this transparency that often causes content analysis to be referred to as an objective method of analysis.
- It can allow a certain amount of longitudinal analysis with relative ease. Several of the studies referred to above allow the researcher to track changes in frequency over time (Barley, Meyer, and Gash 1988; Chen and Meindl 1991; Kabanoff, Waldersee, and Cohen 1995; Todd, McKeen, and Gallupe 1995). For example, Kabanoff et al.'s (1995) research entailed an analysis of organizational values over a four-year time period, Todd et al. (1995) examined information systems job advertisements over a twenty-year period (see Research in focus 12.6), while Research in focus 12.8 gives an example of a content analysis that spanned an even longer time period. Similarly, in the example of employment tribunal hearings concerning sex, race, or disability discrimination, a temporal analysis could be introduced through comparison of employment tribunal reporting in newspapers during two different time periods, such as the 1960s and the 1990s. Changes in emphasis could thus be examined.
- Content analysis is often referred to favourably as an *unobtrusive method*, a term devised by Webb et al. (1966) to refer to a method that does not entail participants in a study having to take the researcher into account (see Key concept 13.12). It is therefore a *non-reactive method* (see Key concept 11.8). However, this point has to be treated with a little caution. It is certainly the case that, when the focus of a content analysis is upon things such as newspaper articles or television programmes, there is no reactive effect. Newspaper articles are obviously not written in the knowledge that a content analysis may one day be carried out on them. Hence Harris (2001) suggests that the content analysis of secondary data such as newspaper articles is particularly useful when researching sensitive issues such as the ethical behaviour of managers, because the method overcomes the problematic tendency of individuals to deny socially undesirable traits and only to admit to socially desirable ones (see Chapter 8 on social desirability as a source of error). On the other hand, if the content analysis is being conducted on documents, such as interview transcripts or ethnographies (e.g. Hodson 1996; see Research in focus 12.9), while the process of content analysis does not itself introduce a reactive effect, the documents may have been at least partly influenced by such an effect.
- It is a highly flexible method. It can be applied to a wide variety of kinds of unstructured information. While content analysis in the social sciences is primarily associated with the analysis of mass-media outputs, in business and management research it has a much broader applicability than this, including content analysis of websites. Research in focus 12.9 presents an illustration of a rather unusual application of content analysis.
- Content analysis can allow information to be generated about social groups that are difficult to gain access to. For example, most of our knowledge of the social backgrounds of elite groups, such as company directors, derives from content analyses of such publications as *Who's Who* and *Burke's Peerage* (Bryman 1974).



## Research in focus 12.8
## A content analysis spanning thirty-six years

Boyce and Lepper (2002) examined the company records relating to a successful joint venture that existed for seventy-five years between the Union Steam Ship Company in New Zealand and William Holyman and Sons to assess the importance of information quality in its success. The study is based on data collected from the company archives relating to the dates 1904, 1919, 1920, 1924, and 1935. The authors explain that these years were chosen for pragmatic reasons—namely, there were more data in the archives for these years and they 'appeared to be the most interesting' (2002: 118). Data from the files relating to the joint venture were then entered onto a spreadsheet, which recorded 'the number of words in each document, the source of each exchange and recipient, the nature of each exchange, and a subjective assessment as to the level of trust implicit in each exchange' (2002: 89). Words and phrases classified as indicating high trust included 'I am glad to say', 'we are willing to do so', 'trusting to the future'; words and phrases indicating low trust included 'unfortunately', 'we do not feel inclined', 'our hands cannot be tied too tightly'. The results of the content analysis indicate that information exchanges between the joint venture partners involved a high level of trust. However, the authors acknowledge some of the limitations of content analysis for an archival study of this nature. Namely, deciding on whether an item indicates high or low trust involves the coder in making a judgement as to what constitutes high or low trust. The authors suggest that the content analysis relied on their background knowledge and understanding of the material contained in the archive, and thus involved an element of subjective judgement.



## Research in focus 12.9
## A content analysis of qualitative research on the workplace

Hodson (1996) reports the results of a content analysis of 'book-length ethnographic studies based on sustained periods of direct observation' (1996: 724). There is an excellent website in connection with the Workplace Ethnography Project, which can be found at:
***www.sociology.ohio-state.edu/rdh/Workplace-Ethnography-Project.html*** (accessed 26 May 2010)

As a method, ethnography (see Chapter 17) entails a long period of participant observation in order to understand the culture of a social group. Hodson's content analysis concentrated on ethnographic studies of workplaces that had been published in book form (published articles were excluded because they rarely included sufficient detail). Thousands of case studies were assessed for possible inclusion in the sample. The sample was made up of studies from different countries and included some well-known British ones (Beynon 1975; Nichols and Beynon 1977; Pollert 1981; Cavendish 1982). According to the Workplace Ethnography Project website: 'The study generated 204 ethnographic cases. These cases were derived from 156 separate books since the observations reported in some books allowed the coding of multiple cases.'

Hodson (1996) states that each case was coded in terms of one of five types of workplace organization (craft, direct supervision, assembly line, bureaucratic, and worker participation). This was the independent variable. Various dependent variables and 'control' variables (variables deemed to have an impact on the relationships between independent and dependent variables) were also coded. Here are two of the variables and their codes:

**Job satisfaction**

1 = very low; 2 = moderately low; 3 = average; 4 = high; 5 = very high

**Autonomy**

1 = none (the workers' tasks are completely determined by others, by machinery, or by organizational rules); 2 = little (workers occasionally have the chance to select among procedures or priorities); 3 = average (regular opportunities to select procedures or set priorities within definite limits); 4 = high (significant latitude in determining procedures and setting priorities); 5 = very high (significant interpretation is needed to reach broadly specified goals). (Hodson 1996: 728)

Hodson's findings suggest that some pessimistic accounts of worker participation schemes (for example, that they do not genuinely permit participation and do not necessarily have a beneficial impact on the worker) are incomplete. A more detailed treatment of this research can be found in Hodson (1999). Since the early 1996 publication, many others have been published in major journals. Not only does the website provide a list of publications deriving from the project (including downloadable pdf files of most of the articles), it also includes the coding information, and you can download the data into SPSS (see Chapter 15 for more information on SPSS).



## Research in focus 12.10
## A content analysis of newspaper articles about HRM

Mazza and Alvarez (2000) were interested in the role of the popular press in the production and legitimation of management ideas and practices. To explore this further they conducted a content analysis of articles on human resource management (HRM) published in leading newspapers and magazines in Italy. Focusing on the time period from 1988 to 1996, they collected data from articles on HRM in two periodicals selected on the basis of their wide diffusion (circulation). Articles were selected by searching for keywords related to HRM in the CD-ROM databases of the two publications. Next, the selected articles were read to see if they dealt with HRM issues. The articles were then analysed using a predominantly qualitative approach, rather than using a coding scheme.

In order to assess the level of interaction between academic literature and press coverage of management ideas, the researchers also measured the frequency of articles on HRM in leading academic journals such as *Administrative Science Quarterly*, as well as in more practitioner-orientated publications, such as *Harvard Business Review*, using the ABI/INFORM database (see Chapter 4). They observe that the number of HRM-related articles in the selected popular press sources during the period 1988–94 grew, declining thereafter but peaking again in 1996. They speculate that the timing of this popularity may be related to a generalized concern about political corruption in Italy, noting that the articles about HRM were paralleled by discussion of business ethics, which is presented as a solution to the problem of corruption.

Although this study used a qualitative approach to content analysis, rather than one designed to ensure consistency and replicability through the application of explicit coding criteria, we can learn from the method of sampling and of recording changes over time used in Mazza and Alvarez's study, which could be a model for content analyses of the diffusion of other business and management ideas, such as total quality management, knowledge management, or business process re-engineering.



# Disadvantages of content analysis

Like all research techniques, content analysis suffers from certain limitations, which are described below.

- A content analysis can only be as good as the documents on which the practitioner works. John Scott (1990) recommends assessing documents in terms of such criteria as: authenticity (that the document is what it purports to be); credibility (whether there are grounds for thinking that the contents of the document have been or are distorted in some way); and representativeness (whether or not the documents examined are representative of all possible relevant documents, as, if certain kinds of document are unavailable or no longer exist, generalizability will be jeopardized). These kinds of consideration will be especially important to bear in mind when a content analysis is being conducted on documents such as company reports or internal memoranda. These issues will be explored in further detail in Chapter 21.
- It is almost impossible to devise coding manuals that do not entail some interpretation on the part of coders. Coders must draw upon their everyday knowledge as participants in a common culture in order to be able to code the material with which they are confronted (Cicourel 1964; Garfinkel 1967). To the extent that this occurs, it is questionable whether or not it is justifiable to assume a correspondence of interpretation between the persons responsible for producing the documents being analysed and the coders (Beardsworth 1980).
- Particular problems are likely to arise when the aim is to impute latent rather than manifest content. In searching for traditional markers of organizational leadership, as in Chen and Meindl's study (1991), or inferring organizational values (see Research in focus 12.3), the potential for invalid inference being made is magnified.
- It is difficult to ascertain the answers to 'Why?' questions through content analysis. For example, Barley, Meyer, and Gash (1988) found that over the course of nearly a decade academically oriented papers on the subject of organizational culture gradually adopted or accommodated practitioners' concerns. Why? Although the authors provide a number of speculative answers to these questions, content analysis alone cannot provide the answers. As they claim, 'the convergence may have resulted because academics were subtly influenced to adopt a more managerial agenda in order to secure valued resources and a larger audience for their work, but given the nature of the data, other explanations are equally plausible' (1988: 55). Hence, the authors claim that to establish the motives for the convergence would require interviewing the paper authors 'and studying networks of citations to determine who influenced whom' (1988: 55). Similarly, although Mazza and Alvarez (2000) were able to identify two peaks in the popularity of articles about HRM in the Italian popular press, they could only speculate as to the reasons for this (see Research in focus 12.10).
- Content analytic studies are sometimes accused of being atheoretical. It is easy to see why an atheoretical approach might arise. The emphasis in content analysis on measurement can easily and unwittingly result in an accent being placed on what is measurable rather than on what is theoretically significant or important. However, content analysis is not necessarily atheoretical. For example, Barley et al. (1988) place their findings about academic and practitioner subcultures in the context of a political perspective of knowledge creation and diffusion, suggesting that the research interests of academics are ultimately defined by the interests of practitioners who influence the research process, through exercising constraints on funds, sites, and objectives. Similarly, Hodson's (1996) content analysis of workplace ethnographies was underpinned by theoretical ideas deriving from the work of influential writers such as Blauner (1964) and R. Edwards (1979) concerning developments in modes of workplace organization and their impacts on workers' experiences.



# Checklist

## Doing content analysis

- ◯ Have you clearly defined your research questions?
- ◯ Is the population of documents to be content analysed relevant to your research questions?
- ◯ Can you justify your sampling approach?
- ◯ Have you made sure that your dimensions do not overlap?
- ◯ Have you made sure that the categories used for each of your dimensions do not overlap?
- ◯ Do all the dimensions allow you to answer your research questions?
- ◯ Have you piloted your coding schedule?
- ◯ Are the coding instructions clear?
- ◯ If your research is based on the mass media, can you justify the time span of your coverage?
- ◯ Are you clear about the unit of analysis?



# Key points

- Content analysis is very much located within the quantitative research tradition of emphasizing measurement and the specification of clear rules that exhibit reliability.
- While traditionally associated with the analysis of mass-media content, content analysis is in fact a very flexible method that can be applied to a wide range of phenomena.
- It is crucial to be clear about your research questions in order to be certain about your units of analysis and what exactly is to be analysed.
- You also need to be clear about what is to be counted.
- The coding schedule and coding manual are crucial stages in the preparation for a content analysis.
- Content analysis becomes particularly controversial when it is used to seek out latent meaning and themes.



# Questions for review

- To what kinds of documents and media can content analysis be applied?
- What is the difference between manifest and latent content? What are the implications of the distinction for content analysis?

### *What are the research questions?*

- Why are precise research questions especially crucial in content analysis?
- With what general kinds of research questions is content analysis concerned?

### *Selecting a sample*

- What special sampling issues does content analysis pose?

### *What is to be counted?*

- What kinds of things might be counted in the course of doing a content analysis?
- To what extent do you need to infer latent content when you go beyond counting words?

### *Coding*

- Why is coding so crucial in content analysis?
- What is the difference between a coding schedule and a coding manual?
- What potential pitfalls need to be guarded against when devising coding schedules and manuals?

### *Advantages of content analysis*

- 'One of the most significant virtues of content analysis is its immense flexibility in that it can be applied to a wide variety of documents.' Discuss.

### *Disadvantages of content analysis*

- To what extent does the need for coders to interpret meaning undermine content analysis?
- How far are content analysis studies atheoretical?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Content Analysis.*

# 13

# Secondary analysis and official statistics

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 312

**Other researchers' data** 313

- Advantages of secondary analysis 313
- Limitations of secondary analysis 320
- Accessing the UK Data Archive 323

**Official statistics** 327

- Reliability and validity 328
- Condemning and resurrecting official statistics 329
- Official statistics as a form of unobtrusive measure 330

***Key points*** 331

***Questions for review*** 332






## Chapter outline

This chapter explores the possibilities associated with the analysis of data that have been collected by others. There are two main types discussed in this chapter:

- the secondary analysis of data collected, either for commercial or research purposes, by other people;
- the secondary analysis of **official statistics**—that is, statistics collected by government departments in the course of their work or specifically for statistical purposes.

This chapter explores:

- the advantages and disadvantages of carrying out secondary analysis of data collected by other researchers, particularly in view of many datasets being based on large, high-quality investigations that are invariably beyond the means of students;
- how to obtain such datasets;
- the potential of official statistics in terms of their reliability and validity;
- the growing recognition of the potential of official statistics after a period of neglect as a result of criticisms levelled at them;
- the notion that official statistics are a form of *unobtrusive method*—that is, a method that is not prone to a reaction on the part of those being studied to the fact that they are research participants.

# Introduction

Many of the techniques we have covered so far—survey research by questionnaire or structured interview, structured observation, and content analysis—can be extremely time-consuming and expensive to conduct. Students in particular may have neither the time nor the financial resources to conduct very extensive research. Yet we know that large amounts of quantitative data about business and management are collected by social scientists, market intelligence firms, professional associations, and others. Some of this information, such as that produced by market research organizations, can be expensive. However, many organizations, most notably government departments and their various representatives, collect data that are presented in statistical form and that may be usable without charge by students and university researchers. Would it not be a good idea to analyse such data rather than collect new data? It would have the additional advantage for managers and employees that they would not be bothered by interviewers and by questionnaires popping through their letter boxes.

This is where *secondary analysis* comes in. Secondary analysis offers this kind of opportunity. Key concept 13.1 contains a brief definition of secondary analysis and raises one or two basic points about what it involves. As the opening paragraph suggests, in this chapter we will be concerned with two kinds of issue:

- the secondary analysis of data that have been collected by other researchers;
- the secondary analysis of data that have been collected by other organizations in the course of their business.

In business and management, secondary analysis is of increasing interest to researchers. Traditionally, it has been the province of economists to analyse secondary data and draw conclusions about how it relates to the world of business. However, since the 1960s, more researchers, particularly those from an industrial relations background, have begun to take greater interest in the analysis of large-scale workplace survey data. Part of the reason for this relates to the success of the Workplace Employment Relations Survey (WERS; see Research in focus 2.14), which considerably opened up the potential for secondary analysis of work-related issues, largely because of its breadth and scope. The success of the WERS has



## Key concept 13.1
## What is secondary analysis?

Secondary analysis is the analysis of data by researchers who will probably not have been involved in the collection of those data, for purposes that in all likelihood were not envisaged by those responsible for the data collection. Secondary analysis may entail the analysis of either quantitative data (Dale, Arber, and Proctor 1988) or qualitative data (Corti, Foster, and Thompson 1995), but it is with the former that we will be concerned in this chapter. To some extent, it is difficult to know where primary and secondary analysis start and finish. If a researcher is involved in the collection of survey interview data and analyses some of the data, resulting in some publications, but then some time later decides to rework the data, it is not entirely clear how far the latter is primary or secondary analysis. Typically, secondary analysis entails the analysis of data that others have collected, but, as this simple scenario suggests, this need not necessarily be the case.

encouraged these researchers to explore other secondary datasets, such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS), and to engage in greater cross-national, comparative analysis. Moreover, their experience of designing survey research has informed the way that these data were collected and used, by bringing insights from a tradition based more on a qualitative case study to bear on the design and development of large-scale surveys and by ensuring that the right kinds of question continue to be asked (Marginson 1998).



# Other researchers' data

There are several reasons why secondary analysis should be considered a serious alternative to collecting new data. These advantages of secondary analysis have been covered by Dale, Arber, and Proctor (1988), from whom we have borrowed most of the following observations. In considering the various advantages of secondary analysis, we have in mind the particular needs of the lone student conducting a small research project as an undergraduate or a more substantial piece of work as a postgraduate. However, this emphasis should definitely not be taken to imply that secondary analysis is really appropriate or relevant only to students. Quite the contrary: secondary analysis should be considered by all business researchers, and, indeed, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) requires applicants for research grants who are proposing to collect new data to demonstrate that relevant data are not already available in the UK Data Archive (see below). However, secondary data need not necessarily be collected by other researchers; instead, it may be collected by a company or another type of organization for its own purposes (see Research in focus 13.2 and Research in focus 13.10). It is also possible for secondary analysis to be used in combination with the collection of primary data, as the example in Research in focus 13.3 illustrates. This can enable a comparative element to be incorporated into the research design. However, we have one other reason for emphasizing the prospects of secondary analysis for students that is simply based on our personal experience that students tend to assume that any research they carry out has to entail the collection of primary data. Provided secondary analysis does not conflict with the guidelines students are given regarding projects they are asked to complete, we feel there is a strong case for students considering the use of secondary analysis, as it frees them up to spend more time on searching the literature, designing their research questions, and analysing and interpreting their data.

## Advantages of secondary analysis

Secondary analysis offers numerous benefits to students carrying out a research project. These are outlined below.

- *Cost and time*. As noted at the outset, secondary analysis offers the prospect of having access to good-quality data, such as that available from the UK Data Archive



## Research in focus 13.2
## Secondary analysis of data collected by a business

Sørensen's (2004) study of the racial composition of workplaces was based on secondary data that he obtained from a large multidivisional financial services organization. Access to the personnel records was provided on the condition that no identifying information about the firm would be revealed (see discussion of anonymity in Chapter 5). Analysis focused on groups of newly hired staff in retail branches of the company, where interaction between employees was considered to be more likely. 'These data selection rules resulted in a dataset covering 1,673 employees from 263 district branches' (Sørensen 2004: 643). Sørensen explains that 'a distinct advantage of this dataset is that it contains the demographic characteristics not only of the focal employees who are tracked from the time of hire, but also of all other employees at the branch, regardless of the date of hire. I can therefore continuously measure the demographic composition of the branches from the time a sampled employee is hired into the branch until the time of exit or censoring' (Sørensen 2004: 643). The use of a quantitative case study design enabled a longitudinal element to be designed into the study (see Chapter 2), as the dataset contained information about the exact point at which employees joined and left the company over the time period under investigation, 1 January 1996–31 May 1999. This enabled Sørensen to explore changes in turnover rates over time. The results of this analysis revealed that employees were more likely to leave the organization if the number of employees of the same racial grouping as themselves declined during the time that they worked there.



## Research in focus 13.3
## Combining primary and secondary data in a comparative study

Tüselmann, McDonald, and Heise (2002) carried out a postal questionnaire survey of German subsidiaries in north-west England employing at least twenty-five workers to find out about employment relations in German multinational companies operating in an Anglo-Saxon setting. However, in order to introduce a comparative element into the study, the researchers compared their own data with the results contained in the database of the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) (see Research in focus 2.14). The researchers used the same questions in their questionnaire as those contained in the management survey in the 1998 WERS. They also explain that 'to ensure that differences in employee relations between German subsidiaries and British establishments were not merely due to the different composition of the samples' (2002: 33), the results from WERS were weighted to reflect the age, size, and sectoral composition of the German subsidiaries. This allowed them to compare workplaces owned by German multinational companies operating in the UK with similar British-owned workplaces to find out if the German subsidiaries adapted their employment relations practices to fit the British context or maintained practices associated with their country of origin.

(see section on Accessing the UK Data Archive below), for a tiny fraction of the resources involved in carrying out a data collection exercise yourself.

- *High-quality data*. Many of the datasets that are employed most frequently for secondary analysis are of extremely high quality. By this we mean several things. First, the sampling procedures have been rigorous, in most cases resulting in samples that are as close to being representative as one is likely to achieve. While the organizations responsible for these studies suffer the same problems of survey non-response as anybody else, well-established procedures are usually in place for following up non-respondents and thereby keeping this problem to a minimum. Secondly, the samples are often national samples or at least cover a wide variety of regions of

Great Britain or the UK. In addition, some datasets enable cross-national comparison (see Research in focus 13.4). The degree of geographical spread and the sample size of such datasets are invariably attained only in research that attracts quite substantial resources. It is certainly inconceivable that student projects could even get close to the coverage that such datasets attain. Thirdly, many datasets have been generated by highly experienced researchers and, in the case of some of the large datasets, like the WERS (see Research in focus 2.14), the UK Skills Survey (see Research in focus 7.3), and the LFS (see Research in focus 13.7), the data have been gathered by research organizations that have developed structures and control procedures to check on the quality of the emerging data (see Table 13.1).

# Table 13.1

**Large UK and European datasets suitable for secondary analysis**

| Title | Dataset details | Topics covered |
|---|---|---|
| Annual Employment Survey (AES) | Since 1971, a Census of Employment has been conducted every two years. Provides a picture of the level and distribution of employment in Great Britain consisting of sample censuses (300,000 businesses) and full census in 1993 covering 1.25 million businesses.<br>Since 1995, the Census of Employment has been replaced by the Annual Employment Survey (AES), a much smaller annual survey covering approximately 130,000 businesses, the results of which are published more rapidly. Sponsored by the Office for National Statistics: ***www.statistics.gov.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Data are collected on the number of jobs by geographical location, detailed industrial activity (SIC code), and whether full- or part-time. |
| British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) | Begun in 1991 and conducted annually by interview and questionnaire with a national representative sample of some 5,500 households and 10,300 individuals. It follows the same representative sample of individuals within a household each year. Data are deposited in the UK Data Archive. BHPS also has a homepage: ***www.iser.essex.ac.uk/survey/bhps*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Household organization; labour market behaviour; income and wealth; housing; health; and socio-economic values. |
| British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey | More or less annual survey since 1983 of a representative sample aged 18 and over by interview and questionnaire. Each survey comprises an hour-long interview and a self-completion questionnaire. Accessible through the National Centre for Social Research at: ***www.natcen.ac.uk/series/british-social-attitudes*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Covers wide range of areas of social attitudes and behaviour. The survey focuses mainly on people's attitudes, but also collects details of their behaviour patterns, household circumstances, and work. |
| European Community Studies and Eurobarometer | Since the early 1970s, public opinion surveys have been conducted on behalf of the European Commission at least twice a year in all member states of the European Union. The Eurobarometer series began in 1974. It comprises individual face-to-face interviews with national samples and is conducted biannually, in spring and autumn. Accessible through UK Economic and Social Data Service at: ***www.esds.ac.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Cross-national comparison of wide range of social and political issues, including European integration; life satisfaction; social goals; currency issues; working conditions; and travel. |

# Table 13.1

*Continued*

| Title | Dataset details | Topics covered |
|---|---|---|
| Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS) | A new survey which began in 2001 that combines and replaces the FES and NFS. Around 12,000 addresses are sampled and households are asked to keep diary records of expenditure and income over a two-week period. Face-to-face interviews are also conducted by CAPI. ***www.statistics.gov.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Information on household expenditure, income, and food consumption. |
| General Household Survey (GHS) | Annual interviews since 1971 with members aged over 16 in over 8,000 randomly sampled households. Accessible through UK Economic and Social Data Service at: ***www.esds.ac.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Has tended to cover standard issues such as education and health, about which questions are asked each year, plus additional items that vary annually. Huge variety of questions relating to social behaviour and attitudes. |
| International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) | Annual programme since 1983 based on cross-national collaboration covering survey topics important for social science research. Accessible through the GESIS Leibniz Institute for the Social Sciences at: ***www.issp.org*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Attitudes towards legal systems and the economy. Covers special topics, including work orientations (see Research in focus 13.4); the environment; and national identity. |
| Labour Force Survey (LFS) | Biennial interviews, 1973–83, annual interviews, 1984–91, comprising a quarterly survey of around 15,000 addresses per quarter and an additional survey in March–May; since 1991, quarterly survey of around 60,000 addresses. Since 1998, core questions are also administered in member states of the European Union. Accessible through UK Economic and Social Data Service at: ***www.esds.ac.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Covers hours worked, job search methods, training, and personal details, such as nationality and gender. |
| Office for National Statistics (ONS) Omnibus Survey | Survey carried out eight times a year since 1990 using face-to-face structured interviews on a sample of just under 2,000 people. Uses short, simple sets of questions to gain an impression of public attitudes concerning topics that change frequently. Accessible through UK Economic and Social Data Service at: ***www.esds.ac.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Covers core demographic questions about respondents plus questions that change from month to month about topics that change frequently—e.g. food safety, eating behaviour, personal finance, sports participation, Internet access, human rights, AIDS awareness. |
| Population Census (UK) | A simple questionnaire survey of the United Kingdom population held every ten years since 1801. The most recent Census at the time of writing was held in 2001 and the one before that in 1991. It can be accessed via UK Data Archive's Census Registration Service at: ***www.census.ac.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Contains information about households and individuals covering topics as diverse as age, gender, occupation, qualifications, ethnicity, social class, employment, family structure, amenities, and tenure. |
| UK New Earnings Survey | Since 1970, annual sample survey of the earnings of employees in Great Britain sponsored by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Reports are free to view or download from the National Statistics web site at: ***www.statistics.gov.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Looks at levels, composition, and distribution of earnings and details of hours worked, broken down by industry, occupation, age group, and gender. |
| Workplace Employment Relations Survey (previously Workplace Employee Relations Survey) (WERS) | This survey has been carried out in 1980, 1984, 1990, 1998, and 2004. The sample comprises workplaces where interviews are carried out with managers, worker representatives, and employees. Accessible through UK Economic and Social Data Service at: ***www.esds.ac.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010) | Wide range of areas covered, including: pay determination; recruitment and training; equal opportunities; workplace change; work attitudes; management organization; and employee representation. |



## Research in focus 13.4

## Cross-national comparison of work orientations: an example of a secondary dataset

The International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) has conducted two surveys focusing on the topic of work orientations, first in 1989 and again in 1997. Participating countries in the 1997 survey included Bangladesh, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the USA. As in 1989, the survey, which uses oral interviews and self-completion questionnaires, focused on respondents' general attitudes towards work and leisure, work organization, and work content. Opinions were elicited on such issues as: respondents' preferences for more work or more leisure time, the value of work in general, and the relative importance to respondents of factors such as job security, high income, opportunities for advancement, job interest, independence, and value to others. Other questions focused on what factors should determine how to pay two people doing the same kind of work, the effects the introduction of new technologies (computers, robots, etc.) would have on the workplace, attitudes about self-employment, size of the workplace, public- versus private-sector employment, and full-time versus part-time work. Respondents were also asked how easy or difficult it would be to find an acceptable job, how they felt about their present job, and how they viewed their working conditions (for example, if they came home exhausted from work, the amount of stress and possible danger on the job, working hours, place of work, whether their status was temporary or permanent, how their present job made use of their skills, and how they acquired these skills). Additional questions elicited information on relations in the workplace between management and employees and between workmates, how satisfied respondents were with their job, how they felt about their organization, how many days they had been absent (excluding vacation) from work in the last six months, how likely it was that they would try to find a new job within the next twelve months, and how much they worried about the possibility of losing their job. A special group of questions focused on respondents who were not currently employed. Demographic variables include age, sex, education, marital status, personal and family income, employment status, household size and composition, occupation, religion and church attendance, social class, union membership, political party, voting history, size of community, region, and ethnicity.
The dataset can be accessed via the UK Data Archive at the University of Essex.

- *Opportunity for longitudinal analysis*. Partly linked to the last point is the fact that secondary analysis can offer the opportunity for longitudinal research, which, as noted in Chapter 2, is rather rare in business and management research because of the time and cost involved. Sometimes, as with the WERS, a panel design has been employed and it is possible to chart trends and connections over time. Such data are sometimes analysed cross-sectionally, but there are obviously opportunities for longitudinal analysis as well. Also, with datasets such as the LFS, where similar data are collected over time, usually because certain interview questions are recycled each year, trends (such as changes in working time or shifting patterns of employment) can be identified over time. With such datasets, respondents differ from year to year, so that causal inferences over time cannot be readily established, but nonetheless it is still possible to gauge trends. For example, although the study by Knight and Latreille (2000) was confined to use of the 1998 WERS data (see Research in focus 13.5), the authors made frequent comparison with analyses from the 1990 WERS data to show that there had been relatively little change in patterns and rates of disciplinary sanctions and dismissals, and complaints to employment tribunals during this time period. Similarly, a study by Addison and Belfield (2000) used data from the 1998 WERS to replicate research done by other researchers who had used data from the 1990 WERS in order to test whether or not efforts to boost employee participation have had any effect.
- *Subgroup or subset analysis*. When large samples are the source of data (as in the WERS and the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS)), there is the opportunity to study what can often be quite sizeable subgroups of individuals or subsets of questions. Very often, in order to study

specialized categories of individuals, small, localized studies are the only feasible way forward because of costs. However, large datasets can frequently yield quite large nationally representative samples of specialized categories of individuals, such as workers in a particular industry or occupation, or with a particular set of personal characteristics. These can form the basis for representative sampling of individuals. Similarly, when a large-scale survey covers several topic areas, analysis may involve focusing on a smaller subset of questions that are covered by the survey. For example, Addison and Belfield (2000) were interested in the effects of European works councils on organizational performance and employee attitudes. They therefore analysed the responses from just *one* question in the 1998 WERS, which related to the status of these new institutional arrangements.

- *Opportunity for cross-cultural analysis*. Cross-cultural research has considerable appeal at a time when social scientists are more attuned to the processes associated with globalization and to cultural differences. It is easy to forget that many findings should not be taken to apply to countries other than the one in which the research was conducted. However, cross-cultural research presents barriers to the social scientist. There are obvious barriers to do with the cost and practical difficulties of doing research in a different country, especially when language and cultural differences are likely to be significant. The secondary analysis of comparable data from two or more countries provides one



## Research in focus 13.5

## Unfair dismissal complaints and employment tribunals: an example of secondary analysis using the WERS data

Knight and Latreille (2000) used the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS) data to investigate the incidence of disciplinary sanctions, dismissals, and unfair dismissal complaints made to UK employment tribunals. Using the management respondent dataset, their analysis is based on analysis of the following dependent variables:

1. the disciplinary sanction rate per 100 employees;
2. the dismissal rate per 100 employees; and
3. the incidence of claims for unfair dismissal during the twelve months preceding the survey.

In a consideration of disciplinary sanction rates, analysis of the WERS data revealed that the rate of disciplinary sanction is lower among part-time and female workers. This confirms findings of other researchers (for example, P. Edwards 1995), which suggested that women and part-time workers are more compliant to work discipline because of shorter tenure and lower pay. Knight and Latreille's findings show that the probability of dismissal is highest in workplaces with higher proportions of manual workers who are employed in routine and unskilled jobs. They also found that rates of dismissal are higher in workplaces where a greater proportion of younger workers is employed. These findings also confirm the findings of other researchers, which suggest that discipline and dismissal rates will be higher in workplaces where there is a high proportion of manual and less skilled workers because the costs of hiring and firing are lower compared with skilled employees. Finally, in workplaces where union membership is high, there is a significantly lower rate of dismissals, suggesting that unions protect their members from discipline and dismissal. In terms of the incidence of employment tribunal applications for unfair dismissal, the researchers found similar patterns: that the incidence of tribunal applications is higher in workplaces where there is a higher proportion of manual workers and in larger workplaces. The reasons for this latter finding, however, may relate to a number of factors, not least that there are likely to be more dismissals in larger workplaces and therefore more occasions on which employees are likely to feel sufficiently aggrieved to make an application to an employment tribunal. This highlights some of the limitations of the WERS data, from which it is not possible to establish the number of unfair dismissal claims brought at each workplace.

possible model for conducting cross-cultural research. The ISSP is explicitly concerned with bringing together findings from existing social science surveys from different countries and contexts. An example of the kind of cross-cultural analysis the programme has produced is given in Research in focus 13.4. Another example to illustrate how data from more than one country can be compared is a study by Coutrot (1998), in which he compared the industrial relations systems of France and the UK through statistical analysis of two broadly similar datasets—WERS 1990 and *Relations Professionnelles et Négociations d'Entreprise* (*REPONSE*) 1992 (a large-scale survey that covers similar issues to WERS and is based on interviews with managers and employee representatives in France). However, in order for a cross-cultural analysis to be conducted, some coordination is necessary so that the questions asked are comparable. Differences between countries in the definitions used and the criteria for inclusion can make this difficult, as the example relating to the use of official statistics, given by Jackie Davies (2001; see Research in focus 13.6), illustrates.



## Research in focus 13.6
## Difficulties in making cross-cultural comparisons using official statistics

Jackie Davies (2001) carried out an international comparison of labour disputes and stoppages through strike action in twenty-three OECD countries between 1990 and 1999 using statistical data collected at a national level. However, the article is careful to point out the limitations of such an analysis for the following reasons:

- *Voluntary notification*. In most of the countries governments rely on employers notifying them of any disputes, which they are then able to confirm through media reports.
- *Fail to measure full effects*. None of the countries records the full effects of stoppages at work—for example, measured in terms of lost working time in companies that are not involved in the dispute but are unable to work because of a shortage of materials caused by the strike.
- *Different thresholds for inclusion*. The countries differ in the criteria they use to determine when a stoppage is entered into the statistics. In the UK, for example, disputes involving fewer than ten employees or lasting less than one day are excluded from the recorded figures. In some countries, the thresholds for inclusion are particularly high. For example, in the USA records include only disputes involving more than 1,000 workers. This can make comparison of strike rates between countries particularly problematic.
- *Exclusion of certain industrial sectors*. Some of the countries exclude the effects of disputes in certain sectors—for example, Portugal omits public-sector and general strikes.
- *Changes in the way figures are recorded*. For example, France has changed the way it records lost working days, thus making it difficult to make a comparison over time.
- *Indirectly involved workers*. There are differences between the countries in their attempts to record those workers who are indirectly involved in a stoppage but who are unable to work because others at their workplace are on strike. Half of the countries, including France, the Netherlands, and New Zealand, attempt to include these workers in the statistics, but the other half, including Italy and Japan, do not.
- *Dispute rates affected by small number of very large strikes*. Some countries can appear to have very high labour dispute rates in one particular year because of one strike involving a large number of workers. In France, for example, there was a strike in 1995 involving the whole public sector. Some of these difficulties can be overcome by making comparisons over several years.

These differences lead some countries, such as the USA or Japan, to record a lower number of working days lost through labour disputes than say the UK or Germany, simply because of the different methods used for compiling statistics in the individual countries. This means that cross-cultural comparisons using nationally collected statistics need to be made with a degree of caution.

- *More time for data analysis*. Precisely because data collection is time-consuming, the analysis of data is often squeezed. It is easy to perceive the data collection as the difficult phase and to take the view that the analysis of data is relatively straightforward. This is not the case. Working out what to make of your data is no easy matter and requires considerable thought and often a preparedness to consider learning about unfamiliar techniques of data analysis. While secondary analysis invariably entails a lot of data management—partly so that you can get to know the data and partly so that you can get it into a form that you need (see below) (and this phase should not be underestimated)—the fact that you are freed from having to collect fresh data means that your approach to the analysis of data can be more considered than perhaps it might otherwise have been.
- *Reanalysis may offer new interpretations*. It is easy to take the view that, once a set of data has been analysed, the data have in some sense been drained of further insight. What, in other words, could possibly be gained by going over the same data that someone else has analysed? In fact, data can be analysed in so many different ways that it is very unusual for the range of possible analyses to be exhausted. Several possibilities can be envisaged. First, a secondary analyst may decide to consider the impact of a certain variable on the relationships between variables of interest. Such a possibility may not have been envisaged by the initial researchers. Secondly, the arrival of new theoretical ideas may suggest analyses that could not have been conceived of by the original researchers. In other words, the arrival of such new theoretical directions may prompt a reconsideration of the relevance of the data. Thirdly, an alternative method of quantitative data analysis may be employed which offers the prospect of a rather different interpretation of the data. Fourthly (and related to the last point), new methods of quantitative data analysis, such as meta-analysis (see Key concept 4.4), are continuously emerging. As awareness of such techniques spreads, and their potential relevance is recognized, researchers become interested in applying them to other datasets.
- *The wider obligations of the business researcher*. For all types of business research, research participants give up some of their time, usually for no reward. It is not unreasonable that the participants should expect that the data that they participate in generating should be mined to their fullest extent. However, much business research is chronically under-analysed. Primary researchers may feel they want to analyse only data relating to central research questions, or lose interest as a new set of research questions interpose themselves into their imagination. Making data available for secondary analysis enhances the possibility that fuller use will be made of the data.

## Limitations of secondary analysis

The foregoing list of benefits of secondary analysis sounds almost too good to be true. In fact, there are not very many limitations, but the following warrant some attention.

- *Lack of familiarity with data*. When you collect your own data, when the dataset is generated, it is hardly surprising that you are very familiar with the structure and contours of your data. However, with data collected by others, a period of familiarization is necessary. You have to get to grips with the range of variables, the ways in which the variables have been coded, and various aspects of the organization of the data. The period of familiarization can be quite substantial with large complex datasets and should not be underestimated.
- *Complexity of the data*. Some of the best-known datasets that are employed for secondary analysis, such as the WERS and the General Household Survey (GHS), are very large in the sense of having large numbers of both respondents and variables. Sometimes, the sheer volume of data can present problems with the management of the information at hand, and, again, a period of acclimatization may be required. Also, some of the most prominent datasets that have been employed for secondary analysis are known as *hierarchical* datasets, such as the WERS. The difficulty here is that the data are collected and presented at the level of both the organization and the individual, as well as other levels. The secondary analyst must decide which level of analysis is going to be employed. If the decision is to analyse individual-level data, the individual-level data must then be extracted from the dataset. Different data will apply to each level. Thus, at the organizational level, the WERS provides data on such variables as number of employees and level of ownership, while, at the individual level, data on age, qualifications, and salary level can be found. For example, Hoque (2003) was interested in the impact of Investors in People (IiP) accreditation on workplace training practice. He

used data from the 1998 WERS managers' survey to extract organization-level data to build up a profile of workplaces that have IiP accreditation. However, in order to evaluate the impact of IiP accreditation on training practice, Hoque relied on individual-level data, in the form of data about training activity taken from the survey of employees. These included questions about the number of days spent on training that were paid for or organized by the employer and whether or not the employee had, in the previous twelve months, discussed his or her training needs with his or her supervisor. He used these data to draw conclusions at the level of the organization, and to make comparisons of the effectiveness of training practice in accredited versus non-accredited workplaces.

- *No control over data quality*. The point has been made on several occasions that secondary analysis offers the opportunity for students and others to examine data of far higher quality than they could collect themselves. However, this point applies mainly to datasets from a regulated source such as the UK Data Archive (see Table 13.1). These tend to be commissioned by a government department and conducted by researchers who are regarded as independent or at



## Research in focus 13.7

## Working at home: an example of secondary analysis using the Labour Force Survey

The aim of Felstead et al.'s (2001) research was to obtain 'a reliable statistical portrait of people who work at home' (2001: 216) through analysis of a national dataset. Having identified a number of drawbacks associated with UK census data—notably the lack of currency of the data, which are collected only once every ten years, and the imprecision of the census in establishing exactly where work is conducted—they decided to carry out an analysis using Labour Force Survey (LFS) data instead. The data enabled specification of three separate groups:

- those who work *mainly* at home;
- those who work *partially* at home (at least one day a week); and
- those who work *sometimes* at home.

Their analysis suggests that, although the incidence of working at home is increasing, as popular commentaries on the future of work suggest, most of the people who work at home do so on a fairly irregular, infrequent basis. Even though the number of people working mainly at home increased from 1.5 per cent to 2.5 per cent over the 1991–8 period, this remains a very small proportion of the employed workforce.

In terms of characteristics, analysis showed that the image of people who work at home as predominantly comprising women with young children, the underqualified, and members of ethnic minorities was somewhat of an oversimplification. The results showed that, among those working mainly at home, women outnumber men, but the opposite is true among those who work at home partially and sometimes. Moreover, when the category of those who work mainly at home is disaggregated to show manual and non-manual workers, it reveals that 88.2 per cent of manual employees who work mainly at home are women. In terms of the impact of dependent children, the researchers found that the proportion of women with pre-school children is higher among those working mainly at home (15.8 per cent) than women in employment (10.2 per cent), but the reverse is true for men. In terms of qualifications, those who work mainly from home have qualification levels similar to those of the employed population, but those who work at home partially or sometimes are significantly more likely to be educated to degree level than the rest of the employed population. Finally, they suggest that ethnic minorities are generally under-represented among those who work at home. However, they are over-represented among those working mainly at home in manual occupations and are among the worst paid. The analysis reveals that 'the social relations of those who work at home are not homogeneous but rather comprise a fragmented and diverse mosaic' in which the 'cross-cutting divisions of gender, ethnicity, occupation and employment status' are prominent (2001: 229).

least somewhat distanced from the issues that are being investigated, such as academics working for a university research unit. While the quality of data should never be taken for granted, in the case of such datasets it is reasonably assured, though that is not to say that the data will necessarily meet all of a prospective secondary analyst's needs, since they may not have been collected on an aspect of a topic that would have been of considerable interest. As an example of this last point, see the use by Felstead et al. (2001) of the LFS (see Research in focus 13.7). With other datasets, somewhat more caution may be necessary in connection with assessment of data quality. This may be of particular concern when using data that are the result of commercially commissioned research, as is the case in market research or when using surveys that have been conducted in-house by a company that wants, for example, to measure the effectiveness of its HRM strategy.

- *Absence of key variables*. Because secondary analysis entails the analysis of data collected by others for their own purposes, it may be that one or more key variables may not be present. You may, for example, want to examine whether or not a relationship between two variables holds when one or more *other* variables are taken into account. Such an analysis is known as **multivariate analysis**, an area that will be touched on in the next chapter. The inability to examine the significance or otherwise of a theoretically important variable can be frustrating and can arise when, for example, a theoretical approach that has emerged since the collection of the data suggests its importance. This is also a drawback in meta-analysis, sometimes making it difficult for researchers to generate unambiguous conclusions as a result of the analysis (see Research in focus 13.8). Obviously, when researchers collect primary data themselves, the prospect of this happening should be less pronounced.



## Research in focus 13.8
## A meta-analysis of the relationship between rewards and intrinsic motivation

Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (2001) conducted a meta-analysis of reward effects on intrinsic motivation in educational settings such as classrooms. They began by calculating the effects of rewards—whether verbal or tangible—on the intrinsic motivation of students in educational settings. The authors examined 128 experiments published between 1971 and 1996. Their concept of reward included verbal rewards or positive feedback as well as tangible rewards, such as money or prizes, that are given to students to reinforce their motivation to learn. The researchers speculated that rewards could be used to affect student motivation in a way that was either informational or controlling. The meta-analysis tested the following hypotheses:

1. controlling positive feedback will lead to less intrinsic motivation than informational positive feedback;
2. tangible rewards will decrease intrinsic motivation.

The results were analysed in two separate meta-analyses by separating studies into those that examined verbal versus those that examined tangible rewards. The tangible reward studies were further subdivided into four groups according to whether they were:

- contingent on working on a task;
- *not* contingent on working on a task;
- contingent on finishing a task;
- contingent on a specified level of task performance.

The research found that verbal rewards tend to have an enhancing effect on intrinsic motivation, although they are more likely to have a negative effect if the interpersonal context within which they are administered is controlling rather than informational. On the other hand, the meta-analysis showed that tangible rewards significantly undermined intrinsic motivation, particularly among children. This led them to conclude that rewards substantially undermine intrinsic interest.

This contradicted the finding from an earlier meta-analytic study on the same subject (Cameron and Pierce 1994), which found that negative effects of reward occur only under certain conditions, and, when appropriately arranged, rewards could actually be used to enhance intrinsic motivation and performance. These competing meta-analyses have thus become the focus of fierce intellectual debate, critics comparing their analysis to 'putting a beautiful dessert (peaches and ice cream drizzled with raspberry sauce and a dollop of whipped cream) into an industrial blender and liquefying the entire concoction' (in Cameron 2001: 31). Much of the debate relates to the way that studies are categorized so their findings can be meaningfully compared. Criticisms are also levelled at the way studies are selected for inclusion in the analysis, for example: how long is the period of time for the meta-analysis and are only published studies considered, or does the analysis include unpublished studies, such as doctoral dissertations?

A further reason for the fierceness of the debate concerns the relationship between educational research and policy. One of the aims of this meta-analysis was to produce a definitive statement about the relationship between rewards and intrinsic motivation that could be used to inform current educational practice. Hence, Deci et al. relate their findings to a wider agenda by stating 'it is an injustice to the integrity of our teachers and students to simply advocate that educators focus on the use of rewards to control behaviour rather than grapple with the deeper issues of (*a*) why many students are not interested in learning within our educational system and (*b*) how intrinsic motivation and self regulation can be promoted among these students' (2001: 50). Similar issues about the role of meta-analysis in creating such a link between research and practice apply in the field of management and business.

## Accessing the UK Data Archive

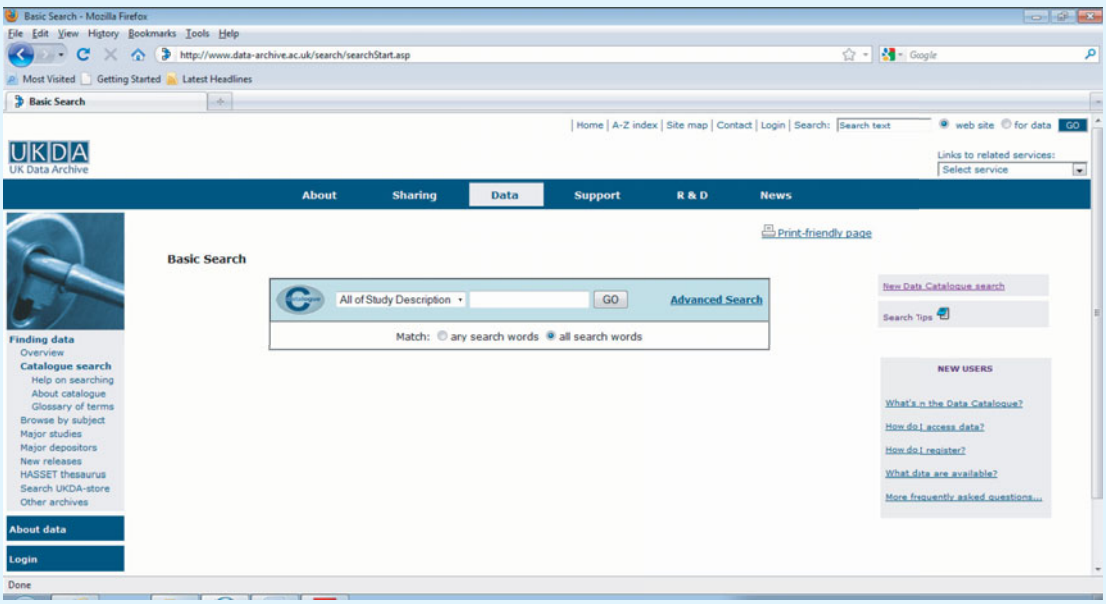
The UK Data Archive at the University of Essex is likely to be your main source of quantitative data for secondary analysis. Containing over 4,000 datasets, the Archive is the largest collection of accessible digital data on social and economic topics in the UK. Data are acquired from academic, commercial, and government sources and preserved and made available for further analysis. The Archive has a very good website, which can be searched in a variety of ways, such as keywords (see below).

Access to the Archive's holdings is provided to all academic researchers unless restrictions have been placed on the dataset by the owners. In addition to UK cross-sectoral studies from academic, government, and commercial sources, the Archive holds time series data, major longitudinal studies, panel surveys, and major cross-sectional studies. Data holdings include: UK Census data; General Household Survey (GHS); Family Expenditure Survey (FES); Office for National Statistics (ONS) Omnibus Survey; Labour Force Survey (LPS); British Crime Survey; and British Social Attitudes (BSA). Data are made available over the network, on CD-ROM, and on other media. The Archive can also be used to locate and acquire data from other archives within Europe and worldwide, using a series of reciprocal agreements with other institutions. By far the most straightforward route to find out whether or not the Archive contains data on the topic you are interested in is by going to the Archive's online catalogue, which can be obtained by going to the Archive's home page at:
***www.data-archive.ac.uk*** (accessed 10 June 2010)

and then selecting **Search catalogue**, which will take you to the catalogue search page (see Plate 13.1). You can select to search **All of Study Description**, which will search on all of the fields in the drop-down list as well as the abstract and methodology—for example, sampling methods, method of data collection, and data sources. Alternatively you can narrow your search to words in the **Title**, or you can select to search for **Assigned Subject Keywords** generated from a controlled vocabulary or thesaurus. You can also browse the catalogue by subject, such as **Industry and Management**. For example, we asked for studies with the keywords 'consumers' and 'technolog*' (* is used as a 'wild card' in searches so that it covers 'technology', 'technolog*ical*', 'technolog*ies*', etc.) found anywhere in the study description. Clicking on the 'Go' button resulted in twenty-two studies being found (see Plate 13.2). We selected Study Number SN 5289, which is described in the title as a 'Segmentation of Consumers according to Type and Level of Engagement with Electronic Communications and Technologies, 2004', and requested Study **Description/Documentation**. The information provided gave a description of the study, along with a variety of particulars: sponsors; sampling details; method of data

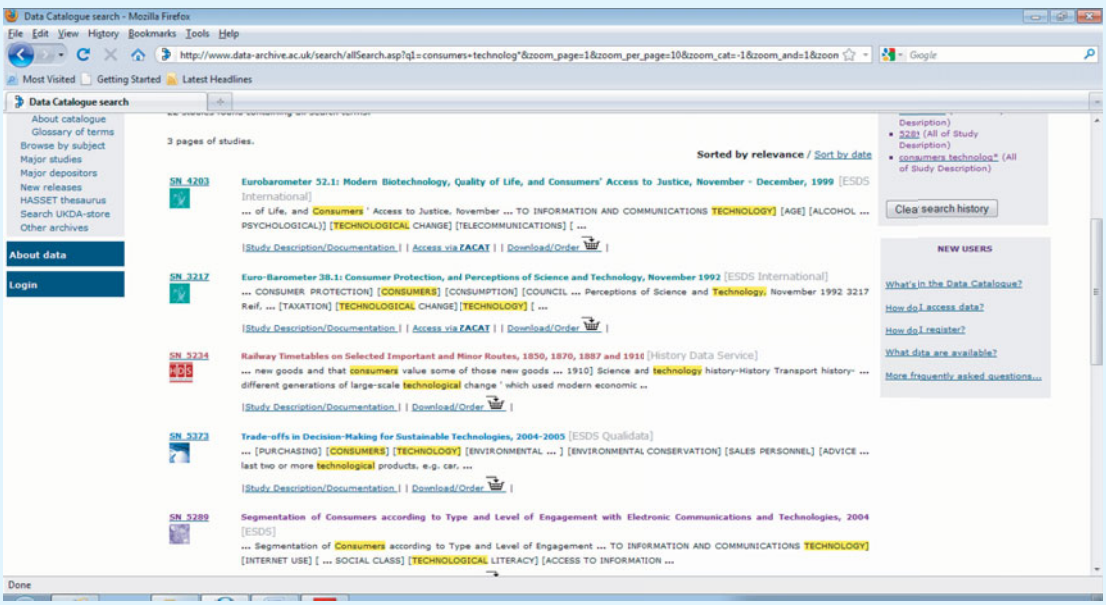
# Plate 13.1

## The UK Data Archive Search Catalogue




# Plate 13.2

## Results of a search



collection; main topics of the survey; and information about publications deriving from the study. It also informs you of any special conditions relating to access. With the one we specified, we are told that there are no special access restrictions and that the data are available in downloadable form to registered users. Access to data is via registration using the Athens authentication system or by setting up an account that will allow you to download data. You will need to find out if there is an administrative charge for receiving the data, but it is likely that, if you are a student at or a member of staff in a UK institution of higher education, there will be no charge.

Information about searching for qualitative data for the purpose of conducting a secondary analysis can be found in Chapter 21.

A website that has been designed to increase the use of secondary analysis and that provides a variety of hyperlinks to useful sites is:
***http://tramss.data-archive.ac.uk*** (accessed10 June 2010).

Table 13.1 lists several large datasets that are accessible to students and would repay further investigation in terms of their potential use in the context of research questions in which you might be interested. Further information about these datasets can be found via the UK Data Archive, unless otherwise specified in Table 13.1.

In addition to the government-sponsored datasets available via the UK Data Archive, there are some commercial sources of business information that can be used for secondary analysis. Target Group Index (TGI) is one of the largest commercially produced continuous consumer surveys conducted in Great Britain. The survey covers the ownership, level, and frequency of purchase and expenditure on most consumer products and services. It also covers information on respondents' media habits—that is, what they read, listen to, or watch. An annual survey is carried out among 25,000 adults nationwide. Data are available in two formats—hard copy (thirty-four volumes of data categorized by product group) and online through the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB). Similarly, the Price Waterhouse Cranfield (PWC) Survey of European Human Resource Management is an international comparative survey of human resource policies and practices carried out in 1990, 1991, and 1992 in more than fourteen European countries. The questionnaire, which was administered to personnel specialists, relates to changes in the employment relationship, recruitment, training, remuneration, and employee relations. However, although some of the older TGI survey data can be accessed from libraries and some of the PWC survey data have been published in raw form (see e.g. Brewster and Hegewisch 1994), accessing these kinds of data is likely to prove prohibitively expensive for a student researcher.

However, it need not necessarily be the case that secondary analysis entails the analysis of primary data collected by other researchers, as the examples of Bryman's (1997, 2000) secondary analysis using historical accounts of the US animation industry (see Research in focus 13.9) and Fernández, Taylor, and Bell's (2005) secondary analysis of data collected by a business organization (see Research in focus 13.10) illustrate.



## Research in focus 13.9
## Doing secondary analysis of secondary materials

It is often assumed that secondary analysis is always of primary data—that is, original data collected by another researcher. However, this need not always be the case. One of the authors has a long-standing interest in the early animation industry in the USA. The history of animation is a field where a considerable number of academic historians and animation enthusiasts have written some fascinating histories, both of the industry as a whole and of individual studios and directors. Bryman (1997) used these materials in relation to the debate, which has raged in marketing circles, about whether it is better to be a pioneer ('first mover') or a late entrant in an industry. Interestingly, this is a debate in which there is both quantitative and qualitative research: the former tends to show that it is better to be a pioneer, whereas the qualitative case studies tend to demonstrate that late entrants fare better. Bryman's examination of the animation industry came down firmly on the superiority of being a late entrant, since the early entrants floundered, while the later entrants were able to build upon the

experiences and mistakes of the pioneers. A later article (Bryman 2000) examined the industry in relation to various theories about technology and its relationship to the organization of work. The study shows, among other things, that the early pioneers of animation drew on norms about the design of technology and about the organization of work that were in tune with their times. Later entrants adopted similar approaches to the design of technology and of work in order to gain a sense of legitimacy in what was at the time a fledgling industry. These findings are interpreted in terms of institutional theory, which proposes that organizations are propelled to incorporate 'the practices and procedures defined by prevailing rationalized concepts of organizational work and institutionalized in society' (Meyer and Rowan 1977: 340). The two publications point to the potential that historical analysis has for the understanding of business and management and to the possibilities that can be opened up by an analysis of secondary materials like these histories of animation and studios.



## Research in focus 13.10
## Secondary analysis of data collected by an organization

In addition to use of other researchers' data for secondary analysis, there are also opportunities for researchers to analyse data that have been collected by non-research organizations for their own purposes. For example, Ferdández, Taylor, and Bell (2005) gained access to the database that had been set up by Investors in People (IiP) UK, which is the organization responsible for coordinating the IiP initiative in the UK. This contained information about over 60,000 organizations that had been involved with the IiP initiative over an eleven-year period, 1991–2001. The first challenge, however, was to make the data usable, since the original database was not set up in a way that was suitable for statistical analysis of the type that they wanted to carry out. After transferring the data from a Microsoft database into SPSS and removing 8,000 incomplete entries, Ferdández, Taylor, and Bell were able to start to test their hypotheses, which were generated from previous qualitative and quantitative studies of IiP.

One of the advantages of this database was that it enabled them to analyse the complete population of organizations that had been involved with IiP during this time period, rather than a sample of organizations from a general-purpose employment relations survey, as previous researchers had done (Hoque 2003). A further advantage was that the database enabled longitudinal analysis of take-up patterns of the IiP initiative. The analysis also revealed some interesting differences in the way that data had been collected. Previous analyses of IiP using WERS 1998 (see Research in focus 2.14) had relied on one question in the managerial survey, which asked: 'Is your organization/establishment accredited as an Investor in People?' However, Fernández, Taylor, and Bell argue that the term 'accreditation' may be confusing to respondents because it does not correspond to the categories used by IiP advisors, which are 'commitment' (the point at which the organization decides to start to work towards becoming an Investor in People) and 'recognition' (when an organization has reached the standard required to become an Investor in People). This distinction is significant, because commitment is not very meaningful as an indicator of an organization's approach to people management; only the category of 'recognition' indicates the existence of certain human resources practices. If respondents were not clear about this difference, or if the term was confusing to them, then the validity of the data would be questionable. Moreover, since there was only one question in WERS 1998 about Investors in People, there was no possibility of checking the validity of the question. Ferdández, Taylor, and Bell (2005) conclude that these datasets provide a useful comparison through which to test the validity of other widely used survey databases.



## Telling it like it is
## Using secondary analysis in a small-scale research project

Tore's research project involved secondary analysis of data about the social networks of university students. As he explained: 'I had a lot of data [about] social network involving real people. A lot of the data in the literature is based on power lines, computer networks and all this kind of stuff where people do not have much social interaction or human interaction so I thought, "Well, I have a whole lot of data involving real human interaction." So I thought it would be interesting to have a look at this data. So I spoke with my supervisor and he was very interested and then that's how the project got started.'

Tore's secondary analysis focused on data that formed part of a website that he had designed and run during the second year of his degree for students to socialize with one another. 'This data was taken from a database from the web site that included profiles of students. The profiles had variables such as age, sex, gender, what course they attended and then it also had messages sent between them. There were 1,284 students on the website and there were over 60,000 messages that had been sent between them. So I could measure interaction between them.'

Tore's experience is valuable because it shows how a research project need not necessarily involve the collection of primary data. His experience is also relatively unusual because, although it involves analysis of data that were not collected for the purpose of the research, he was the person who collected the data, even though he did not at the time consider using it for the purposes of research. It is more usual for secondary data analysis to involve the use of data collected by a third party. One of the big advantages for Tore in this situation was that he did not have to do anything to gain access or permission to use the data, since he was already in possession of the dataset.



*To hear more about Tore's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# Official statistics

The use and analysis of official statistics for purposes of business research have been subject to controversy for many years. Agencies of the state, in the course of their business, are required to keep a running record of their areas of activity. When these records are aggregated, they form the official statistics in an area of activity. Thus, in Great Britain, the Employment Service collects data that form the basis for the level of unemployment (also known as the 'claimant count'). This is just one, as it happens high-profile, set of statistics that can be subsumed under the general category of 'official statistics'. Such statistics are frequently the cause of headlines in the mass media—for example, if there has been a sharp increase in the level of unemployment. But they would also seem to offer considerable potential for business and management researchers. We could imagine such official statistics offering the researcher certain advantages over some other forms of quantitative data, such as data based on surveys.

- The data have already been collected. Therefore, as with other kinds of secondary analysis of data (see above), considerable time and expense may be saved. Also, the data may not be based on samples, so that a complete picture can be obtained.
- Since the people who are the source of the data are not being asked questions that are part of a research project, the problem of *reactivity* will be much less pronounced than when data are collected by interview or questionnaire.
- There is the prospect of analysing the data both cross-sectionally and longitudinally. When analysing the data cross-sectionally, we could examine employment rates (in addition to unemployment rates) in terms of such

standard variables as social class, income, ethnicity, age, gender, and region. Such analyses allow us to search for the factors that are associated with employment. Also, we can analyse the data over time. Precisely because the data are compiled over many years, it is possible to chart trends over time and perhaps to relate these to wider social changes.

- There is the prospect as well of cross-cultural analysis, since the official statistics from different nation states can be compared for a specific area of activity.

However, readers who recall the discussion of convergent validity introduced in Chapter 6 will already be on their guard. The official statistics concerned with an area of social life such as employment can be very misleading, because they record only those individuals who are processed by the agencies that have the responsibility for compiling the statistics. In addition, the process whereby official statistics are generated involves an element of interpretation. As the example in Research in focus 13.6 illustrates, government agencies will vary in terms of how they record information. In the case of labour disputes, this means that a substantial number of disputes are likely to go unrecorded as a result either of not being reported or of not being recognized as a labour dispute according to the criteria used by the agency. This level of unrecorded activity is sometimes referred to in relation to the field of crime (which has been one of the main areas for discussions about the uses and limitations of official statistics) as 'the dark figure' (Coleman and Moynihan 1996). Nor can the example of labour disputes be regarded as alone in this connection. To push the point even further, the deficiencies of official statistics also extend to the recording of levels of employment and unemployment. For example, the 'claimant count', which is used to gain a picture each month of the level of unemployment, may misrepresent the 'real' level of unemployment: people who are unemployed but who do not claim benefits or whose claim is disallowed will not be counted in the statistics, while those who form part of the claimant count but who work in part of what is known as the 'black' or 'informal' economy (and who therefore are not really unemployed) *will* be included in the unemployment statistics.

A great deal of national and cross-national official statistical information can be obtained via Internet sources. National Statistics Online is the UK website of official statistics, reflecting the economy, population, and society at national and local level, publishing summary stories and detailed data releases free of charge. This includes the UK National Statistics Publication Hub, which provides a useful access point for statistical information relating to various aspects of labour-market activity in the UK. Reports such as *Labour Market Trends* and *Social Trends* provide aggregated results based on this type of large-scale survey data. The website addresses for these gateways are given below:

***www.statistics.gov.uk*** (accessed 10 June 2010)
***www.statistics.gov.uk/hub*** (accessed 11 June 2010)

Finally, Europa, the portal site of the European Union, provides an additional useful source of official documents and statistics relating to European Union affairs and European integration. The website can be found at:

***europa.eu/index_en.htm*** (accessed 11 June 2010)

## Reliability and validity

Issues of reliability and validity seem to loom large in these considerations. Reliability seems to be jeopardized because definitions and policies regarding the phenomena to be counted vary over time, as the example of the different definitions of labour disputes used by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) nations given by Jackie Davies (2001) effectively illustrates (see Research in focus 13.6). The problem for the reliability of such statistics is that variations over time in levels of labour dispute may be due not to variations in the level of workplace conflict but to variations in the propensity to expend resources in recording these events. Also, there may be changes over time in the definitions of labour dispute or in the propensity of employers to report disputes to government. Such changes will clearly affect the degree to which fluctuations in the rate of occurrence of labour disputes reflect 'real' fluctuations in the rate of incidence. To the extent that such factors operate, the reliability of the data will be adversely affected and, as a result, validity will be similarly impaired.

Also, the problems with official statistics extend to the examination of the variables with which the rate of occurrence is associated. For example, it might be assumed that, if an examination of differences in labour disputes demonstrates that the rate varies by sector—for example, with industries such as manufacturing and transport having consistently high strike rates, whereas sectors like agriculture have very low ones—this implies that the industrial sector is related to labour militancy leading to strike action. There are two problems with drawing such an inference. First, there is an analytic difficulty known as *the* **ecological fallacy** (see Key concept 13.11). Secondly, even if we could ignore the problem of the ecological

fallacy (which we cannot, of course), we would still be faced with an issue that is related to the matter of validity. Variations between industrial sectors may be a product of factors other than the difference in their propensity to take strike action. Instead, the variations may be due to such factors as: variations in the average rates of pay and the terms and conditions of employment in different industrial sectors; likelihood of employers in different industrial sectors to report a dispute; differences in the number of employees working in these sectors; variation in the average number of people employed by organizations in different sectors; differences in the level of union membership and union activity; and variations in the effectiveness of formal communication systems.



## Key concept 13.11
## What is the ecological fallacy?

The ecological fallacy is the error of assuming that inferences about individuals or organizations can be made from findings relating to aggregate data. For example, official statistics might demonstrate a positive relationship between size of firm and the number of labour disputes involving strike action. Such a finding could be taken to imply that employees in larger firms are more likely than those in small firms to take strike action. However, it would be wrong to draw such an inference about individual firms or groups of employees from aggregate data. A particular large firm may show quite low levels of strike activity, while a particular small firm might show a high level. The fallacy can arise for several reasons—the reason highlighted in this case being that it may not be the size of the firm that is responsible for the level of strike activity.

## Condemning and resurrecting official statistics

Criticism of the use of various kinds of official statistics in the social sciences has drawn attention to these problems. Instead, it was recommended that researchers should turn their attention to the investigation of the organizational processes that produce the various deficiencies identified by the various writers. The effect of this view was to consign official statistics to the sidelines of business research so that it became an object of research interest rather than a potential source of data, although research based on official statistics continued in certain quarters. It would also be wrong to think that critique was the sole reason for the neglect of official statistics during this period. The fact that official statistics, because they are a sideline for many state agencies, are invariably not tailored to the needs of business and management researchers can be considered a further limitation. In other words, it may be that the definitions of apparently similar or identical terms (such as labour disputes or working at home) employed by those responsible for compiling official statistics may not be commensurate with the definitions employed by business and management researchers. However, others have argued that the flaws in many of the official statistics are probably no worse than the errors that occur in much measurement deriving from methods such as social surveys based on questionnaires and structured interviews (Bulmer 1980). Indeed, some forms of official statistics are probably very accurate by almost any set of criteria, such as population census data.

A further criticism of the rejection of various forms of official statistics is that it seems to imply that quantitative data compiled by business researchers are somehow error-free, or at least superior. However, as we have seen in previous chapters, while business and management researchers do their best to reduce the amount of error in their measurement of key concepts (such as through the standardization of the asking of questions and the recording of answers in survey research), it is not the case that the various measures that are derived are free of error. All social measurement is prone to error; what is crucial is taking steps to keep that error to a minimum. Therefore, to reject official statistics because they contain errors is misleading if in fact all measurement in business research contains errors. It is clear that the wholesale rejection of official statistics by many researchers has been tempered. While there is widespread recognition and acknowledgement that problems remain with certain forms of official statistics, each set of statistics has to be evaluated for the purposes of business and management research on its own merits.

## Official statistics as a form of unobtrusive measure

One of the most compelling and frequently cited cases for the continued use of official statistics is that they can be considered a form of unobtrusive measure, although nowadays many writers prefer to use the term 'unobtrusive method' (R. M. Lee 2000). This term is derived from the notion of 'unobtrusive measure' coined by Webb et al. (1966). In a highly influential book, Webb et al. argued that social researchers are excessively reliant on measures of social phenomena deriving from methods of data collection that are prone to *reactivity* (see Research in focus 2.8 and Key concept 11.8, where this idea is introduced). This means that, whenever people know that they are participating in a study (which is invariably the case with methods of data collection such as structured interviewing, self-completion questionnaire, and structured observation), a component of their replies or behaviour is likely to be influenced by their knowledge that they are being investigated. In other words, their answers to questions or the behaviour they exhibit may be untypical.

Official statistics fit fairly squarely in the second of the four types of unobtrusive measures outlined in Key concept 13.12. As noted in the box, this second grouping covers a very wide range of sources of data, which includes statistics generated by organizations that are not agencies of the state. This is a useful reminder that potentially interesting statistical data are frequently compiled by a wide range of organizations, such as market research agencies. There may be greater potential for searching out and mining statistical data produced by organizations that are relatively independent of the state.



## Key concept 13.12
## What are unobtrusive measures?

An unobtrusive measure is 'any method of observation that directly removes the observer from the set of interactions or events being studied' (Denzin 1970). Webb et al. (1966) distinguished four main types:

1. *Physical traces*. These are the 'signs left behind by a group' and include such things as graffiti and rubbish.
2. *Archive materials*. This category includes statistics collected by governmental and non-governmental organizations, such as diaries, the mass media, and historical records.
3. *Simple observation*. This refers to 'situations in which the observer has no control over the behaviour or sign in question, and plays an unobserved, passive, and non-intrusive role in the research situation' (Webb et al. 1966: 112).
4. *Contrived observation*. This is the same as simple observation, but the observer either actively varies the setting in some way (but without jeopardizing the unobtrusive quality of the observation) or employs hidden hardware to record observations, such as video cameras.

Official statistics would be subsumed under Category 2, as would content analysis of media of the kind described in Chapter 12. However, a content analysis like that described in Research in focus 12.9 would not be considered an example of an unobtrusive measure, because the material being content analysed (workplace ethnographies) derives from studies in which the data were generated in an obtrusive fashion. Structured observation of the kind covered in Chapter 11 will typically not fall into Categories 3 and 4, because the observer is usually known to those being observed. However, field stimulations, such as the mystery shopper example described in Research in focus 11.10, are an example of contrived observation. In this case, the mystery shoppers were not known by travel agents to be researchers and they actively varied the situation through communication of their specific holiday requirements in order to elicit travel agents' recommendations.

It is important to realize that Webb et al. (1966) were not intending that **unobtrusive methods** should supplant conventional methods. Instead, they argued that the problem they were identifying was the almost exclusive reliance upon methods that were likely to be affected by reactivity. Webb et al. argued for greater 'triangulation' (see Key concept 16.6) in social research, whereby conventional (reactive) and unobtrusive (non-reactive) methods would be employed in conjunction. For example, they wrote that they were providing an inventory of

unobtrusive methods, 'because they demonstrate ways in which the investigator may shore up reactive infirmities of the interview and questionnaire' (1966: 174).

It is worth noting that unobtrusive methods or measures encapsulate at least two kinds of ways of thinking about the process of capturing data. First, many so-called unobtrusive measures are in fact *sources* of data, such as graffiti, diaries, media articles, and official statistics. Such sources require analysis in order to be rendered interesting to a business school audience. Secondly, it includes *methods* of data collection, such as simple and contrived observation. While the data generated by such methods of data collection also require analysis, the data have to be produced by the methods. The data are not simply out there awaiting analysis in the way in which diaries or newspaper articles are (although, of course, a great deal of detective work is often necessary to unearth such sources). This means that neither of the terms 'unobtrusive methods' or 'unobtrusive measures' captures the variety of forms terribly well. A further disadvantage of the term 'unobtrusive measure' is that it seems to imply a connection to quantitative research alone, whereas certain approaches employed by qualitative researchers may qualify as unobtrusive methods.

R. M. Lee (2000) has developed a classification of unobtrusive methods that differs slightly from that of Webb et al. (1996). He distinguishes the following kinds of data:

1. *Found data.* This category corresponds more or less exactly to physical traces.
2. *Captured data.* This category comprises both *simple observation* and *contrived observation.*
3. *Retrieved data: running records.* This category would include, for example, company information that is held in a national database such as by Companies House in the UK , where records can be examined over quite long periods so that changes can be explored. He also includes in this category such things as job advertisements.
4. *Retrieved data: personal and episodic records.* With this category, Lee has in mind three kinds of data: **personal documents** (letters, diaries, memoirs), visual images in the mass media (for example, newspaper photographs and advertisements), and 'documents produced through "instititutional discovery" procedures' (R. M. Lee 2000: 87) (for example, reports of inquiries into factors that led to a disaster; see Research in Focus 21.4 for an example).
5. Lee also distinguishes *records produced through the Internet*, especially the various forms of computer-mediated communication, such as email and various kinds of message boards and chat rooms. In the years since Lee wrote, blogs (web logs) might be another kind.

Many of these different kinds of data are encountered elsewhere in this book, e.g. personal documents in Chapter 21 and computer-mediated communications in Chapter 21 and 26. Each of the different types that Webb et al. and Lee identify pose distinctive questions in terms of issues such as the reliability of the evidence and the ethical issues involved.



## Key points

- Secondary analysis of existing data offers the prospect of being able to explore research questions of interest to you without having to go through the process of collecting the data yourself.
- Very often, secondary analysis offers the opportunity of being able to employ high-quality datasets that are based on large, reasonably representative samples.
- Secondary analysis presents few disadvantages.
- The analysis of official statistics may be thought of as a special form of secondary analysis but one that is more controversial because of the unease about the reliability and validity of certain types of official data, especially those relating to unemployment and labour disputes.

- Some forms of official statistics are much less prone to errors, but there remains the possible problem of divergences of definition between compilers of such data and business researchers.
- Official statistics represent a form of unobtrusive method and enjoy certain advantages (especially lack of reactivity) because of that.



## Questions for review

- What is secondary analysis?

### *Other researchers' data*

- Outline the main advantages and limitations of secondary analysis of other researchers' data.
- Does the possibility of conducting a secondary analysis apply only to quantitative data produced by other researchers?
- What is meta-analysis and why is it of particular interest to researchers in business and management?

### *Official statistics*

- Why have many business researchers been sceptical about the use of official statistics for research purposes?
- How justified is their scepticism?
- What reliability and validity issues do official statistics pose?
- What are unobtrusive methods or measures? What is the chief advantage of such methods?



### Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Secondary Analysis and Official Statistics.*

# 14

# Quantitative data analysis

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 334

**A small research project** 335

- Missing data 338

**Types of variable** 340

**Univariate analysis** 342

- Frequency tables 342
- Diagrams 343
- Measures of central tendency 344
- Measures of dispersion 344

**Bivariate analysis** 346

- Relationships not causality 346
- Contingency tables 347
- Pearson's *r* 347
- Spearman's rho 349
- Phi and Cramér's *V* 350
- Comparing means and eta 350

**Multivariate analysis** 350

- Could the relationship be spurious? 351
- Could there be an intervening variable? 351
- Could a third variable moderate the relationship? 352

**Statistical significance** 352

- The chi-square test 355
- Correlation and statistical significance 355
- Comparing means and statistical significance 356

***Checklist*** 356
***Key points*** 356
***Questions for review*** 357



## Chapter outline

In this chapter, some of the basic but nonetheless most frequently used methods for analysing quantitative data analysis will be presented. In order to illustrate the use of the methods of data analysis, a small imaginary set of data based on attendance at a gym is used. It is the kind of small research project that would be feasible for most students doing undergraduate research projects for a dissertation or similar exercise. The chapter explores:

- the importance of *not* leaving considerations of how you will analyse your quantitative data until after you have collected all your data; you should be aware of the ways in which you would like to analyse your data from the earliest stage of your research;
- the distinctions between the different kinds of variable that can be generated in quantitative research; knowing how to distinguish types of variables is crucial so that you appreciate which methods of analysis can be applied when you examine variables and relationships between them;
- methods for analysing a single variable at a time (**univariate analysis**);
- methods for analysing relationships between variables (**bivariate analysis**);
- the analysis of relationships between three variables (**multivariate analysis**).

# Introduction

In this chapter, some very basic techniques for analysing quantitative data will be examined. In the next chapter, the ways in which these techniques can be implemented using sophisticated computer software will be introduced. As explained in Chapter 15, this software has been known for years as SPSS but the version described in the chapter is referred to as PASW Statistics 18. However, we will continue to refer to the software as SPSS, since the name SPSS is to be restored for the next release, when it will be referred to as IBM SPSS. The formulae that underpin the techniques to be discussed will not be presented, since the necessary calculations can easily be carried out by using SPSS. Two chapters cannot do justice to these topics and readers are advised to move as soon as possible on to books that provide more detailed and advanced treatments (e.g. Bryman and Cramer 2008).

Before beginning this exposition of techniques, we would like to give you advance warning of one of the biggest mistakes that people make about quantitative data analysis:

> I don't have to concern myself with how I'm going to analyse my survey data until after I've collected my data. I'll leave thinking about it till then, because it doesn't impinge on how I collect my data.

This is a common error that arises because quantitative data analysis looks like a distinct phase that occurs after the data have been collected (see, for example, Figure 6.1, in which the analysis of quantitative data is depicted as a late step—number 9—in quantitative research). Quantitative data analysis is indeed something that occurs typically at a late stage in the overall process and is also a distinct stage.

However, that does not mean that you should not be considering how you will analyse your data until then. In fact, you should be fully aware of what techniques you will apply at a fairly early stage—for example, when you are designing your questionnaire, observation schedule, coding frame, or whatever. The two main reasons for this are as follows.

- You cannot apply just any technique to any variable. Techniques have to be appropriately matched to the types of variables that you have created through your research. This means that you must be fully conversant with the ways in which different types of variable are classified.
- The size and nature of your sample are likely to impose limitations on the kinds of techniques you can use (see the discussion in Chapter 7 of the issue of 'Kind of analysis').

In other words, you need to be aware that decisions that you make at quite an early stage in the research process, such as the kinds of data you collect and the size of your sample, will have implications for the sorts of analysis that you will be able to conduct.



## A small research project

The discussion of quantitative data analysis will be based upon an imaginary piece of research carried out by an undergraduate marketing student for a dissertation. The student in question is interested in the role of the sport and leisure industry and in particular, because of her own enthusiasm for leisure clubs and gyms, with the ways in which such venues are used and people's reasons for joining them. She has read an article that suggests that participant involvement in adult fitness programmes is associated with their attitudinal loyalty, comprising investment of time and money, social pressure from significant others, and internalization or commitment to the fitness regime (S. H. Park 1996). She intends to use this theory as a framework for her findings. The student is also interested in issues relating to gender and body image and she suspects that men and women will differ in their reasons for going to a gym and the kinds of activities in which they engage in the gym. Her final issue of interest relates to the importance of age in determining gym involvement. In particular, she has discovered that previous research has shown that older people tend to show higher levels of attitudinal loyalty to recreational activities more generally and she wants to find out if this finding also applies to involvement in leisure clubs and gyms.

She secures the agreement of a gym close to her home to contact a sample of its members by post. The gym has 1,200 members and she decides to take a simple random sample of 10 per cent of the membership (that is, 120 members). She sends out postal questionnaires to members of the sample with a covering letter testifying to the gym's support of her research. One thing she wants to know is how much time people spend on each of the three main classes of activity in the gym: cardiovascular equipment, weights equipment, and exercises. She defines each of these carefully in the covering letter and asks members of the sample to keep a note of how long they spend on each of the three activities on their next visit. They are then requested to return the questionnaires to her in a prepaid reply envelope. She ends up with a sample of ninety questionnaires — a response rate of 75 per cent.

Part of the questionnaire is presented in Tips and skills 'Part of a questionnaire used in study of gym users'. The entire questionnaire runs to four pages, but only twelve of the questions are provided here. Many of the questions (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9) are pre-coded and the student simply has to circle the code to the far right of the question under the column 'code'. With the remainder of the questions, specific figures are requested and she simply transfers the relevant figure to the code column. An example of a questionnaire that has been completed by a respondent and coded by the student is presented in Tips and skills 'A completed and processed questionnaire'.



### Tips and skills
### Part of a questionnaire used in study of gym users

| Questionnaire | | Code |
|---|---|---|
| **1.** Are you male or female (please tick)? | | |
| Male ____ Female ____ | | 1 2 |
| **2.** How old are you? | | |
| ____ years | | |
| **3.** Which of the following best describes your *main* reason for going to the gym? (please tick *one* only) | | |
| Relaxation | ____ | 1 |
| Maintain or improve fitness | ____ | 2 |
| Lose weight | ____ | 3 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Meet others | ____ | 4 |
| Build strength | ____ | 5 |
| Other (please specify) | ____ | 6 |

**4.** When you go to the gym, how often do you use the cardiovascular equipment (jogger, step machine, bike, rower)? (please tick)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Always | ____ | 1 |
| Usually | ____ | 2 |
| Rarely | ____ | 3 |
| Never | ____ | 4 |

**5.** When you go to the gym, how often do you use the weights machines (including free weights)? (please tick)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Always | ____ | 1 |
| Usually | ____ | 2 |
| Rarely | ____ | 3 |
| Never | ____ | 4 |

**6.** How frequently do you usually go to the gym? (please tick)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Every day | ____ | 1 |
| 4–6 days a week | ____ | 2 |
| 2 or 3 days a week | ____ | 3 |
| Once a week | ____ | 4 |
| 2 or 3 times a month | ____ | 5 |
| Once a month | ____ | 6 |
| Less than once a month | ____ | 7 |

**7.** Are you usually accompanied when you go to the gym or do you usually go on your own? (please tick *one* only)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| On my own | ____ | 1 |
| With a friend | ____ | 2 |
| With a partner/spouse | ____ | 3 |

**8.** Do you have sources of regular exercise other than the gym?

Yes ____ No ____ 1 2

*If you have answered No to this question, please proceed to question 10*

**9.** If you have replied **Yes** to question 8, please indicate the *main* source of regular exercise in the last 6 months from this list. (please tick *one* only)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sport | ____ | 1 |
| Cycling on the road | ____ | 2 |
| Jogging | ____ | 3 |
| Long walks | ____ | 4 |
| Other (please specify) | ____ | 5 |

**10.** During your last visit to the gym, how many minutes did you spend on the cardiovascular equipment (jogger, step machine, bike, rower)?

____ minutes

**11.** During your last visit to the gym, how many minutes did you spend on the weights machines (including free weights)?

____ minutes

**12.** During your last visit to the gym, how many minutes did you spend on other activities (e.g. stretching exercises)?

____ minutes



# Tips and skills

## A completed and processed questionnaire

| Questionnaire | | Code |
|---|---|---|
| **1.** Are you male or female (please tick)? | | |
| Male ✓ Female ____ | | ① 2 |
| **2.** How old are you? | | |
| ***21*** years | | ***21*** |
| **3.** Which of the following best describes your *main* reason for going to the gym? (please tick *one* only) | | |
| Relaxation | ____ | 1 |
| Maintain or improve fitness | ✓ | ② |
| Lose weight | ____ | 3 |
| Meet others | ____ | 4 |
| Build strength | ____ | 5 |
| Other (please specify) | ____ | 6 |
| **4.** When you go to the gym, how often do you use the cardiovascular equipment (jogger, step machine, bike, rower)? (please tick) | | |
| Always | ✓ | ① |
| Usually | ____ | 2 |
| Rarely | ____ | 3 |
| Never | ____ | 4 |
| **5.** When you go to the gym, how often do you use the weights machines (including free weights)? (please tick) | | |
| Always | ✓ | ① |
| Usually | ____ | 2 |
| Rarely | ____ | 3 |
| Never | ____ | 4 |
| **6.** How frequently do you usually go to the gym? (please tick) | | |
| Every day | ____ | 1 |
| 4–6 days a week | ____ | 2 |
| 2 or 3 days a week | ✓ | ③ |
| Once a week | ____ | 4 |
| 2 or 3 times a month | ____ | 5 |
| Once a month | ____ | 6 |
| Less than once a month | ____ | 7 |
| **7.** Are you usually accompanied when you go to the gym or do you usually go on your own? (please tick *one* only) | | |
| On my own | ✓ | ① |
| With a friend | ____ | 2 |
| With a partner/spouse | ____ | 3 |
| **8.** Do you have sources of regular exercise other than the gym? | | |
| Yes ____ No ✓ | | 1 ② |
| *If you have answered No to this question, please proceed to question 10* | | |

**9.** If you have replied **Yes** to question 8, please indicate the *main* source of regular exercise in the last six months from this list. (please tick *one* only)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Sport | ____ | 1 |
| Cycling on the road | ____ | 2 |
| Jogging | ____ | 3 |
| Long walks | ____ | 4 |
| Other (please specify) | ____ | 5 |

**10.** During your last visit to the gym, how many minutes did you spend on the cardiovascular equipment (jogger, step machine, bike, rower)?

*33* minutes *33*

**11.** During your last visit to the gym, how many minutes did you spend on the weights machines (including free weights)?

*17* minutes *17*

**12.** During your last visit to the gym, how many minutes did you spend on other activities (e.g. stretching exercises)?

*5* minutes *5*

## Missing data

The data for all ninety respondents are presented in Tips and skills 'Gym survey data'. Each of the twelve questions is known for the time being as a variable number (var00001, etc.). The variable number is a default number that is imposed by SPSS, the statistical package that is described in the next chapter. Each variable number corresponds to the question number in Tips and skills 'Part of a questionnaire used in study of gym users' (i.e. var00001 is question 1, var00002 is question 2, etc.). An important issue arises in the management of data as to how to handle 'missing data'. Missing data arise when respondents fail to reply to a question—either by accident or because they do not want to answer the question. Thus, respondent 24 has failed to answer question 2, which is concerned with age. This has been coded as a zero (0) and it will be important to ensure that the computer software is notified of this fact, since it needs to be taken into account during the analysis. Also, question 9 has a large number of zeros, because many people did not answer it, because they have been filtered out by the previous question (i.e. they do not have other sources of regular exercise). These have also been coded as zero to denote missing data, though strictly speaking their failure to reply is more indicative of the question not being applicable to them. Note also, that there are zeros for var00010, var00011, and var00012. However, these do *not* denote missing data but that the respondent spends zero minutes on the activity in question. Everyone has answered questions 10, 11, and 12, so there are in fact no missing data for these variables. If there had been missing data, it would be necessary to code missing data with a number that could not also be a true figure. For example, nobody has spent 99 minutes on these activities, so this might be an appropriate number as it is easy to remember and could not be read by the computer as anything other than missing data.



# Tips and skills

## Gym survey data

| var00001 | var00002 | var00003 | var00004 | var00005 | var00006 | var00007 | var00008 | var00009 | var00010 | var00011 | var00012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 21 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 33 | 17 | 5 |
| 2 | 44 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 10 | 23 | 10 |
| 2 | 19 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 27 | 18 | 12 |
| 2 | 27 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 30 | 17 | 3 |
| 1 | 57 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 22 | 0 | 15 |
| 2 | 27 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 34 | 17 | 0 |
| 1 | 39 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 17 | 48 | 10 |
| 2 | 36 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 25 | 18 | 7 |
| 1 | 37 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 34 | 15 | 0 |
| 2 | 51 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 16 | 18 | 11 |
| 1 | 24 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 42 | 16 |
| 2 | 29 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 34 | 22 | 12 |
| 1 | 20 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 22 | 31 | 7 |
| 2 | 22 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 37 | 14 | 12 |
| 2 | 46 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 26 | 9 | 4 |
| 2 | 41 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 22 | 7 | 10 |
| 1 | 25 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 21 | 29 | 4 |
| 2 | 46 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 18 | 8 | 11 |
| 1 | 30 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 23 | 9 | 6 |
| 1 | 25 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 23 | 19 | 0 |
| 2 | 24 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 20 | 7 | 6 |
| 2 | 39 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 17 | 0 | 9 |
| 1 | 44 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 22 | 8 | 5 |
| 1 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 15 | 10 | 4 |
| 2 | 18 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 18 | 7 | 10 |
| 1 | 41 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 34 | 10 | 4 |
| 2 | 38 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 24 | 14 | 10 |
| 1 | 25 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 48 | 22 | 7 |
| 1 | 41 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 17 | 27 | 0 |
| 2 | 30 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 32 | 13 | 10 |
| 2 | 29 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 31 | 0 | 7 |
| 2 | 42 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 17 | 14 | 6 |
| 1 | 31 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 49 | 21 | 2 |
| 2 | 25 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 30 | 17 | 15 |
| 1 | 46 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 32 | 10 | 5 |
| 1 | 24 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 36 | 11 |
| 2 | 34 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 27 | 14 | 12 |
| 2 | 50 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 28 | 8 | 6 |
| 1 | 28 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 26 | 22 | 8 |
| 2 | 30 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 21 | 9 | 12 |
| 1 | 27 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 64 | 15 | 8 |
| 2 | 27 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 22 | 10 | 7 |
| 1 | 36 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 21 | 24 | 0 |
| 2 | 43 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 25 | 13 | 8 |
| 1 | 34 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 45 | 15 | 6 |
| 2 | 27 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 33 | 10 | 9 |
| 2 | 38 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 23 | 0 | 16 |
| 1 | 28 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 38 | 13 | 5 |
| 1 | 44 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 27 | 19 | 7 |
| 2 | 31 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 32 | 11 | 5 |
| 2 | 23 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 33 | 18 | 8 |
| 1 | 45 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 26 | 10 | 7 |

| var00001 | var00002 | var00003 | var00004 | var00005 | var00006 | var00007 | var00008 | var00009 | var00010 | var00011 | var00012 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 34 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 36 | 8 | 12 |
| 1 | 27 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 42 | 13 | 6 |
| 2 | 40 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 26 | 9 | 10 |
| 2 | 24 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 22 | 10 | 9 |
| 1 | 37 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 21 | 11 | 0 |
| 1 | 22 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 23 | 17 | 6 |
| 2 | 31 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 40 | 16 | 12 |
| 1 | 37 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 54 | 12 | 3 |
| 2 | 33 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 17 | 10 | 5 |
| 1 | 23 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 41 | 27 | 8 |
| 1 | 28 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 27 | 11 | 8 |
| 2 | 29 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 24 | 9 | 9 |
| 2 | 43 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 36 | 17 | 12 |
| 1 | 28 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 22 | 15 | 4 |
| 1 | 48 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 25 | 11 | 7 |
| 2 | 32 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 27 | 13 | 11 |
| 1 | 28 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 15 | 23 | 7 |
| 2 | 23 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 14 | 11 | 5 |
| 2 | 43 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 18 | 7 | 3 |
| 1 | 28 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 34 | 18 | 8 |
| 2 | 23 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 37 | 17 | 17 |
| 2 | 36 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 18 | 12 | 4 |
| 1 | 50 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 28 | 14 | 3 |
| 1 | 37 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 26 | 14 | 9 |
| 2 | 41 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 24 | 11 | 4 |
| 1 | 26 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 23 | 19 | 8 |
| 2 | 28 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 27 | 12 | 4 |
| 2 | 35 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 28 | 14 | 0 |
| 1 | 28 | 5 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 20 | 24 | 12 |
| 2 | 36 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 26 | 9 | 14 |
| 2 | 29 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 23 | 13 | 4 |
| 1 | 34 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 4 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 24 | 12 | 3 |
| 1 | 53 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 32 | 17 | 6 |
| 2 | 30 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 24 | 10 | 9 |
| 1 | 43 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 24 | 14 | 10 |
| 2 | 26 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 16 | 23 | 7 |
| 2 | 44 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 27 | 18 | 6 |
| 1 | 45 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 20 | 14 | 5 |



# Types of variable

One of the things that might strike you when you look at the questions is that the kinds of information that you receive varies by question. Some of the questions call for answers in terms of real numbers: questions 2, 10, 11, and 12. Questions 1 and 8 yield either/or answers and are therefore in the form of dichotomies. The rest of the questions take the form of lists of categories, but there are differences between these too. Some of the questions are in terms of answers that are rank ordered: questions 4, 5, and 6. Thus we can say in the case of question 6 that the category 'every day' implies greater frequency than '4–6 days a week', which in turn implies greater frequency than '2 or 3 days a week', and so on. However, in the case of questions 3, 7, and 9, the categories are *not* capable of

being rank ordered. We cannot say in the case of question 3 that 'relaxation' is more of something than 'maintain or improve fitness' or 'lose weight'.

These considerations lead to a classification of the different types of variable that are generated in the course of research. The four main types are:

- **Interval/ratio variables**. These are variables where the distances between the categories are identical across the range of categories. In the case of variables var00010 to var00011, the distance between the categories is one minute. Thus, a person may spend 32 minutes on cardiovascular equipment, which is 1 minute more than someone who spends 31 minutes on this equipment. That difference is the same as the difference between someone who spends 8 minutes and another who spends 9 minutes on the equipment. This is the highest level of measurement, and a very wide range of techniques of analysis can be applied to interval/ratio variables. There is, in fact, a distinction between interval and ratio variables, in that the latter are interval variables with a fixed zero point. However, since most ratio variables exhibit this quality in business research (for example, income, age, number of employees, revenue), they are not being distinguished here.
- *Ordinal variables*. These are variables whose categories can be rank ordered (as in the case of interval/ratio variables) but the distances between the categories are not equal across the range. Thus, in the case of question 6, the difference between the category 'every day' and '4–6 days a week' is not the same as the difference between '4–6 days a week' and '2 or 3 days a week', and so on. Nonetheless, we can say that 'every day' is more frequent than '4–6 days a week', which is more frequent than '2 or 3 days a week', etc. You should also bear in mind that, if you subsequently group an interval/**ratio variable** like var00002, which refers to people's ages, into categories (for example, 20 and under; 21–30; 31–40; 41–50; 51 and over), you are transforming it into an **ordinal variable**.
- *Nominal variables*. These variables, also known as *categorical variables*, comprise categories that cannot be rank ordered. As noted previously, we cannot say in the case of question 3 that 'relaxation' is more of something than 'maintain or improve fitness' or 'lose weight'.
- **Dichotomous variables**. These variables contain data that have only two categories (for example, gender). Their position in relation to the other types is slightly ambiguous, as they have only one interval. They can therefore be considered as having attributes of the other three types of variable. They look as though they are nominal variables, but because they have only one interval they are sometimes treated as ordinal variables. However, it is probably safest to treat them for most purposes as if they were ordinary nominal variables.

The four main types of variable and illustrations of them from the gym survey are provided in Table 14.1.

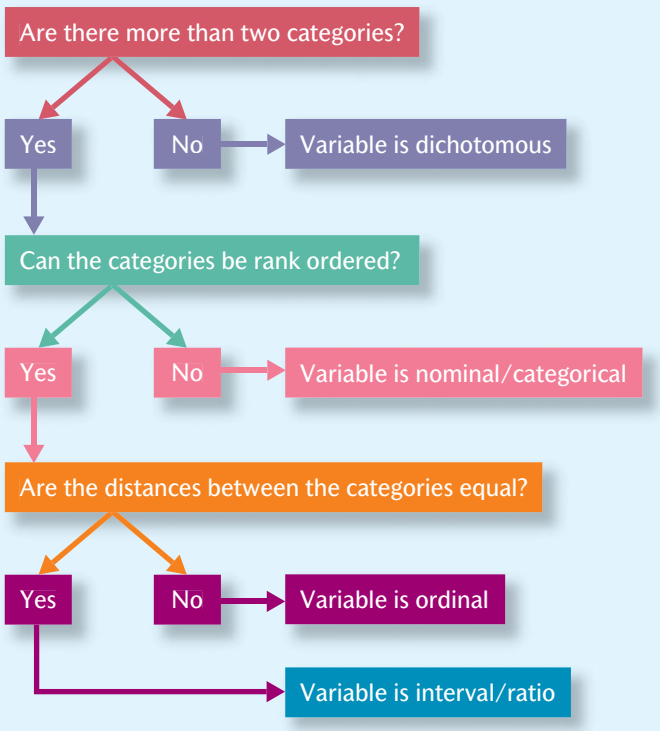
## Table 14.1

**Types of variable**

| Type | Description | Examples in gym study | Variable Name in SPSS (see Chapter 15) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Interval/ratio | Variables where the distances between the categories are identical across the range | var00002 | age |
| | | var00010 | cardmins |
| | | var00011 | weimins |
| | | var00012 | othmins |
| Ordinal | Variables whose categories can be rank ordered but the distances between the categories are not equal across the range | var00004 | carduse |
| | | var00005 | weiuse |
| | | var00006 | frequent |
| Nominal | Variables whose categories cannot be rank ordered; also known as *categorical* | var00003 | reasons |
| | | var00007 | accomp |
| | | var00009 | exercise |
| Dichotomous | Variables containing data that have only two categories | var00001 | gender |
| | | var00008 | othsourc |

## Figure 14.1

**Deciding how to categorize a variable**




Multiple-indicator (or multiple-item) measures of concepts, like Likert scales (see Research in focus 6.3), produce, strictly speaking, ordinal variables. However, many writers argue that they can be treated as though they produce interval/ratio variables, because of the relatively large number of categories they generate. For a brief discussion of this issue, see Bryman and Cramer (2004), who distinguish between 'true' interval/ratio variables and those produced by multiple-indicator measures (2004: 71–3).

Figure 14.1 provides guidance about how to identify variables of each type.



# Univariate analysis

**Univariate analysis** refers to the analysis of one variable at a time. In this section, the most common approaches will be outlined.

## Frequency tables

A **frequency table** provides the number of people and the percentage belonging to each of the categories for the variable in question. It can be used in relation to all of the different types of variable. An example of a frequency table is provided for var00003 in Table 14.2. Notice that nobody chose two of the possible choices of answer—'meet others' and 'other'—so these are not included in the table. The table shows, for example, that 33 members of the sample go to the gym to lose weight and that they represent 37 per cent (percentages are often rounded up

## Table 14.2

**Frequency table showing reasons for visiting the gym**

| Reason | *n* | % |
|---|---|---|
| Relaxation | 9 | 10 |
| Maintain or improve fitness | 31 | 34 |
| Lose weight | 33 | 37 |
| Build strength | 17 | 19 |
| TOTAL | 90 | 100 |

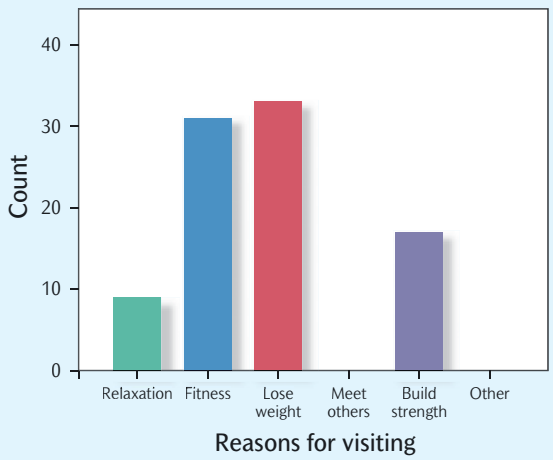
## Table 14.3

**Frequency table showing ages of gym members**

| Age | *n* | % |
|---|---|---|
| 20 and under | 3 | 3 |
| 21–30 | 39 | 44 |
| 31–40 | 23 | 26 |
| 41–50 | 21 | 24 |
| 51 and over | 3 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 89 | 100 |

## Figure 14.2

**Bar chart showing main reasons for visiting the gym (SPSS output)**




and down in frequency tables) of the entire sample. The procedure for generating a frequency table with SPSS is described on page 368.

If an interval/ratio variable (like people's ages) is to be presented in a frequency table format, it is invariably the case that the categories will need to be grouped. When grouping in this way, take care to ensure that the categories you create do not overlap (for example, like this: 20–30, 30–40, 40–50, etc.). An example of a frequency table for an interval/ratio variable is shown in Table 14.3, which provides a frequency table for var00002, which is concerned with the ages of those visiting the gym. If we do not group people in terms of age ranges, there would be thirty-four different categories, which is too many to take in. By creating five categories, the distribution of ages is easier to comprehend. Notice that the sample totals 89 and that the percentages are based on a total of 89 rather than 90. This is because this variable contains one missing value (respondent 24). The procedure for grouping respondents with SPSS is described on pages 364 and 366–7.

## Diagrams

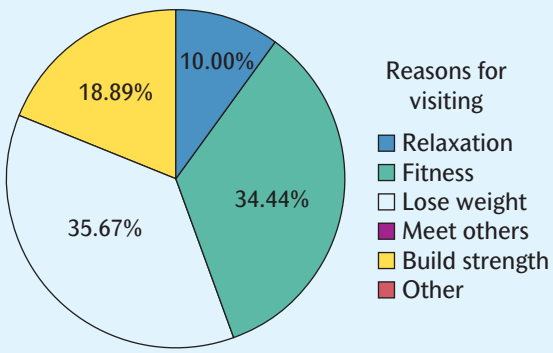
Diagrams are among the most frequently used methods of displaying quantitative data. Their chief advantage is that they are relatively easy to interpret and understand. If you are working with nominal or ordinal variables, the *bar chart* and the *pie chart* are two of the easiest methods to use. A bar chart of the same data presented in Table 14.2 is presented in Figure 14.2. Each bar represents the number of people falling in each category. This figure was produced with SPSS. The procedure for generating a bar chart with SPSS is described on pages 369–71.

Another way of displaying the same data is through a pie chart, like the one in Figure 14.3. This also shows the relative size of the different categories but also brings out the size of each slice relative to the total sample. The percentage that each slice represents of the whole sample is also given in this diagram, which was also produced with SPSS. The procedure for generating a pie chart with SPSS is described on page 371.

If you are displaying an interval/ratio variable, like var00002, a *histogram* is likely to be employed. Figure 14.4, which was also generated by SPSS, uses the same data and categories as Table 14.3. As with the bar chart, the bars represent the relative size of each of the age bands. However, note that, with the histogram, there is no space between the bars, whereas there is a space between the bars of a bar chart. Histograms are produced

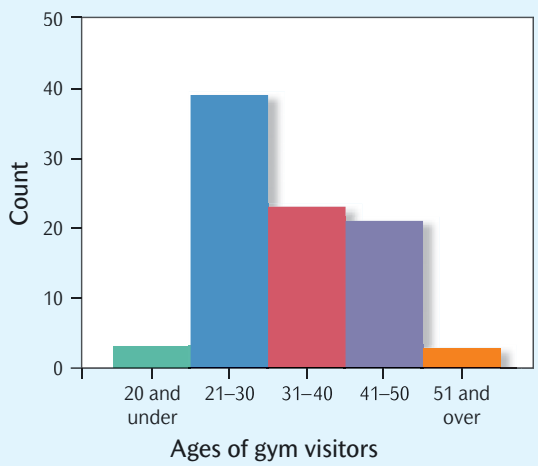
## Figure 14.3

**Pie chart showing main reasons for visiting the gym (SPSS output)**




## Figure 14.4

**Histogram showing the ages of gym visitors (SPSS output)**




for interval/ratio variables, whereas bar charts are produced for nominal and ordinal variables. The procedure for generating a histogram with SPSS is described on page 371.

## Measures of central tendency

**Measures of central tendency** encapsulate in one figure a value that is typical for a **distribution of values**. In effect, we are seeking out an average for a distribution, but, in quantitative data analysis, three different forms of average are recognized.

- *Arithmetic mean*. This is the average as we understand it in everyday use—that is, we add all the values in a distribution and then divide by the number of values. Thus, the arithmetic mean (or more simply the *mean*) for var00002 is 33.6, meaning that the average age of gym visitors is nearly 34 years of age. The mean should be employed only in relation to interval/ratio variables, though it is not uncommon to see it being used for ordinal variables as well.
- **Median**. This is the mid-point in a distribution of values. Whereas the mean is vulnerable to *outliers* (extreme values at either end of the distribution), which will exert considerable upwards or downwards pressure on the mean, by taking the mid-point of a distribution the median is not affected in this way. The median is derived by arraying all the values in a distribution from the smallest to the largest and then finding the middle point. If there is an even number of values, the median is calculated by taking the mean of the two middle numbers of the distribution. In the case of var00002, the median is 31. This is slightly lower than the mean, in part because some considerably older members (especially respondents 5 and 10) inflate the mean slightly. The median can be employed in relation to both interval/ratio and ordinal variables.
- **Mode**. This is the value that occurs most frequently in a distribution. The mode for var00002 is 28. The mode can be employed in relation to all types of variable.
- The procedure for generating the mean, median, and mode with SPSS is described on page 372.

## Measures of dispersion

The amount of variation in a sample can be just as interesting as providing estimates of the typical value of a distribution. For one thing, it becomes possible to draw contrasts between comparable distributions of values. For example, is there more or less variability in the amount of time spent on cardiovascular equipment as compared to weights machines?

The most obvious way of measuring dispersion is by the *range*. This is simply the difference between the maximum and the minimum value in a distribution of values associated with an interval/ratio variable. We find that the range for the two types of equipment is 64 minutes for the cardiovascular equipment and 48 minutes for the weights machines. This suggests that there is more

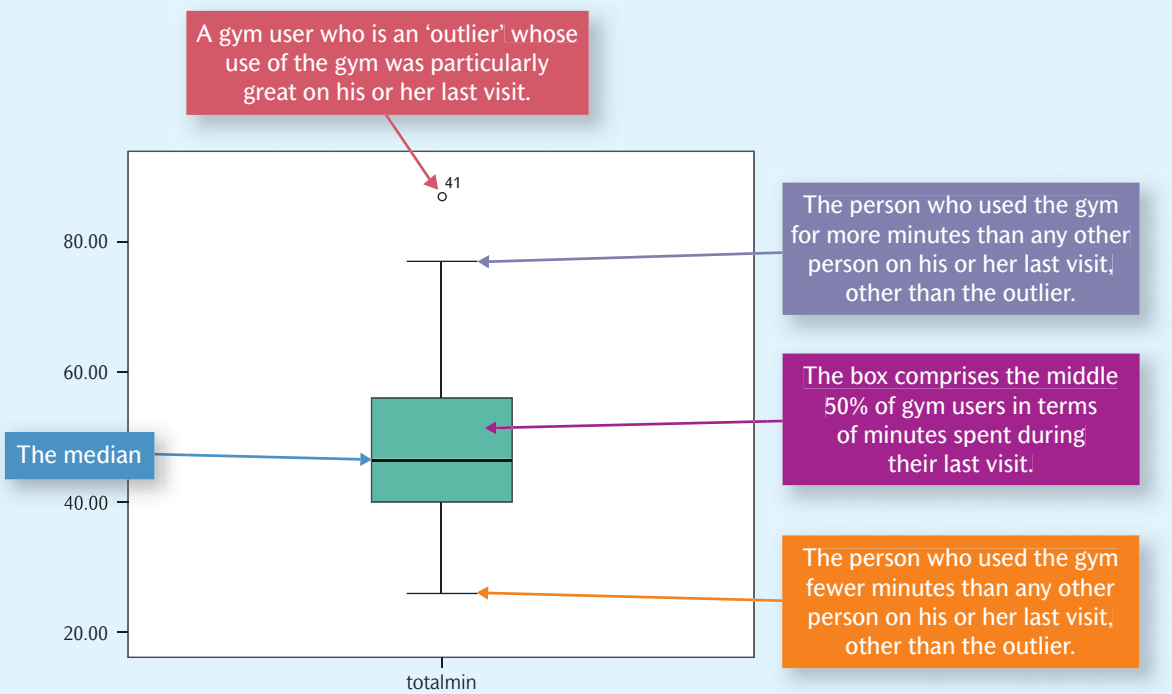
variability in the amount of time spent on the former. However, like the mean, the range is influenced by outliers, such as respondent 60 in the case of var00010.

Another **measure of dispersion** is the **standard deviation**, which is essentially the average amount of variation around the mean. Although the calculation is somewhat more complicated than this, the standard deviation is calculated by taking the difference between each value in a distribution and the mean and then dividing the total of the differences by the number of values. The standard deviation for var00010 is 9.9 minutes and for var00011 it is 8 minutes. Thus, not only is the average amount of time spent on the cardiovascular equipment higher than for the weights equipment; the standard deviation is greater too. The standard deviation is also affected by outliers, but, unlike the range, their impact is offset by dividing by the number of values in the distribution. The procedure for generating the standard deviation with SPSS is described on page 372.

A type of figure that has become popular for displaying interval/ratio variables is the *boxplot* (see Figure 14.5). This form of display provides an indication of both central tendency (the median) and dispersion (the range). It also indicates whether there are any outliers. Figure 14.5 displays a boxplot for the total number of minutes users spent during their most recent gym visit. There is an **outlier**—case number 41 who spent a total of 87 minutes in the gym. The box represents the middle 50 per cent of users. The upper line of the box indicates the greatest use of the gym within the 50 per cent and the lower line of the box represents the least use of the gym within the 50 per cent. The line going across the box indicates the median. The line going upwards from the box goes up to the person whose use of the gym was greater than any other user, other than case number 41. The line going downwards from the box goes down to the person whose use of the gym was lower than that of any other user. Boxplots are useful because they display both central tendency and dispersion. They vary in their shape depending on whether cases tend to be high or low in relation to the median. With Figure 14.5, the box and the median are closer to the bottom end of the distribution, suggesting less variation among gym users below the median. There is more variation above the median. The procedure for generating the boxplot with SPSS is described on page 372.

# Figure 14.5

## A boxplot for the number of minutes spent on the last visit to the gym





# Bivariate analysis

Bivariate analysis is concerned with the analysis of two variables at a time in order to uncover whether or not the two variables are related. Exploring relationships between variables means searching for evidence that the variation in one variable coincides with variation in another variable. A variety of techniques is available for examining relationships, but their use depends on the nature of the two variables being analysed. Figure 14.6 attempts to portray the main types of bivariate analysis according to the types of variable involved.

## Relationships not causality

An important point to bear in mind about all of the methods for analysing relationships between variables is that it is precisely *relationships* that they uncover. As was noted in Chapter 2 in relation to cross-sectional designs, this means that you cannot infer that one variable causes another. Indeed, there are cases when what appears to be a causal influence working in one direction actually works in the other way. An interesting example of this problem of causal direction will be presented much later in the book in Chapter 25. The example shows that Sutton and Rafaeli (1988) expected to find a relationship between the display of positive emotions (for example, smiling, or friendliness on the part of checkout staff) in retail outlets and sales in those outlets. In other words, the display of positive emotions was deemed to have a causal influence on levels of retail sales. In fact, the relationship was found to be the other way round: levels of retail sales exerted a causal influence on the display of emotions (see Research in focus 25.9 for more detailed explanation of this study).

Sometimes, we may feel confident that we can infer a causal direction when a relationship between two variables is discerned—for example, if we find that age and voting behaviour are related. It is impossible for the way people vote to influence their age, so, if we do find the two variables to be related, we can infer with complete confidence that age is the independent variable. It is not uncommon for researchers, when analysing their data, to draw inferences about causal direction based on their

## Figure 14.6

### Methods of bivariate analysis

| | Nominal | Ordinal | Interval/ratio | Dichotomous |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Nominal** | Contingency table + chi-square ($\chi^2$) + Cramér's *V* | Contingency table + chi-square ($\chi^2$) + Cramér's *V* | Contingency table + chi-square ($\chi^2$) + Cramér's *V*. If the interval/ratio variable can be identified as the dependent variable, compare means + eta | Contingency table + chi-square ($\chi^2$) + Cramér's *V* |
| **Ordinal** | Contingency table + chi-square ($\chi^2$) + Cramér's *V* | Spearman's rho (ρ) | Spearman's rho (ρ) | Spearman's rho (ρ) |
| **Interval/ratio** | Contingency table + chi-square ($\chi^2$) + Cramér's *V*. If the interval/ratio variable can be identified as the dependent variable, compare means + eta | Spearman's rho (ρ) | Pearson's *r* | Spearman's rho (ρ) |
| **Dichotomous** | Contingency table + chi-square ($\chi^2$) + Cramér's *V* | Spearman's rho (ρ) | Spearman's rho (ρ) | phi (ϕ) |

assumptions about the likely causal direction among related variables, as Sutton and Rafaeli (1988) did in their study. Although such inferences may be based on sound reasoning, they can only be inferences, and there is the possibility that the real pattern of causal direction is the opposite of that which is anticipated.

## Contingency tables

Contingency tables are probably the most flexible of all methods of analysing relationships in that they can be employed in relation to any pair of variables, though they are not the most efficient method for some pairs, which is the reason why the method is not recommended in all of the cells in Figure 14.6. A contingency table is like a frequency table, but it allows two variables to be simultaneously analysed so that relationships between the two variables can be examined. It is normal for contingency tables to include percentages, since these make the tables easier to interpret. Table 14.4 examines the relationship between two variables from the gym survey: gender and reasons for visiting the gym. The percentages are *column percentages*—that is, they calculate the number in each cell as a percentage of the total number in that column. Thus, to take the top left-hand cell, the 3 men who go to the gym for relaxation are 7 per cent of all 42 men in the sample. Users of contingency tables often present the presumed independent variable (if one can in fact be presumed) as the column variable and the presumed dependent variable as the rows variable. In this case, we are presuming that gender influences reasons for going to the gym. In fact, we know that going to the gym cannot influence gender. In such circumstances, it is column rather than row percentages that will be required. The procedure for generating a contingency table with SPSS is described on pages 372–4.

Table 14.4

**Contingency table showing the relationship between gender and reasons for visiting the gym**

| Reasons | Gender | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | | Female | |
| | No. | % | No. | % |
| Relaxation | 3 | 7 | 6 | 13 |
| Fitness | 15 | 36 | 16 | 33 |
| Lose weight | 8 | 19 | 25 | 52 |
| Build strength | 16 | 38 | 1 | 2 |
| TOTAL | 42 | | 48 | |

*Note*: $\chi^2 = 22.726$ $p < 0.0001$.

Contingency tables are generated so that patterns of association can be searched for. In this case, we can see clear gender differences in reasons for visiting the gym. As our student anticipated, females are much more likely than men to go to the gym to lose weight. They are also somewhat more likely to go to the gym for relaxation. By contrast, men are much more likely to go to the gym to build strength. There is little difference between the two genders in terms of fitness as a reason.

## Pearson's *r*

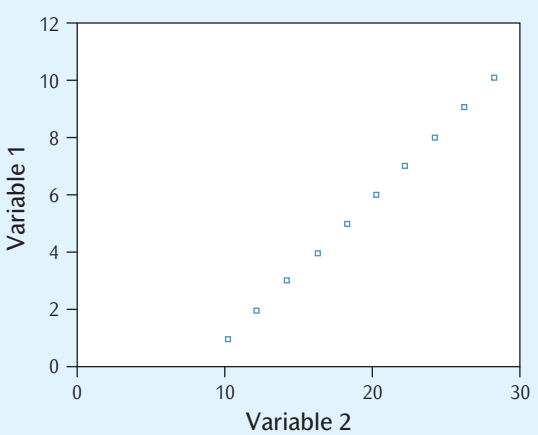
**Pearson's *r*** is a method for examining relationships between interval/ratio variables. The chief features of this method are as follows:

- the coefficient will almost certainly lie between 0 (zero or no relationship between the two variables) and 1 (a perfect relationship)—this indicates the *strength* of a relationship;
- the closer the coefficient is to 1, the stronger the relationship; the closer it is to 0, the weaker the relationship;
- the coefficient will be either positive or negative—this indicates the *direction* of a relationship.

To illustrate these features consider Tips and skills 'Imaginary data from five variables to show different types of relationship', which gives imaginary data for five variables, and the scatter diagrams in Figures 14.7–14.10, which look at the relationship between pairs of

Figure 14.7

**Scatter diagram showing a perfect positive relationship**



interval/ ratio variables. The scatter diagram for variables 1 and 2 is presented in Figure 14.7 and shows a perfect positive relationship, which would have a Pearson's *r* correlation of 1. This means that, as one variable increases, the other variable increases by the same amount and that no other variable is related to either of them. If the correlation was below 1, it would mean that variable 1 is related to at least one other variable as well as to variable 2.



## Tips and skills

## Imaginary data from five variables to show different types of relationship

| Variables | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1 | 10 | 50 | 7 | 9 |
| 2 | 12 | 45 | 13 | 23 |
| 3 | 14 | 40 | 18 | 7 |
| 4 | 16 | 35 | 14 | 15 |
| 5 | 18 | 30 | 16 | 6 |
| 6 | 20 | 25 | 23 | 22 |
| 7 | 22 | 20 | 19 | 12 |
| 8 | 24 | 15 | 24 | 8 |
| 9 | 26 | 10 | 22 | 18 |
| 10 | 28 | 5 | 24 | 10 |

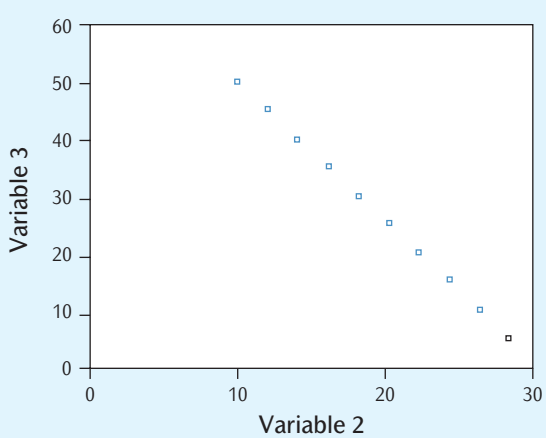
The scatter diagram for variables 2 and 3 (see Figure 14.8) shows a perfect negative relationship, which would have a Pearson's *r* correlation of –1. This means that, as one variable increases, the other variable decreases and that no other variable is related to either of them.

If there was no or virtually no correlation between the variables, there would be no apparent pattern to the markers in the scatter diagram. This is the case with the relationship between variables 2 and 5. The correlation is virtually zero at –0.041. This means that the variation in each variable is associated with other variables than the ones present in this analysis. Figure 14.9 shows the appropriate scatter diagram.

If a relationship is strong, a clear patterning to the variables will be evident. This is the case with variables 2 and 4, whose scatter diagram appears in Figure 14.10. There is clearly a positive relationship, and in fact the Pearson's *r* value is +0.88 (usually, positive correlations are presented without the + sign). This means that the variation in the two variables is very closely connected, but that there is some influence of other variables in the extent to which they vary.

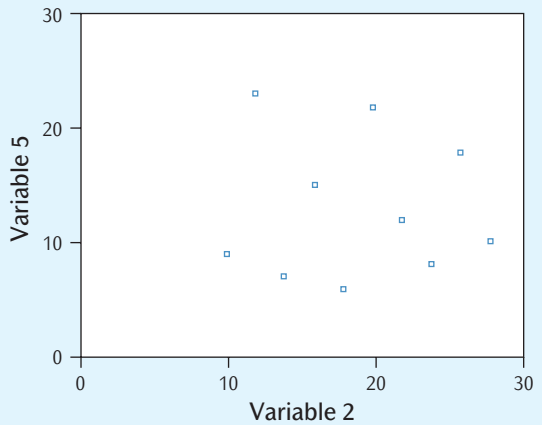
## Figure 14.8

**Scatter diagram showing a perfect negative relationship**



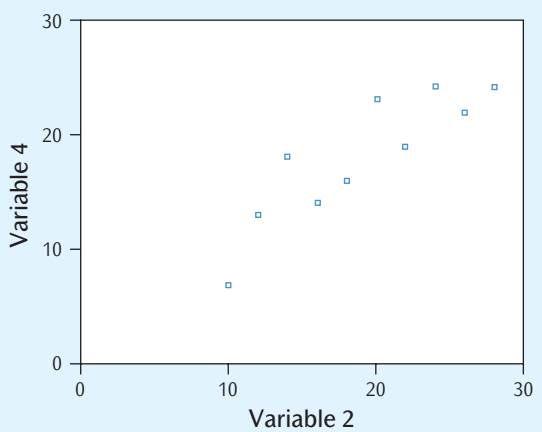
## Figure 14.9

**Scatter diagram showing two variables that are not related**




## Figure 14.10

**Scatter diagram showing a strong positive relationship**




Going back to the gym survey, we find that the correlation between age (var00002) and the amount of time spent on weights equipment (var00011) is –0.27, implying a weak negative relationship. This suggests that there is a tendency such that, the older a person is, the less likely he or she is to spend much time on such equipment, but that other variables clearly influence the amount of time spent on this activity.

In order to be able to use Pearson's *r*, the relationship between the two variables must be broadly *linear*—that is, when plotted on a scatter diagram, the values of the two variables approximate to a straight line (even though they may be scattered, as in Figure 14.10) and do not curve. Therefore, plotting a scatter diagram before using Pearson's *r* is important, in order to determine that the nature of the relationship between a pair of variables does not violate the assumptions being made when this method of correlation is employed.

If you square a value of Pearson's *r*, you can derive a further useful statisti—namely, the *coefficient of determination*, which expresses how much of the variation in one variable is due to the other variable. Thus, if *r* is –0.27, $r^2$ is 0.0729. We can then express this as a percentage by multiplying $r^2$ by 100. The product of this exercise is 7 per cent. This means that just 7 per cent of the variation in the use of cardiovascular equipment is accounted for by age. The coefficient of determination is a useful adjunct to the interpretation of correlation information.

The procedure for generating Pearson's *r* with SPSS is described on page 374 and the procedure for generating scatter diagrams with SPSS is described on pages 374 and 378–80.

## Spearman's rho

**Spearman's rho**, which is often represented with the Greek letter ρ, is designed for the use of pairs of ordinal variables, but is also used, as suggested by Figure 14.6, when one variable is ordinal and the other is interval/ratio. It is exactly the same as Pearson's *r* in terms of the outcome of calculating it, in that the computed value of rho will be either positive or negative and will vary between 0 and 1. If we look at the gym study, there are three ordinal variables: var00004, var00005, and var00006 (see Table 14.1). If we use Spearman's rho to calculate the correlation between the first two variables, we find that the correlation between var00004 and var00005—frequency of use of the cardiovascular and weights equipment—is low, at 0.2. A slightly stronger relationship is found between var00006 (frequency of going to the gym) and var00010 (amount of time spent on the cardiovascular equipment), which is 0.4. Note that the latter variable is an interval/ratio variable. When confronted with a situation in which we want to calculate the correlation between an ordinal and an interval/ratio variable, we cannot use Pearson's *r*, because both variables must be at the interval/ratio level of measurement. Instead, we must use Spearman's rho (see Figure 14.6). The procedure for generating Spearman's rho with SPSS is described on page 374.

Table 14.5

**Comparing subgroup means: time spent on cardiovascular equipment by reasons for going to the gym**

| Time | Reasons | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Relaxation | Fitness | Lose weight | Build strength | Total |
| Mean number of minutes spent on cardiovascular equipment | 18.33 | 30.55 | 28.36 | 19.65 | 26.47 |
| *n* | 9 | 31 | 33 | 17 | 90 |

## Phi and Cramér's *V*

**Phi** ($\phi$) and **Cramér's *V*** are two closely related statistics. The phi coefficient is used for the analysis of the relationship between two dichotomous variables. Like Pearson's *r*, it results in a computed statistic that varies between 0 and + or –1. The correlation between var00001 (gender) and var00008 (other sources of regular exercise) is 0.24, implying that males are somewhat more likely than females to have other sources of regular exercise, though the relationship is weak.

Cramér's *V* uses a similar formula to phi and can be employed with nominal variables (see Figure 14.6). However, this statistic can take on only a positive value, so that it can give an indication only of the strength of the relationship between two variables, not of the direction. The value of Cramér's *V* associated with the analysis presented in Table 14.4 is 0.50. This suggests a moderate relationship between the two variables. Cramér's *V* is usually reported along with a contingency table and a **chi-square test** (see below). It is not normally presented on its own. The procedure for generating phi and Cramér's *V* with SPSS is described on pages 372–4.

## Comparing means and eta

If you need to examine the relationship between an interval/ratio variable and a **nominal variable**, and if the latter can be relatively unambiguously identified as the independent variable, a potentially fruitful approach is to compare the means of the interval/ratio variable for each subgroup of the nominal variable. As an example, consider Table 14.5, which presents the mean number of minutes spent on cardiovascular equipment (var00010) for each of the four categories of reasons for going to the gym (var00003). The means suggest that people who go to the gym for fitness or to lose weight spend considerably more time on this equipment than people who go to the gym to relax or to build strength.

This procedure is often accompanied by a test of association between variables called **eta**. This statistic expresses the level of association between the two variables and, like Cramér's *V*, will always be positive. The level of eta for the data in Table 14.5 is 0.48. This suggests a moderate relationship between the two variables. Eta-squared expresses the amount of variation in the interval/ratio variable that is due to the nominal variable. In the case of this example, eta-squared is 22 per cent. Eta is a very flexible method for exploring the relationship between two variables, because it can be employed when one variable is nominal and the other interval/ratio. Also, it does not make the assumption that the relationship between variables is linear. The procedure for comparing means and for generating eta with SPSS is described on page 380.



# Multivariate analysis

Multivariate analysis entails the simultaneous analysis of three or more variables. This is quite an advanced topic, and it is recommended that readers examine a textbook on quantitative data analysis for an exposition of techniques (e.g. Bryman and Cramer 2008). There are three main contexts within which multivariate analysis might be employed.

## Could the relationship be spurious?

In order for a relationship between two variables to be established, not only must there be evidence that there is a relationship, but the relationship must be shown to be *non-spurious*. A **spurious relationship** exists when there appears to be a relationship between two variables, but the relationship is not real: it is being produced because each variable is itself related to a third variable. For example, if we find a relationship in a firm between employees' levels of organizational commitment and job satisfaction, we might ask: could the relationship be an artefact of the leadership style of respondents' immediate managers (see Figure 14.11)? The more committed people are to their organization, the more job satisfaction they are likely to exhibit. However, whether leaders are considerate to their subordinates or not is likely to influence both organizational commitment *and* job satisfaction. If leadership style were found to be producing the apparent relationship between organizational commitment and job satisfaction, we would conclude that the relationship is spurious. An interesting possible case of a spurious relationship was highlighted in a very short report in *The Times* (1 October 1999: 2) of some medical findings. The article noted that there is evidence to suggest that women on hormone replacement therapy (HRT) have lower levels of heart disease than those not on this form of therapy. The article cites Swedish findings that suggest that the relationship may be due to the fact that women who choose to start the therapy are 'thinner, richer and healthier' than those who do not. These background factors would seem to affect both the likelihood of taking HRT *and* the likelihood of getting heart disease. A further illustration in connection with a health-related issue comes from another *Times* article (Hawkes 2003), which reports a relationship among men between frequency of shaving and likelihood of a heart attack or stroke. The reason appears to be that each of the variables (frequency of shaving and vulnerability to a heart attack or stroke) is affected by lifestyle and hormonal factors.

## Could there be an intervening variable?

Let us say that we do not find that the relationship is spurious. Then, we might ask *why* there is a relationship between two variables. For example, there have been several studies that have explored the relationship between an organization's market orientation and its business performance. However, the mixed nature of the findings to have emerged from these studies led Piercy, Harris, and Lane (2002) to suggest that there is a more complex relationship between these two variables than previous studies have assumed. In particular, they speculated that higher levels of market orientation are associated with higher levels of employee motivation, satisfaction, and commitment, which in turn leads to enhanced organizational performance. Employee attitudes are thus an **intervening variable**:

market orientation → employee attitudes → organizational performance.

An intervening variable allows us to answer questions about the bivariate relationship between variables. It suggests that the relationship between the two variables is not a direct one, since the impact of market orientation

# Figure 14.11

**A spurious relationship**

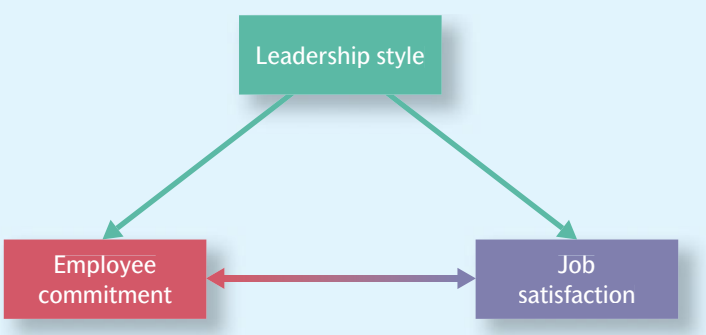


Table 14.6

**Contingency table showing the relationship between age and whether or not gym visitors have other sources of regular exercise (%)**

| Other source of exercise | Age | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | 30 and under | 31–40 | 41 and over |
| Other source | 64 | 43 | 58 |
| No other source | 36 | 57 | 42 |
| *n* | 42 | 23 | 24 |

on organizational performance is viewed as occurring via employee attitudes.

## Could a third variable moderate the relationship?

We might ask a question like: does the relationship between two variables hold for men but not for women? If it does, the relationship is said to be **moderated** by gender. We might ask in the gym study, for example, if the relationship between age and whether visitors have other sources of regular exercise (var00008) is moderated by gender. This would imply that, if we find a pattern relating age to other sources of exercise, that pattern will vary by gender. Table 14.6 shows the relationship between age and other sources of exercise. In this table, age has been broken down into just three age bands to make the table easier to read. The table suggests that the 31–40 age group are less likely to have other sources of regular exercise than the 30 and under and 41 and over age groups. However, Table 14.7, which breaks the relationship down by gender, suggests that the pattern for males and females is somewhat different. Among males, the pattern shown in Table 14.6 is very pronounced, but for females the likelihood of having other sources of exercise declines with gender. It would seem that the relationship between age and other sources of exercise is moderated by gender. This example illustrates the way in which contingency tables can be employed for multivariate analysis. However, there is a wide variety of other techniques (Bryman and Cramer 2008: ch. 10). The procedure for conducting such an analysis with SPSS is described on page 380.



# Statistical significance

One difficulty with working on data deriving from a sample is that there is often the lingering worry that, even though you have employed a probability sampling procedure (as in the gym survey), your findings will not be generalizable to the population from which the sample was drawn. As we saw in Chapter 4, there is always the possibility that *sampling error* (difference between the population and the sample that you have selected) has occurred, even when probability sampling procedures have been followed. If this happens, the

Table 14.7

**Contingency table showing the relationship between age and whether or not gym visitors have other sources of regular exercise for males and females (%)**

| Other source of exercise | Gender | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | | | Female | | |
| | 30 and under | 31–40 | 41 and over | 30 and under | 31–40 | 41 and over |
| Other source | 70 | 33 | 75 | 59 | 50 | 42 |
| No other source | 30 | 67 | 25 | 41 | 50 | 58 |
| *n* | 20 | 9 | 12 | 22 | 14 | 12 |

sample will be unrepresentative of the wider population and therefore any findings will be invalid. To make matters worse, there is no feasible way of finding out whether or not they do in fact apply to the population! What you can do is provide an indication of how confident you can be in your findings. This is where **statistical significance** and the various tests of statistical significance come in.

We need to know how confident we can be that our findings can be generalized to the population from which that sample was selected. Since we cannot be absolutely certain that a finding based on a sample will also be found in the population, we need a technique that allows us to establish how confident we can be that the finding exists in the population and what risk we are taking in inferring that the finding exists in the population. These two elements—confidence and risk—lie at the heart of tests of statistical significance (see Key concept 14.1). However, it is important to appreciate that tests of statistical significance can be employed only in relation to samples that have been drawn using probability sampling.



## Key concept 14.1
## What is a test of statistical significance?

A test of statistical significance allows the analyst to estimate how confident he or she can be that the results deriving from a study based on a randomly selected sample are generalizable to the population from which the sample was drawn. When examining statistical significance in relation to the relationship between two variables, it also tells us about the risk of concluding that there is in fact a relationship in the population when there is no such relationship in the population. If an analysis reveals a statistically significant finding, this does not mean that that finding is intrinsically significant or important. The word 'significant' seems to imply importance. However, statistical significance is solely concerned with the confidence researchers can have in their findings. It does not mean that a statistically significant finding is substantively significant.

In Chapter 7 (see Tips and skills 'Generalizing from a random sample to the population'), in the context of the discussion of the standard error of the mean, we began to get an appreciation of the ideas behind statistical significance. For example, we know that the mean age of the gym sample is 33.6. Using the concept of the standard error of the mean, we can calculate that we can be 95 per cent confident that the population mean lies between 31.72 and 35.47. This suggests that we can determine in broad outline the degree of confidence that we can have in a sample mean.

In the rest of this section, we will look at the tests that are available for determining the degree of confidence we can have in our findings when we explore relationships between variables. All of the tests have a common structure.

- *Set up a* **null hypothesis**. This stipulates that two variables are not related in the population—for example, that there is *no* relationship between gender and visiting the gym in the population from which the sample was selected.
- *Establish the level of statistical significance that you find acceptable*. This is essentially a measure of the degree of risk that you might reject the null hypothesis (implying that there *is* a relationship in the population) when you should support it (implying that there is no relationship in the population). Levels of statistical significance are expressed as probability levels—that is, the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis when you should be confirming it. See Key concept 14.2 on this issue. The convention among most business researchers is that the maximum level of statistical significance that is acceptable is $p < 0.05$, which implies that there are fewer than 5 chances in 100 that you could have a sample that shows a relationship when there is not one in the population.
- *Determine the statistical significance of your findings.* That is, use a statistical test like chi-square (see below).
- If your findings are statistically significant at the 0.05 level—so that the risk of getting a relationship as strong as the one you have found, when there is *no* relationship in the population, is no higher than 5 in 100—you would *reject* the null hypothesis. Therefore, you are implying that the results are unlikely to have occurred by *chance*.



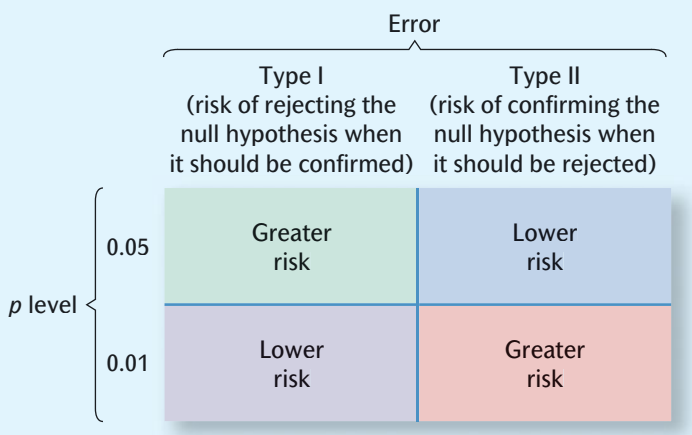
## Key concept 14.2
## What is the level of statistical significance?

The level of statistical significance is the level of risk that you are prepared to take that you are inferring that there is a relationship between two variables in the population from which the sample was taken when in fact no such relationship exists. The maximum level of risk that is conventionally taken in business and managerial research is to say that there are up to 5 chances in 100 that we might be falsely concluding that there is a relationship when there is not one in the population from which the sample was taken. This means that, if we drew 100 samples, we are recognizing that as many as 5 of them might exhibit a relationship when there is not one in the population. Our sample might be one of those 5, but the risk is fairly small. This significance level is denoted by $p < 0.05$ ($p$ means *p*robability). If we accepted a significance level of $p < 0.1$, we would be accepting the possibility that as many as 10 in 100 samples might show a relationship where none exists in the population. In this case, there is a greater risk than with $p < 0.05$ that we might have a sample that implies a relationship when there is not one in the population, since the probability of our having such a sample is greater when the risk is 1 in 10 (10 out of 100 when $p < 0.1$) than when the risk is 1 in 20 (5 out of 100 when $p < 0.05$). Therefore, we would have greater confidence when the risk of falsely inferring that there is a relationship between 2 variables is 1 in 20, as against 1 in 10. But, if you want a more stringent test, perhaps because you are worried about the use that might be made of your results, you might choose the $p < 0.01$ level. This means that you are prepared to accept as your level of risk a probability of only 1 in 100 that the results could have arisen by chance (that is, because of sampling error). Therefore, if the results, following administration of a test, show that the results are statistically significant at the $p < 0.05$ level, but *not* the $p < 0.01$ level, you would have to confirm the null hypothesis.

There are in fact two types of error that can be made when inferring statistical significance. These errors are known as Type I and Type II errors (see Figure 14.12). A Type I error occurs when you reject the null hypothesis when it should in fact be confirmed. This means that your results have arisen by chance and you are falsely concluding that there is a relationship in the population when there is not one. Using a $p < 0.05$ level of significance means that we are more likely to make a Type I error than when using a $p < 0.01$ level of significance.

## Figure 14.12

### Type I and Type II errors



This is because with 0.01 there is less chance of falsely rejecting the null hypothesis. However, in doing so, you increase the chance of making a Type II error (accepting the null hypothesis when you should reject it). This is because you are more likely to confirm the null hypothesis when the significance level is 0.01 (1 in 100) than when it is 0.05 (1 in 20).

## The chi-square test

The chi-square ($\chi^2$) test is applied to contingency tables like Table 14.4. It allows us to establish how confident we can be that there is a relationship between the two variables in the population. The test works by calculating for each cell in the table an expected frequency or value—that is, one that would occur on the basis of chance alone. The chi-square value, which in Table 14.4 is 22.726, is calculated by calculating the differences between the actual and expected values for each cell in the table and then summing those differences (it is slightly more complicated than this, but the details need not concern us here). The chi-square value means nothing on its own and can be meaningfully interpreted only in relation to its associated level of statistical significance, which in this case is $p < 0.0001$. This means that there is only one chance in 10,000 of rejecting the null hypothesis (that is, inferring that there is a relationship in the population when there is no such relationship in the population). You could be extremely confident that there is a relationship between gender and reasons for visiting the gym among all gym members, since the chance that you have obtained a sample that shows a relationship when there is no relationship among all gym members is 1 in 10,000.

Whether or not a chi-square value achieves statistical significance depends not just on its magnitude but also on the number of categories of the two variables being analysed. This latter issue is governed by what is known as the 'degrees of freedom' associated with the table. The number of degrees of freedom is governed by the simple formula:

Number of degrees of freedom
= (number of columns – 1)(number of rows – 1).

In the case of Table 14.5, this will be (2 – 1)(4 – 1), that is, 3. In other words, the chi-square value that is arrived at is affected by the size of the table, and this is taken into account when deciding whether the chi-square value is statistically significant or not. The procedure for chi square in conjunction with a contingency table with SPSS is described on pages 372–4.

## Correlation and statistical significance

Examining the statistical significance of a computed correlation coefficient, which is based on a randomly selected sample, provides information about the likelihood that the coefficient will be found in the population from which the sample was taken. Thus, if we find a correlation of –0.62, what is the likelihood that a relationship of at least that size exists in the population? This tells us if the relationship could have arisen by chance.

If the correlation coefficient $r$ is –0.62 and the significance level is $p < 0.05$, we can reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship in the population. We can infer that there are only 5 chances in 100 that a correlation of at least –0.62 could have arisen by chance alone. You *could* have 1 of the 5 samples in 100 that shows a relationship when there is not one in the population, but the degree of risk is reasonably small. If, say, it was found that $r = –0.62$ and $p < 0.1$, there could be as many as 10 chances in 100 that there is no correlation in the population. This would *not* be an acceptable level of risk for most purposes. It would mean that in as many as 1 sample in 10 we might find a correlation of –0.62 or above when there is not a correlation in the population. If $r = –0.62$ and $p < 0.001$, there is only 1 chance in 1,000 that no correlation exists in the population. There would be a very low level of risk if you inferred that the correlation had not arisen by chance.

Whether a correlation coefficient is statistically significant or not will be affected by two factors:

- the size of the computed coefficient; and
- the size of the sample.

This second factor may appear surprising. Basically, the larger a sample, the more likely it is that a computed correlation coefficient will be found to be statistically significant. Thus, even though the correlation between age and the amount of time spent on weights machines in the gym survey was found to be just –0.27, which is a fairly weak relationship, it is statistically significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. This means that there is only 1 chance in 100 that there is no relationship in the population. Because the question of whether or not a correlation coefficient is statistically significant depends so much on the sample size, it is important to realize that you should always examine *both* the correlation coefficient *and* the significance level. You should not examine one at the expense of the other.

This treatment of correlation and statistical significance applies to both Pearson's $r$ and Spearman's rho. A similar

interpretation can also be applied to phi and Cramér's *V*. SPSS automatically produces information regarding statistical significance when Pearson's *r*, Spearman's rho, phi, and Cramér's *V* are generated.

## Comparing means and statistical significance

A test of statistical significance can also be applied to the comparison of means that was carried out in Table 14.5. This procedure entails treating the total amount of variation in the dependent variable—amount of time spent on cardiovascular equipment—as made up of two types: variation *within* the four subgroups that make up the independent variable, and variation *between* them. The latter is often called the *explained variance* and the former the *error variance*. A test of statistical significance for the comparison of means entails relating the two types of variance to form what is known as the *F* statistic. This statistic expresses the amount of explained variance in relation to the amount of error variance. In the case of the data in Table 14.5, the resulting *F* statistic is statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level. This finding suggests that there is only 1 chance in 1,000 that there is no relationship between the two variables among all gym members. SPSS produces information regarding the *F* statistic and its statistical significance if the procedures described on p. 380 are followed.



# Checklist

## Doing and writing up quantitative data analysis

- ○ Have you answered your research questions?
- ○ Have you made sure that you have presented only analyses that are relevant to your research questions?
- ○ Have you made sure that you have taken into account the nature of the variable(s) being analysed when using a particular technique (that is, whether nominal, ordinal, interval/ratio, or dichotomous)?
- ○ Have you used the most appropriate and powerful techniques for answering your research questions?
- ○ If your sample has *not* been randomly selected, have you made sure that you have not made inferences about a population (or at least, if you have done so, have you outlined the limitations of making such an inference)?
- ○ If your data are based on a cross-sectional design, have you resisted making unsustainable inferences about causality?
- ○ Have you remembered to code any missing data?
- ○ Have you commented on all the analyses you present?
- ○ Have you gone beyond univariate analysis and conducted at least some bivariate analyses?
- ○ If you have used a Likert scale with reversed items, have you remembered to reverse the coding of them?



# Key points

- You need to think about your data analysis before you begin designing your research instruments.
- Techniques of data analysis are applicable to some types of variable and not others. You need to know the difference between nominal, ordinal, interval/ratio, and dichotomous variables.

- You need to think about the kinds of data you are collecting and the implications your decisions will have for the sorts of techniques you will be able to employ.
- Become familiar with computer software like SPSS before you begin designing your research instruments, because it is advisable to be aware at an early stage of difficulties you might have in presenting your data in SPSS.
- Make sure you are thoroughly familiar with the techniques introduced in this chapter and when you can and cannot use them.
- The basic message, then, is not to leave these considerations until your data have been collected, tempting though it may be.
- Do not confuse statistical significance with substantive significance.



## Questions for review

- At what stage should you begin to think about the kinds of data analysis you need to conduct?
- What are missing data and why do they arise?

### *Types of variable*

- What are the differences between the four types of variable outlined in this chapter: interval/ratio; ordinal; nominal; and dichotomous?
- Why is it important to be able to distinguish between the four types of variable?
- Imagine the kinds of answers you would receive if you administered the following four questions in an interview survey. What kind of variable would each question generate: dichotomous; nominal; ordinal; or interval/ratio?

**1.** Do you enjoy going shopping?

Yes ___

No ___

**2.** How many times have you shopped in the last month? Please write in the number of occasions below.

___

**3.** For which kinds of items do you most enjoy shopping? Please tick one only.

Clothes (including shoes) ____

Food ____

Things for the house ____

Presents ____

Entertainment (CDs, DVDs, etc.) ____

**4.** How important is it to you to buy clothes with designer labels?

Very important ____

Fairly important ____

Not very important ____

Not at all important ____

### *Univariate analysis*

- What is an outlier and why might one have an adverse effect on the mean and the range?
- In conjunction with which measure of central tendency would you expect to report the standard deviation: the mean; the median; or the mode?

### *Bivariate analysis*

- Can you infer causality from bivariate analysis?
- Why are percentages crucial when presenting contingency tables?
- In what circumstances would you use each of the following: Pearson's *r*; Spearman's rho; phi; Cramér's *V*; eta?

### *Multivariate analysis*

- What is a spurious relationship?
- What is an intervening variable?
- What does it mean to say that a relationship is moderated?

### *Statistical significance*

- What does statistical significance mean and how does it differ from substantive significance?
- What is a significance level?
- What does the chi-square test achieve?
- What does it mean to say that a correlation of 0.42 is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Quantitative Data Analysis.*

# 15

# Using SPSS for Windows

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 360

**Getting started in SPSS** 362

- Beginning SPSS 362
- Entering data in the Data Viewer 362
- Defining variables: variable names, missing values, variable labels, and value labels 363
- Recoding variables 364
- Computing a new variable 367

**Data analysis with SPSS** 368

- Generating a frequency table 368
- Generating a bar chart 368
- Generating a pie chart 371
- Generating a histogram 371
- Generating the arithmetic mean, median, standard deviation, the range, and boxplots 372
- Generating a contingency table, chi-square, and Cramér's *V* 372
- Generating Pearson's *r* and Spearman's rho 374
- Generating scatter diagrams 374
- Comparing means and eta 377
- Generating a contingency table with three variables 380

**Further operations in SPSS** 381

- Saving your data 381
- Retrieving your data 381
- Printing output 381

***Key points*** 381

***Questions for review*** 382



## Chapter outline

In order to implement the techniques that you learned in Chapter 14, you would need to do either of two things: learn the underlying formula for each technique and apply your data to it, or use computer software to analyse your data. The latter is the approach chosen in this book for two main reasons.

- It is closer to the way in which quantitative data analysis is carried out in real research nowadays.
- It helps to equip you with a useful transferable skill.

You will be learning SPSS for Windows, which is the most widely used package of computer software for doing this kind of analysis. It is relatively straightforward to use. We will be continuing to refer to the techniques introduced in Chapter 14 and will continue to use the gym survey as an example.

This chapter largely operates in parallel with Chapter 14, so that you can see the links between the techniques learned there and the use of SPSS to implement them.

# Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a familiarity with some basic aspects of SPSS for Windows, which is possibly the most widely used computer software for the analysis of quantitative data for social scientists. SPSS, which was originally short for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, has been in existence since the mid-1960s and over the years has undergone many revisions, particularly since the arrival of personal computers. The version that was used in preparing this section was Release 18 and is called PASW Statistics 18. At the time of writing this chapter Release 19 was being beta-tested, but the indications were that the differences between Releases 18 and 19 were, from the point of view of the material covered in this chapter, largely to do with the appearance of some of the dialog boxes and menus that appear. The beta version is referred to as IBM SPSS Statistics Version 19. From this point on, when referring to SPSS for Windows or PASW Statistics 18 in the text, it will be called simply SPSS, and Release 18 will be the focus of attention. The gym survey used in Chapter 14 will be employed to illustrate SPSS operations and methods of analysis. The aim of this chapter is to introduce ways of using SPSS to implement the methods of analysis discussed in Chapter 14.

SPSS operations will be presented in **bold**—for example, **Variable Name**: and **Analyze**. Names given to variables in the course of using SPSS will be presented in ***bold italics***—for example, ***gender*** and ***reasons***. Labels given to values or to variables are also in bold—for example, **reasons for visiting** and **male**. Tips and skills 'Basic operations in SPSS' presents a list summarizing these. One further element in the presentation is that a right-pointing arrow— → —will be used to denote 'click once with the left-hand button of your mouse'. This action is employed to make selections and similar activities.



# Tips and skills
## Basic operations in SPSS

- The SPSS Data Editor. This is the sphere of SPSS into which data are entered and subsequently edited and defined. It is made up of two screens: the **Data Viewer** and the **Variable Viewer**. You move between these two viewers by selecting the appropriate tab at the bottom of the screen.
- The Data Viewer. This is the spreadsheet into which your data are entered. When you start up SPSS, the Data Viewer will be facing you.
- The Variable Viewer. This is another spreadsheet, but this one displays information about each of the variables and allows you to change that information. It is the platform from which you provide for each variable such information as: the variable name; a variable label; and value labels (see below).
- The Output. When you perform an analysis or produce a diagram (called a 'chart' in SPSS), your output will be deposited here. The **Output Viewer** superimposes itself over the **Data Editor** after an analysis has been performed or a chart generated.
- A Variable Name. This is the name that you give to a variable—for example, **gender**. The name must be no more than eight characters. Until you give a variable a name, it will be referred to as **var00001**, etc. When the variable has been given a name, it will appear in the column for that variable in the **Data View** window. It is generated from the **Variable Viewer**.
- A Variable Label. This is a label that you can give to a variable but that is not restricted to eight characters. Spaces can be used—for example, **reasons for visiting**. The Label will appear in any output you generate. It is generated from the **Variable Viewer**.
- A Value Label. This is a label that you can attach to a code that has been used when entering data for all types of variables other than interval/ratio variables. Thus, for **var00001**, we would attach the label **male** to 1 and **female** to 2. When you generate output, such as a frequency table or chart, the labels for each value will be presented. This makes the interpretation of output easier. It is generated from the **Variable Viewer**.
- Missing Values. . . . When you do not have data for a particular variable when entering data for a case, you must specify how you are denoting missing values for that variable. Missing values are generated from the **Variable Viewer**.
- Recode. A procedure that allows codes or numbers to be changed. It is especially helpful when you need to combine groups of people—for example, when producing age bands.
- Compute. . . . A procedure that allows you to combine two or more variables to form a new variable.
- Analyze. This is the point on the menu bar above the **Data Editor** from which you choose (via a dropdown menu) which method of analysis you want to select. Note that, whenever an item on a menu appears with a right-pointing arrowhead after it, this means that, if you select that option, a further menu will follow on.
- Graphs. This is the point on the menu bar above the **Data Editor** from which you choose (via a drop-down menu) which chart you want to select.
- Chart Editor. When you produce a graph, you can edit it with the **Chart Editor**. To activate this editor, double-click anywhere in the graph. A small chart editor window will appear and your main graph will appear opaque until you exit the Editor. From the Editor, you can make various changes and enhancements to your graph.

# Getting started in SPSS

## Beginning SPSS

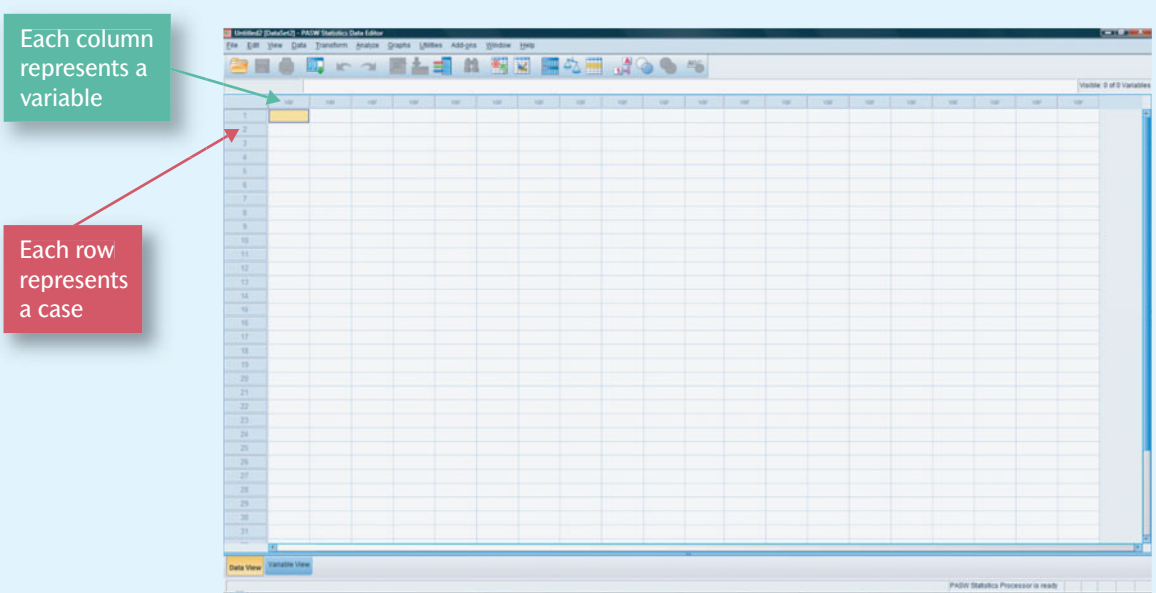
To start SPSS, double-click on the **PASW Statistics** icon on your computer screen. If there is no icon, → the Start button in the bottom left-hand corner of your screen. From the menu of programs, → **SPSS Inc**. A follow-on menu will appear, from which you should select **PASW Statistics 18**. When SPSS loads, you *may* be faced with an opening dialog box with the title 'What do you want to do?' and a list of options. Many users prefer to disable this opening box. It is not important in relation to the following exposition, so → **Cancel**. You will then be faced with the **SPSS Data Editor**. This is made up of two components: **Data View** and **Variable View**. In the following discussion, these two screens are referred to as the **Data Viewer** and the **Variable Viewer**. You move between these two viewers by selecting the appropriate tab at the bottom of the screen. The **Data Viewer** is in the form of a spreadsheet grid into which you enter your data. The columns represent ***variables***—in other words, information about characteristics of each person in the gym study sample. Until data are entered and names are given to variables, each column simply has **var** as its heading. The rows represent ***cases***, which can be people (as in the example you will be working through) or any unit of analysis. Each block in the grid is referred to as a 'cell'. Note also that, when the data are in the SPSS spreadsheet, they will look different; for example, 1 will be 1.00.

## Entering data in the Data Viewer

To input the data into the **Data Viewer**, make sure that the top left-hand cell in the grid is highlighted (see Plate 15.1). If it is not highlighted, simply click once in that cell. Then, type the appropriate figure for that cell—that is, 1. This number goes directly into that cell and into the box beneath the toolbar. As an alternative to using the mouse, many people find it easier to use the arrow keys on their keyboard to move from cell to cell. If you make a mistake at any point, simply click once in the cell in question, type in the correct value, and click once more in that cell. When you have finished, you should end up in the bottom right-hand cell of what will be a perfect rectangle of data. Plate 15.2 shows the **Data Viewer** with

# Plate 15.1

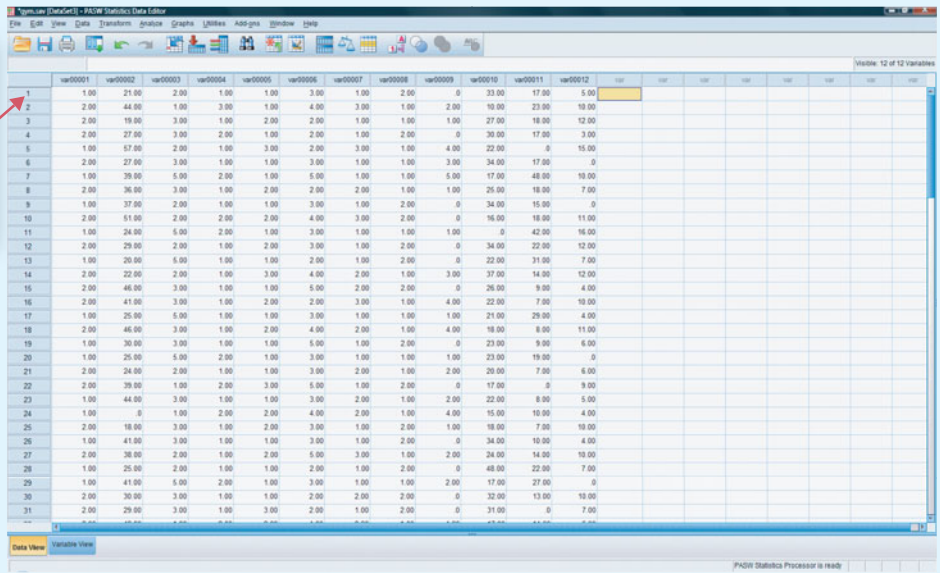
### The SPSS Data Viewer



# Plate 15.2

## The Data Viewer with 'gym study' data entered

This row shows the data for the first person who answered the Gym Survey questionnaire



the data from the gym survey entered (though only part of the set of data is visible, in that only the first twenty-two respondents and ten of the twelve variables are visible). The first row of data contains the coded answers from the completed questionnaire in Chapter 14 (see Tips and skills 'A completed and processed questionnaire').

In order to proceed further, you will find that SPSS works in the following typical sequence for defining variables and analysing your data.

1. You make a selection from the menu bar at the top of the screen, e.g. → **Analyze**.
2. From the menu that will appear, make a selection, e.g. → **Descriptive Statistics**.
3. This will bring up a ***dialog box*** into which you will usually inform SPSS of what you are trying to do—e.g. which variables are to be analysed.
4. Very often, you then need to convey further information and to do this you have to → a button that will bring up what is called, following Bryman and Cramer (2004), a ***sub-dialog box***.
5. You then provide the information in the sub-dialog box and then go back to the dialog box. Sometimes, you will need to bring up a further sub-dialog box and then go back to the dialog box.

When you have finished going through the entire procedure, → **OK**. The toolbar beneath the menu bar allows shortcut access to certain SPSS operations.

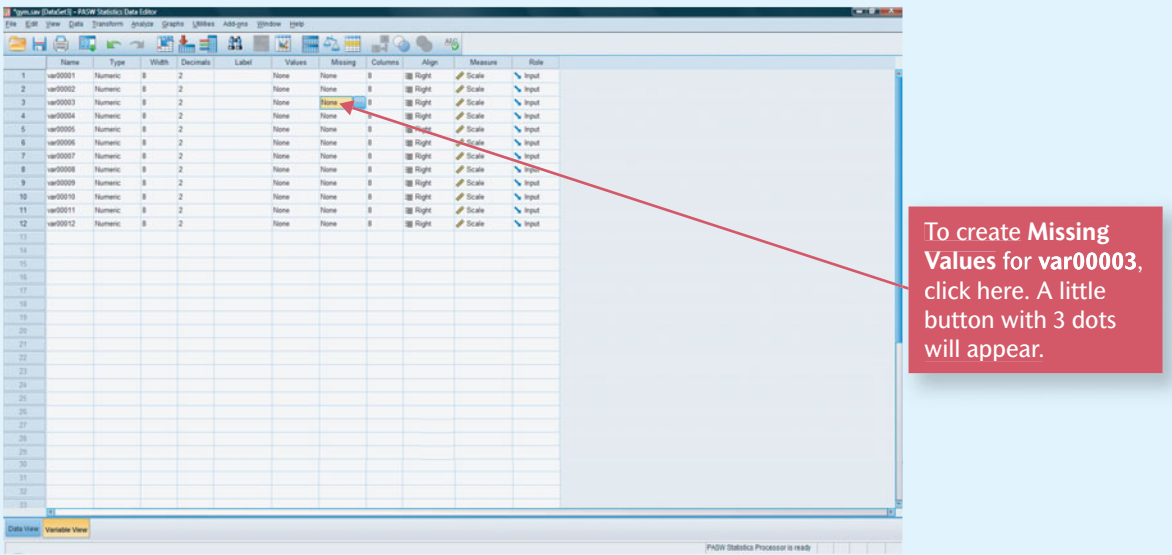
## Defining variables: variable names, missing values, variable labels, and value labels

Once you have finished entering your data, you need to define your variables. The following steps will allow you to do this:

1. → the **Variable View** tab at the bottom of the **Data Viewer** (opens the **Variable Viewer** shown in Plate 15.3).
2. To provide a variable name, click on the current variable name (e.g. ***var00003***) and type the name you want to give it (e.g. ***reasons***). Remember that this name must be no more than eight characters and you *cannot* use spaces.

# Plate 15.3

## The Variable Viewer




3. You can then give your variable a more detailed name, known in SPSS as a variable label. To do this, → cell in the **Label** column relating to the variable for which you want to supply a variable label. Then, simply type in the variable label (i.e. **reasons for visiting**).
4. Then you will need to provide 'value labels' for variables that have been given codes. The procedure generally applies to variables that are not interval/ratio variables. The latter, which are numeric variables, do not need to be coded (unless you are grouping them in some way). To assign value labels, → in the **Values** column relating to the variable you are working on. A small button with three dots on it will appear. → the button. The **Value Labels** dialog box will appear (see Plate 15.4). → the box to the right of **Value** and begin to define the value labels. To do this, enter the value (e.g. **1**) in the area to the right of **Value** and then the value label (e.g. **relaxation**) in the area to the right of **Label**. Then → **Add**. Do this for each value. When you have finished → **OK**.
5. You will then need to inform SPSS of the value that you have nominated for each variable to indicate a missing value. In the case of ***reasons***, the value is 0 (zero). To assign the missing value, → the cell for this variable in the **Missing** column. Again, → the button that will appear with three dots on it. This will generate the **Missing Values** dialog box (see Plate 15.5). In the **Missing Values** dialog box, enter the missing value (**0**) below **Discrete missing values**: and then → **OK**.

In order to simplify the following presentation, ***reasons*** will be the only variable for which a variable label will be defined.

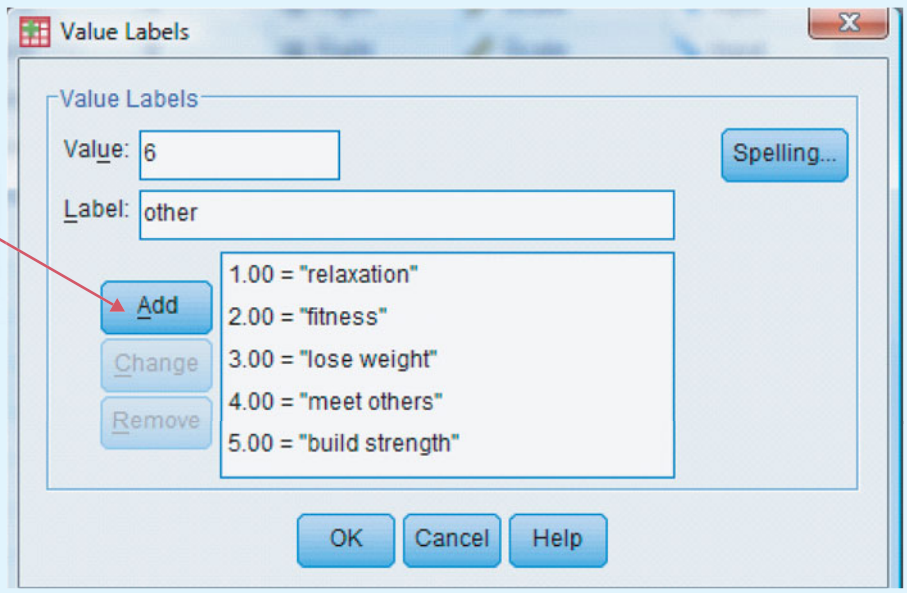
## Recoding variables

Sometimes you need to recode variables—for example, when you want to group people. You would need to do this in order to produce a table like Table 14.3 for an interval/ratio variable like **var00002**, which we will give the variable name ***age***. SPSS offers two choices: you can recode ***age*** so that it will be changed in the **Data Viewer**, or you can keep ***age*** as it is and create a new variable. This latter option is desirable whenever you want to preserve the variable in question as well as create a new one. Since we may want to carry out analyses involving ***age*** as an interval/ratio variable, we will recode it so that a new variable, which we will call ***agegp***, for ***age g***roup***p***s, will be created. The aim of the following operations is to create a new variable—***agegp***—which will comprise five age bands, as in Table 14.3.

# Plate 15.4

## The **Value Labels** dialog box

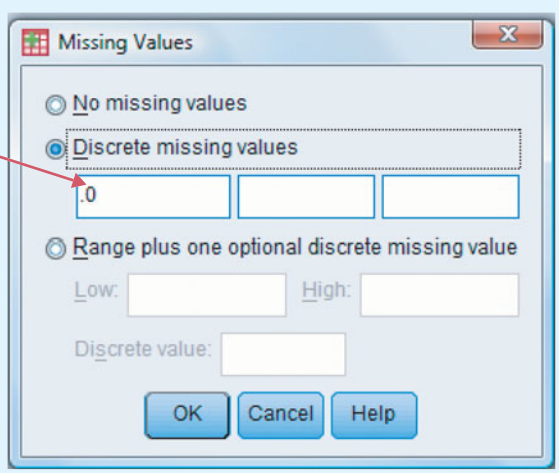
Remember to click on **Add** after entering each **Value** and **Label**




# Plate 15.5

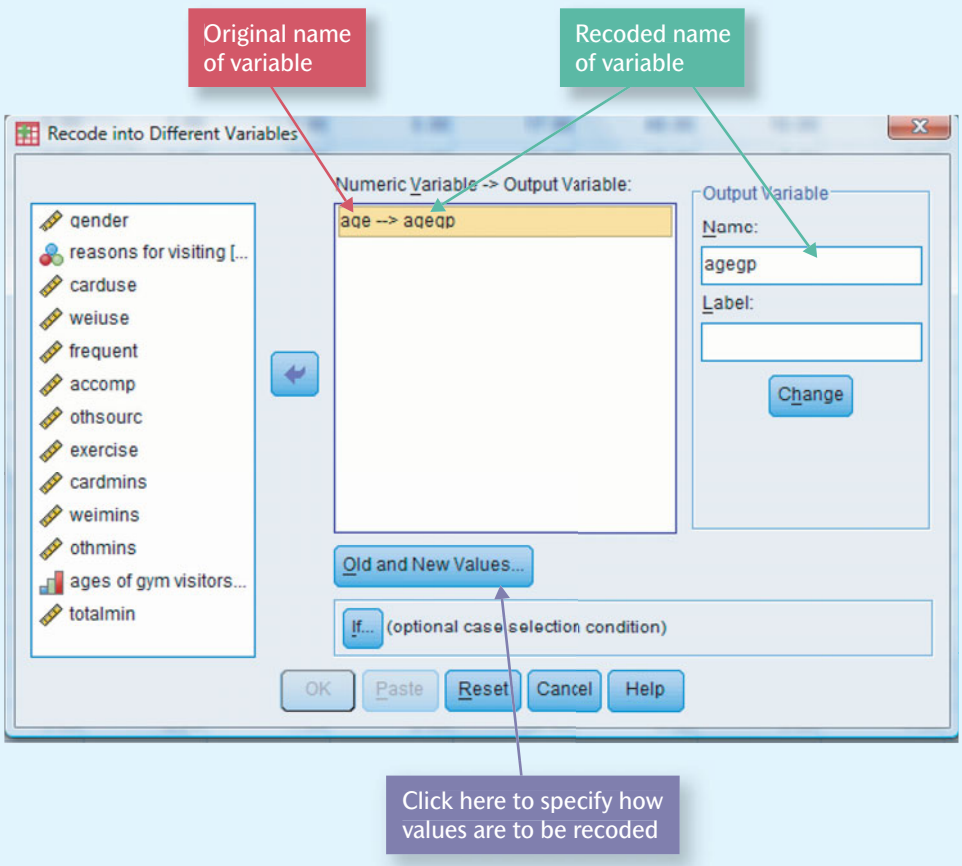
## The **Missing Values** dialog box

Designates 0 as the missing value for the variable in question



# Plate 15.6

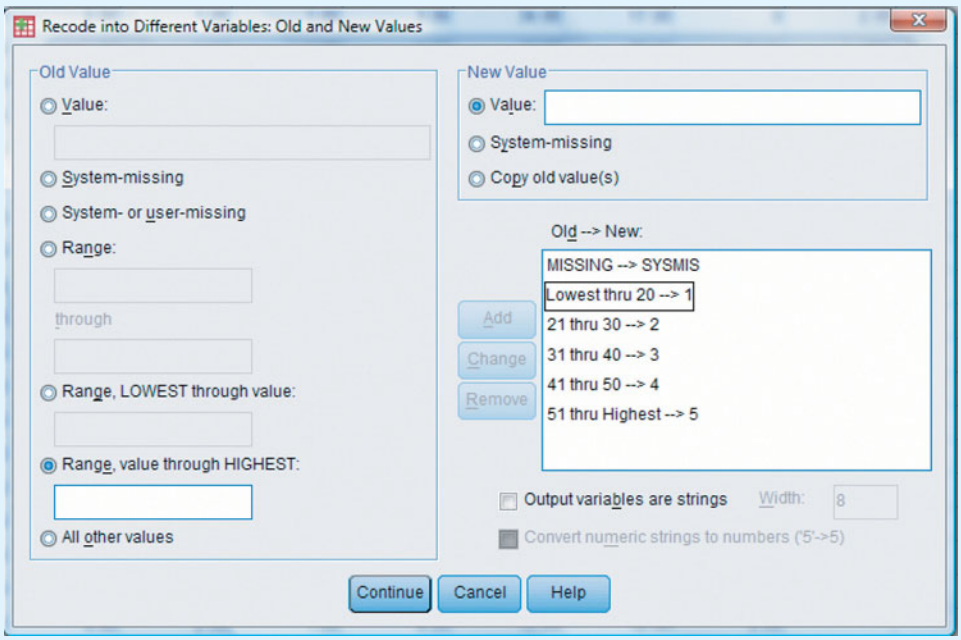
## The Recode into Different Variables dialog box




1. → **Transform** → **Recode** → **Into Different Variables . . .** [**opens Recode into Different Variables** dialog box shown in Plate 15.6]
2. → **age** → [puts ***age*** in **Numeric Variable->Output Variable:** box] → box beneath **Output Variable Name**: and type ***agegp*** → **Change** [puts ***agegp*** in the **Numeric Variable->Output Variable:** box] → **Old and New Values** . . . [opens **Recode into Different Variables: Old and New Values** sub-dialog box shown in Plate 15.7]
3. → the circle by **System- or user-missing** and by **System-missing** under **New Value**, if you have missing values for a variable, which is the case for this variable.
4. → circle by **Range, LOWEST through value:** and type **20** in the box → box by **Value** under **New Value** and type **1** → **Add** [the new value will appear in the **Old->New**: box]
5. → first box by **Range:** and type **21** and in box after **through** type **30** → box by **Value** under **New Value** and type **2** → **Add**
6. → first box by **Range:** and type **31** and in box after **through** type **40** → box by **Value** under **New Value** and type **3** → **Add**
7. → first box by **Range:** and type **41** and in box after **through** type **50** → box by **Value** under **New Value** and type **4** → **Add**

# Plate 15.7

## The Recode into Different Variables: Old and New Values sub-dialog box




8. → circle by **Range, value through HIGHEST** and type **51** in the box → box by **Value** in **New Value** and type **5** → **Add** → **Continue** [closes the **Recode into Different Variables: Old and New Values** sub-dialog box shown in Plate 15.7 and returns you to the **Recode into Different Variables** dialog box shown in Plate 15.6]

9. → **OK**

The new variable ***agegp*** will be created and will appear in the **Data Viewer**. You would then need to generate **value labels** for the five age bands and possibly a **variable label** using the approach described above.

## Computing a new variable

A person's total amount of time spent in the gym is made up of three variables: ***cardmins, weimins***, and ***othmins***. If we add these up, we should arrive at the total number of minutes spent on activities in the gym. In so doing, we will create a new variable ***totalmin***. To do this, this procedure should be followed:

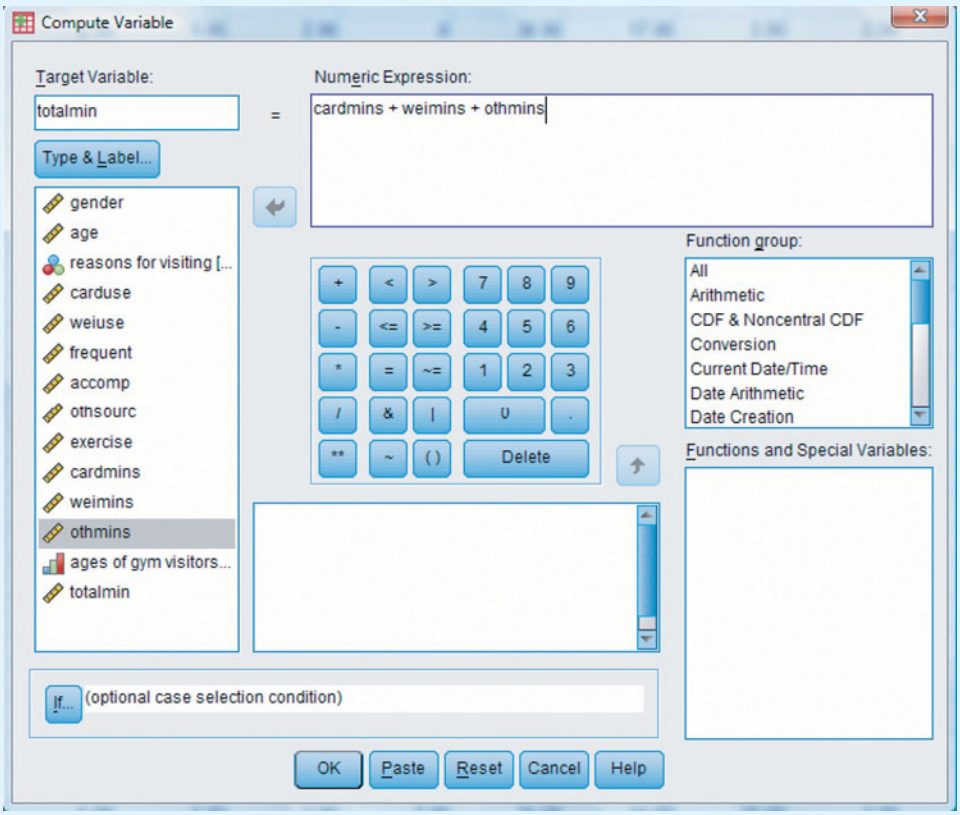
1. → **Transform** → **Compute . . .** [opens the **Compute Variable** dialog box shown in Plate 15.8]
2. Under **Target Variable:** type ***totalmin***
3. From the list of variables at the left, → ***cardmins*** [puts ***cardmins*** in box beneath **Numeric Expression:**] → ▸; → ***weimins*** [puts ***weimins*** after + sign] → + button; → ***othmins*** [puts ***othmins*** after + sign]
4. → **OK**

The new variable ***totalmin*** will be created and will appear in the **Data Editor**.

Now at last, we can begin to analyse the data!

# Plate 15.8

## The Compute Variable dialog box




# Data analysis with SPSS

## Generating a frequency table

To produce a frequency table like the one in Table 14.2:

1. → **Analyze** → **Descriptive Statistics** → **Frequencies . . .** [opens the **Frequencies** dialog box shown in Plate 15.9]
2. → **reasons for visiting** → ▶ [puts **reasons for visiting** in **Variable[s]:** box]
3. → **OK**

The table will appear in the **Output Viewer** (see Plate 15.10).

Note that in the **Frequencies** dialog box, variables that have been assigned labels will appear in terms of their variable labels, but those that have not been assigned labels will appear in terms of their variable names. This is a feature of all dialog boxes produced via **Analyze** and **Graphs** (see below).

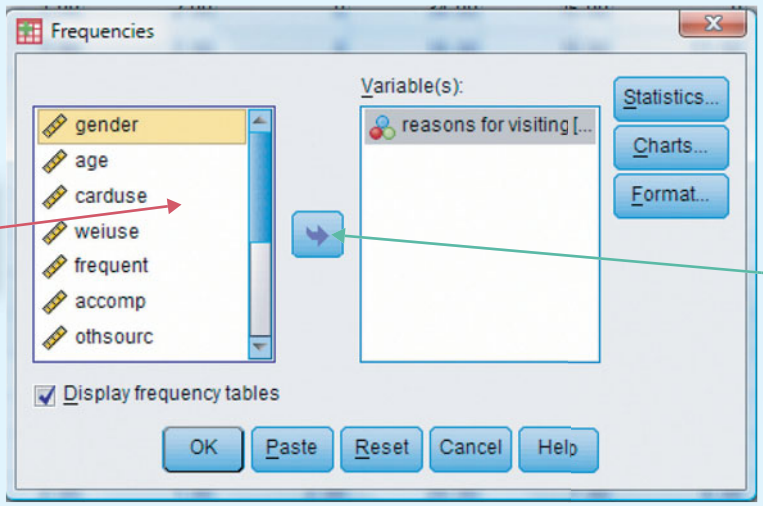
## Generating a bar chart

To produce a bar chart like the one in Figure 14.2:

1. → **Graphs** → **Bar** . . . [opens **Bar Charts** dialog box]
2. → **Simple** → **Summaries for groups of cases** → **Define** [opens **Define Simple Bar: Summaries for Groups of Cases** sub-dialog box shown in Plate 15.11]

# Plate 15.9

## The **Frequencies** dialog box

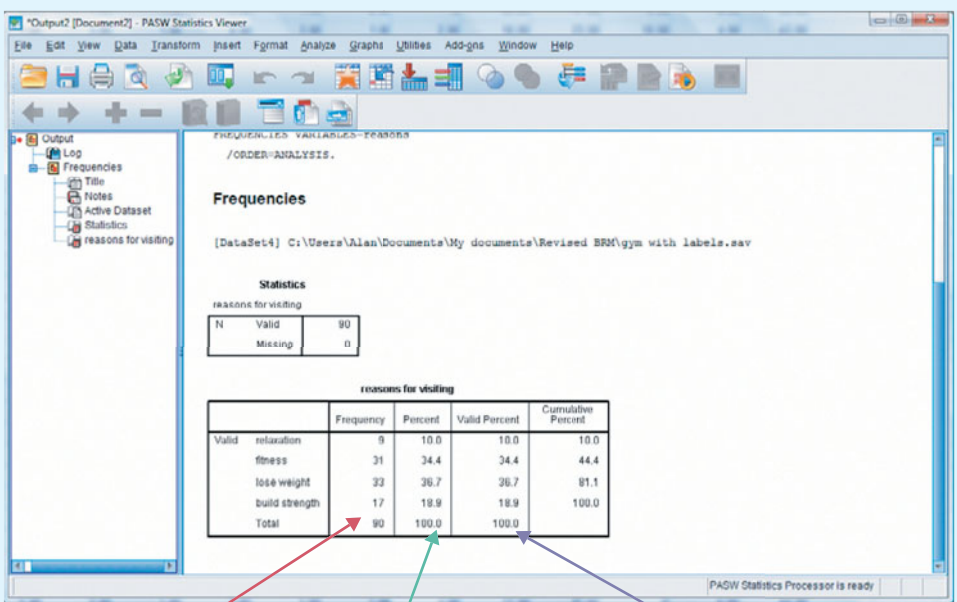



Select variable(s) to be analysed from here

Click here to send the selected variable(s) into the **Variable(s)**: list

# Plate 15.10

## The **Output Viewer** with **Frequency** table



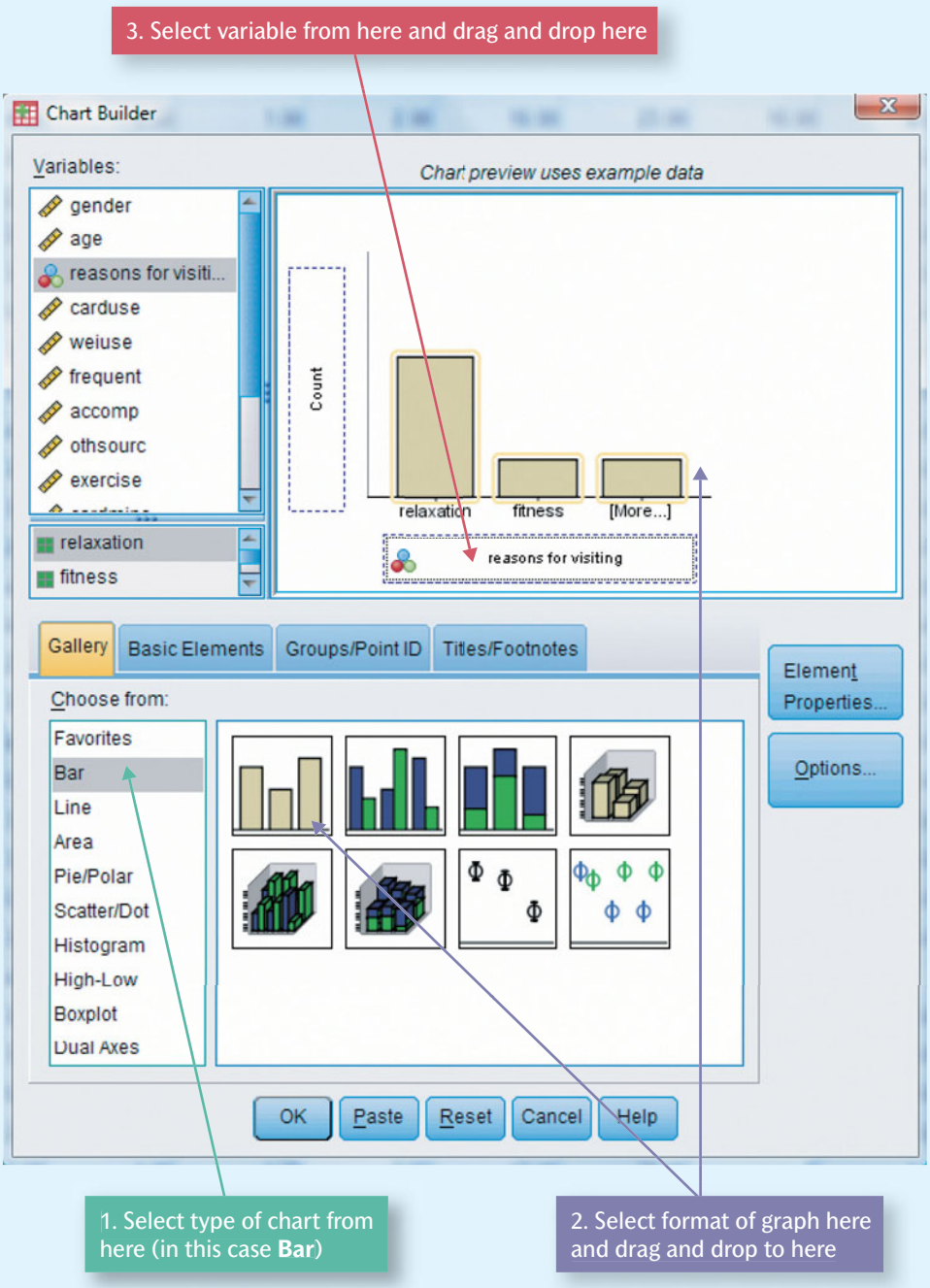

Number of cases in each category

Percentage of cases in each category

Percentage of cases in each category taking missing values into account

# Plate 15.11

## The Define Simple Bar: Summaries for Groups of Cases sub-dialog box



3. → **reasons for visiting** → by **Category Axis** → [**reasons for visiting** will appear in the box] → **N of cases** beneath **Bars Represent** [*if* this has not already been selected, otherwise continue without doing this]
4. → **OK**

## Generating a pie chart

To produce a pie chart like the one in Figure 14.3:

1. → **Graphs** → **Pie . . .** [opens the **Pie Charts** dialog box] → **Summaries for groups of cases** → **Define** [opens the **Define Pie: Summaries for Groups of Cases** sub-dialog box]
2. → **reasons for visiting** → by **Define Slices by:** [**reasons for visiting** will appear in the box] → **N of cases** beneath **Slices Represent** [if this has *not* already been selected, otherwise continue without doing this]
3. → **OK**

In order to include percentages, as in Figure 14.3, *double-click* anywhere in the chart in order to bring up the **Chart Editor**. The chart will appear in the **Chart Editor** and the main figure will become opaque. Then → **Elements** and then → **Show Data Labels**. The **Properties** sub-dialog box will appear (see Plate 15.12). Then to have labels and percentages as in Figure 14.3, rather than frequencies ('counts') which is the default, place a tick by **Percents** [there should also be a tick by **Text**].

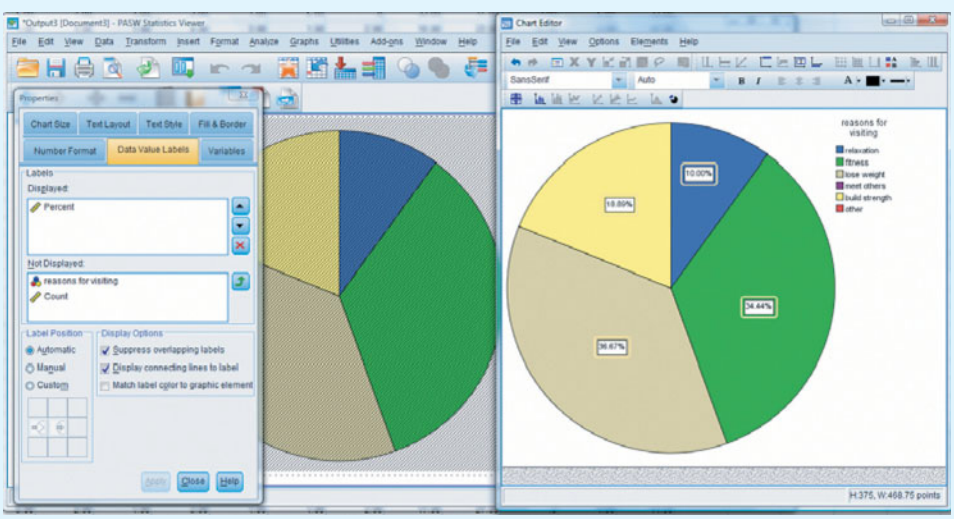
Your chart will be in colour, but, if you only have access to a monochrome printer, you can change your pie chart into patterns, which allows the slices to be clearer. This can be done through the **Chart Editor**.

## Generating a histogram

In order to generate a histogram for an interval/ratio variable like ***age***, → **Graphs** → **Histogram . . .** and then select the relevant variable and place it below **Variable:**. This procedure will generate a histogram whose age bands are defined by the software. By double-clicking on the diagram, the histogram can be edited using the **Chart Editor**. For example, colours can be changed or patterns inserted.

# Plate 15.12

**The Chart Editor and the Properties sub-dialog box for editing a pie chart**



# Figure 15.1

## Explore output for *age* (SPSS output)

**Explore**

**Case Processing Summary**

| | Cases | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Valid | | Missing | | Total | |
| | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| age | 89 | 98.9% | 1 | 1.1% | 90 | 100.0% |

**Descriptives**

| | | | Statistic | Std. Error |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| age | Mean | | 33.5955 | .94197 |
| | 95% Confidence Interval for Mean | Lower Bound | 31.7235 | |
| | | Upper Bound | 35.4675 | |
| | 5% Trimmed Mean | | 33.3159 | |
| | Median | | 31.0000 | |
| | Variance | | 78.971 | |
| | Std. Deviation | | 8.88656 | |
| | Minimum | | 18.00 | |
| | Maximum | | 57.00 | |
| | Range | | 39.00 | |
| | Interquartile Range | | 14.00 | |
| | Skewness | | .446 | .255 |
| | Kurtosis | | –.645 | .506 |

## Generating the arithmetic mean, median, standard deviation, the range, and boxplots

To produce the mean, median, standard deviation, and the range for an interval/ratio variable like ***age***, the following steps should be followed:

1. → **Analyze** → **Descriptive Statistics** → **Explore . . .** [opens the **Explore** dialog box]
2. → **age** → ▶ to the left of **Dependent List:** [puts ***age*** in the **Dependent List:** box] → **Statistics** under **Display** → **OK**

The output will also include the 95 per cent confidence interval for the mean, which is based on the standard error of the mean. The output can be found in Figure 15.1. If you select **Plots . . .** , the **Explore: Plots** sub-dialog box will come up and you can elect to generate a histogram. To do this, you will need to select either **Both** or **Plots** under **Display** on the **Explore** dialog box. In addition, selecting **Both** or **Plots** will produce two further types of figure, one of which is a boxplot, which was covered in Chapter 14.

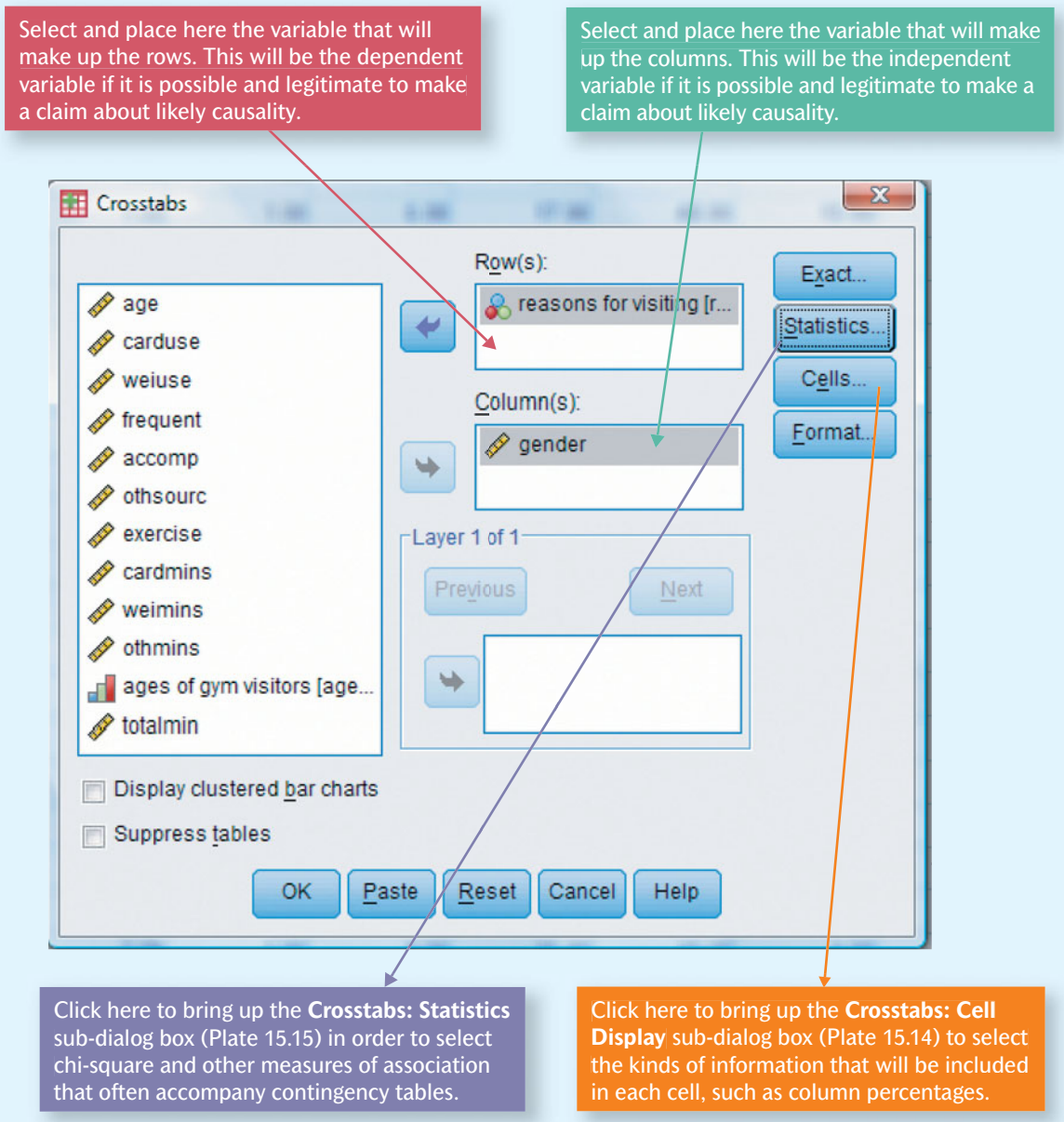
## Generating a contingency table, chi-square, and Cramér's *V*

In order to generate a contingency table, like that in Table 14.4, along with a chi-square test and Cramér's *V*, the following procedure should be followed:

1. → **Analyze** → **Descriptive Statistics** → **Crosstabs . . .** [opens the **Crosstabs** dialog box shown in Plate 15.13]
2. → **reasons for visiting** → ▶ by **Row[s]** [**reasons for visiting** will appear in the **Row[s]:** box] → ***gender*** →

# Plate 15.13

## The Crosstabs dialog box

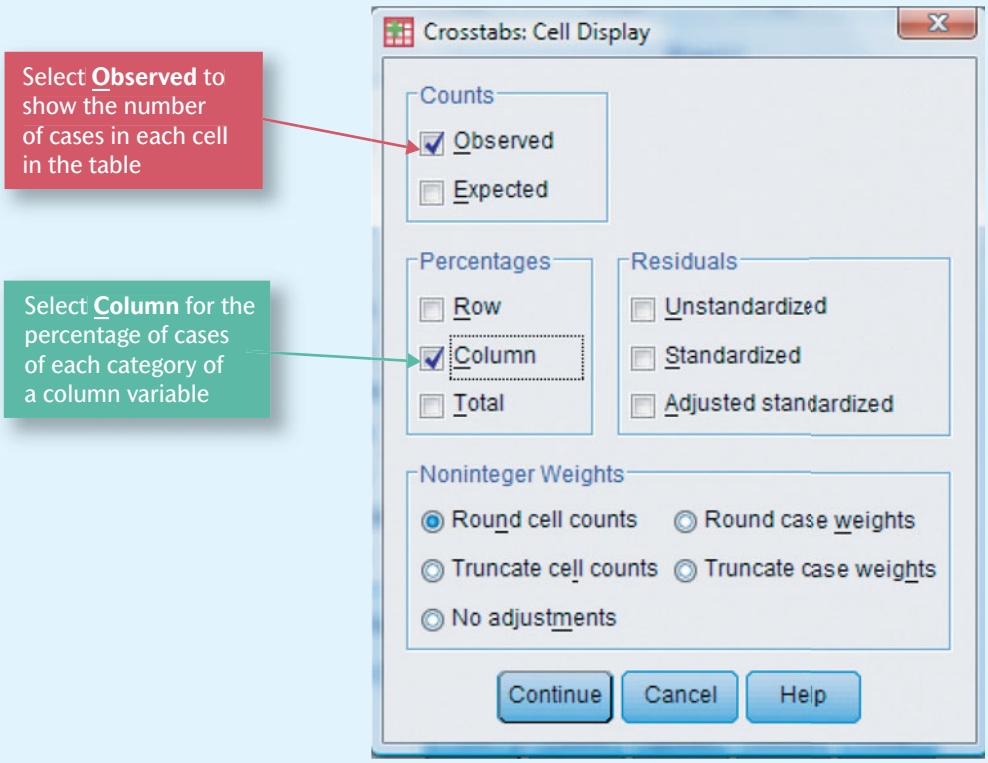



by **Column[s]:** [*gender* will appear in the **Column[s]:** box] → **Cells . . .** [opens **Crosstabs: Cell Display** sub-dialog box shown in Plate 15.14]

3. Make sure **Observed** in the **Counts** box has been selected. Make sure **Column** under **Percentages** has been selected. If either of these has not been selected, simply click at the relevant point. → **Continue** [closes **Crosstabs: Cell Display** sub-dialog box and returns you to the **Crosstabs** dialog box shown in Plate 15.13]

# Plate 15.14

## The Crosstabs: Cell Display sub-dialog box




4. → **Statistics . . .** [opens the **Crosstabs: Statistics** sub-dialog box shown in Plate 15.15]
5. → **Chi-square** → **Phi and Cramér's *V*** → **Continue** [closes **Crosstabs: Statistics** sub-dialog box and returns you to the **Crosstabs** dialog box shown in Plate 15.13]
6. → **OK**

The resulting output can be found in Figure 15.2.

If you have a table with two dichotomous variables, you would use the same sequence of steps to produce phi.

## Generating Pearson's *r* and Spearman's rho

To produce Pearson's *r* in order to find the correlations between ***age***, ***cardmins***, and ***weimins***, follow these steps:

1. → **Analyze** → **Correlate** → **Bivariate . . .** [opens **Bivariate Correlations** dialog box shown in Plate 15.16]
2. → ***age*** → ▶ → ***cardmins*** → ▶ → ***weimins*** → ▶ [***age***, ***cardmins***, and ***weimins*** should now be in the **Variables:** box] → **Pearson** [*if* not already selected] → **OK**

The resulting output is in Figure 15.3.

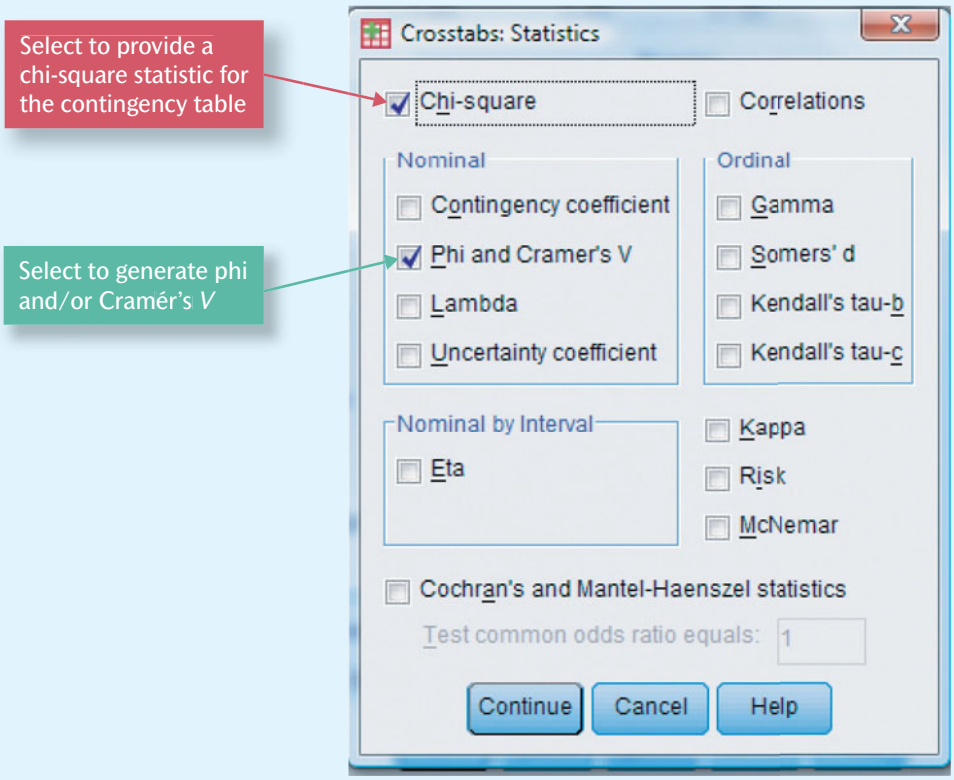
To produce correlations with Spearman's rho, follow the same procedure but instead of selecting **Pearson**, you should → **Spearman** instead.

## Generating scatter diagrams

Scatter diagrams, known as ***scatterplots*** in SPSS, are produced in the following way. Let us say that we want to plot the relationship between ***age*** and ***cardmins***. There is a convention that, if one variable can be identified as likely to be the independent variable, it should be placed on the ***x*** axis, that is, the horizontal axis. Since ***age*** is bound to be the independent variable, we would follow these steps:

# Plate 15.15

## The **Crosstabs: Statistics** sub-dialog box




# Figure 15.2

## Contingency table for *reasons for visiting* by *gender* (SPSS output)

**Crosstabs**

**Case Processing Summary**

| | Cases | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Valid | | Missing | | Total | |
| | N | Percent | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| reasons for visiting * gender | 90 | 100.0% | 0 | .0% | 90 | 100.0% |

# Figure 15.2

*Continued*

**reasons for visiting * gender Crosstabulation**

| | | | gender | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Male | Female | Total |
| reasons for visiting | relaxation | Count | 3 | 6 | 9 |
| | | % within gender | 7.1% | 12.5% | 10.0% |
| | fitness | Count | 15 | 16 | 31 |
| | | % within gender | 35.7% | 33.3% | 34.4% |
| | lose weight | Count | 8 | 25 | 33 |
| | | % within gender | 19.0% | 52.1% | 36.7% |
| | build strength | Count | 16 | 1 | 17 |
| | | % within gender | 38.1% | 2.1% | 18.9% |
| Total | | Count | 42 | 48 | 90 |
| | | % within gender | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

**Chi-Square Tests**

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 22.726[a] | 3 | .000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 25.805 | 3 | .000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 9.716 | 1 | .002 |
| N of Valid Cases | 90 | | |

a. 2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 4.20.

Interpret the Pearson Chi-Square row for information about chi-square

**Symmetric Measures**

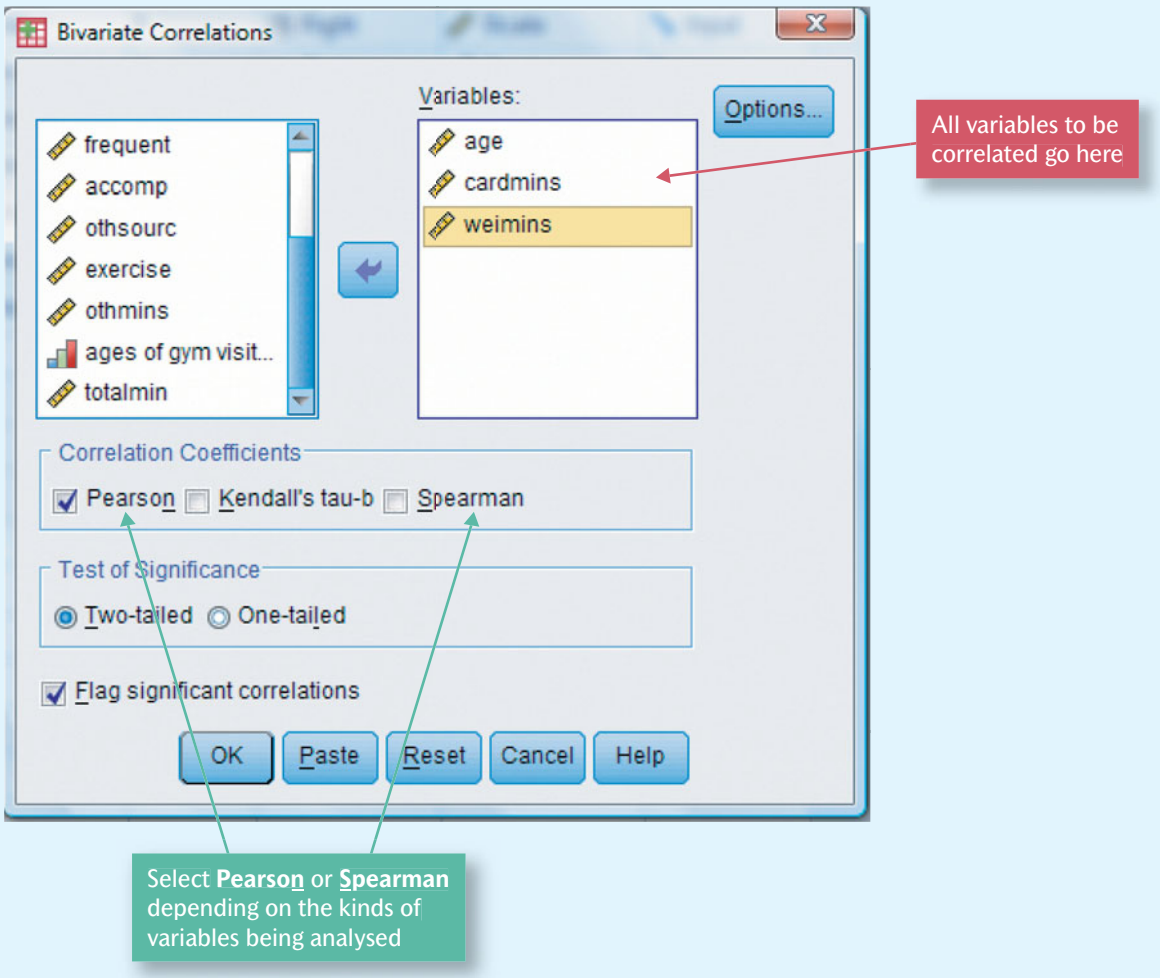
| | | Value | Approx. Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Nominal by Nominal | Phi | .503 | .000 |
| | Cramer's V | .503 | .000 |
| N of Valid Cases | | 90 | |

Shows the strength of the relationship between the variables

Shows the level of statistical significance of the computed value of Cramér's *V*

# Plate 15.16

## The Bivariate Correlations dialog box




1. → **Graphs** → **Scatter/Dot** [opens the **Scatter/Dot** dialog box]

2. → **Simple Scatter** [usually this has been automatically selected] → **Define** [opens the **Simple Scatterplot** sub-dialog box shown in Plate 15.17]

3. → ***cardmins*** → ▸ by **Y Axis:** → ***age*** → ▸ by **X Axis:** → **OK**

A default scatter diagram is shown in Figure 15.4. The scatter diagram can then be edited by bringing up the **Chart Editor**. For example, the type and size of the markers can be changed by clicking anywhere in the chart in the **Chart Editor**. This brings up a **Properties** sub-dialog box, which allows a variety of changes to the appearance of the diagram, such as colour and the nature of the points on the plot.

## Comparing means and eta

To produce a table like Table 14.5, these steps should be followed:

# Figure 15.3

## Correlations output for *age*, *weimins*, and *cardmins* (SPSS output)

**Correlations**

**Correlations**

| | | age | cardmins | weimins |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| age | Pearson Correlation | 1 | −.109 | −.273** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .311 | .010 |
| | N | 89 | 89 | 89 |
| cardmins | Pearson Correlation | −.109 | 1 | −.161 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .311 | | .130 |
| | N | 89 | 90 | 90 |
| weimins | Pearson Correlation | −.273** | −.161 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .010 | .130 | |
| | N | 89 | 90 | 90 |

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations of $p < 0.05$ are 'flagged' with asterisks

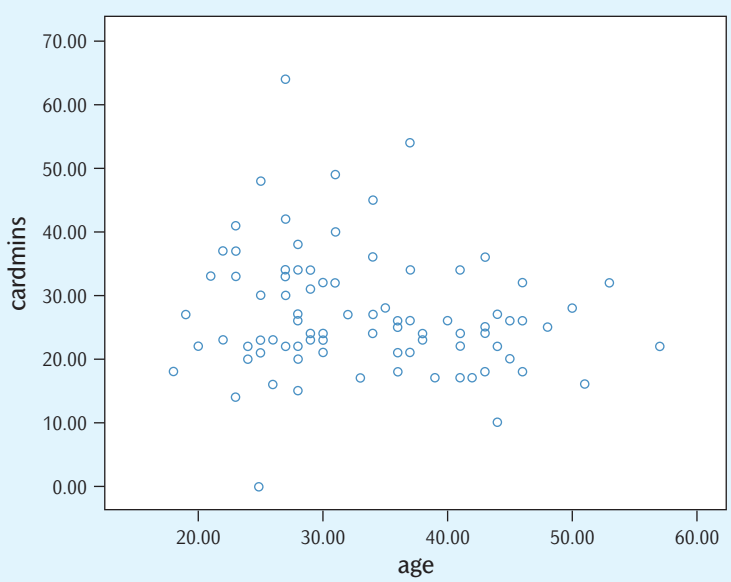
Shows strength of relationship between variables as indicated by Pearson's *r*

Shows level of statistical significance of computed value of Pearson's *r*

Shows number of cases involved in the calculation of a correlation, less any cases for which there are missing values for either or both variables

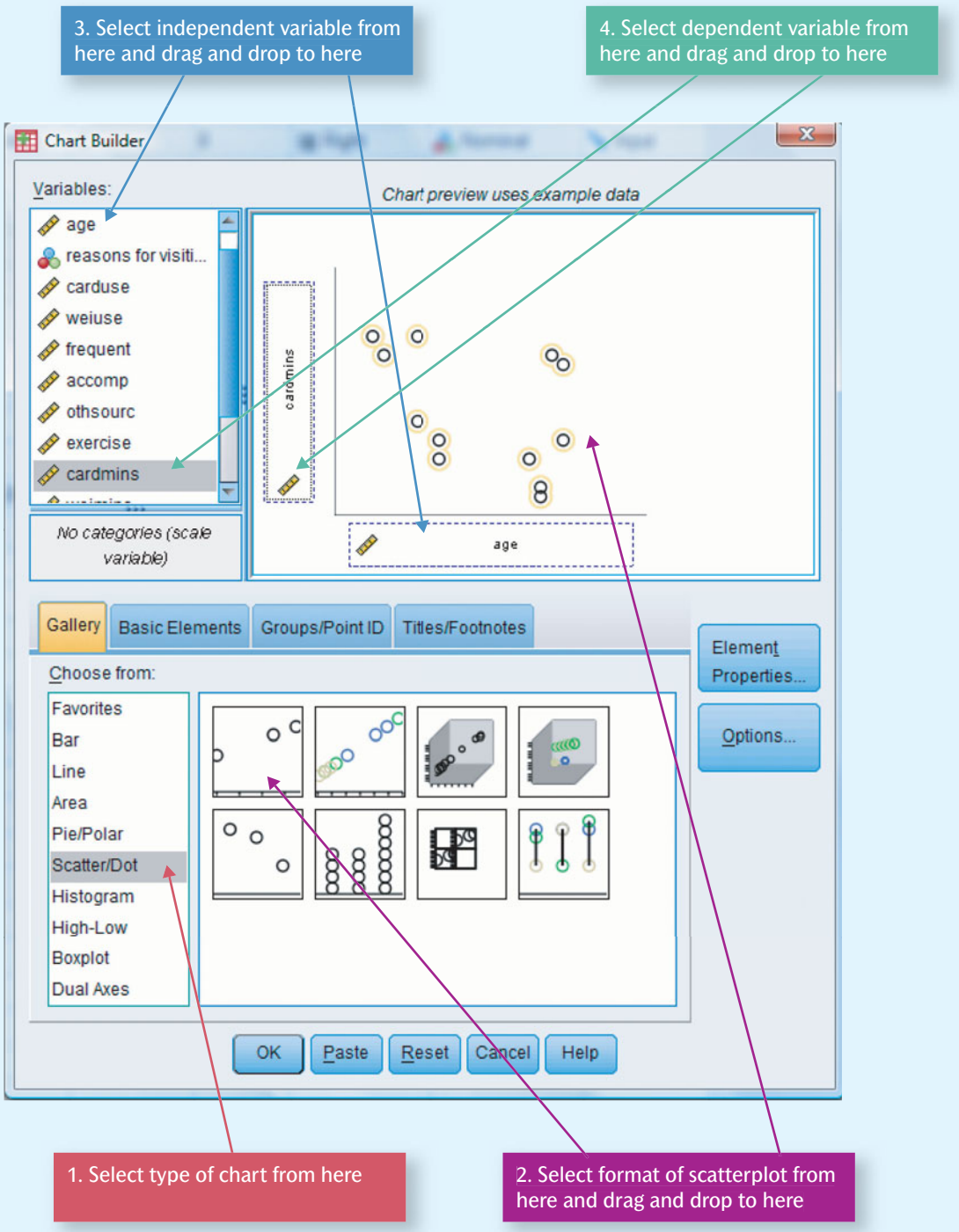
# Figure 15.4

## Scatter diagram showing relationship between *age* and *cardmins* (SPSS output)



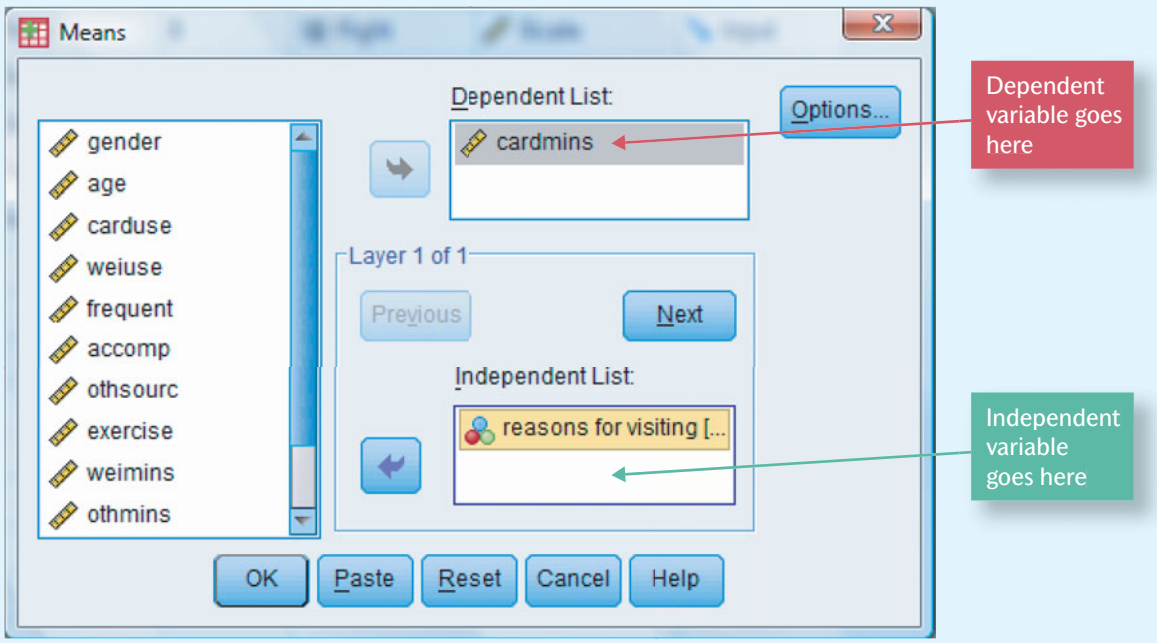
# Plate 15.17

## The **Simple Scatterplot** sub-dialog box



# Plate 15.18

## The Means dialog box




1. → **Analyze** → **Compare Means** → **Means . . .** [opens the **Means** dialog box shown in Plate 15.18]
2. → ***cardmins*** → ▶ to the left of **Dependent List:** → **reasons for visiting** → ▶ button to the left of **Independent List:** → **Options . . .** [opens the **Means: Options** sub-dialog box]
3. → **Anova table and eta** underneath **Statistics for First Layer** → **Continue** [closes the **Means: Options** sub-dialog box and returns you to the **Means** dialog box shown in Plate 15.18] → **OK**

## Generating a contingency table with three variables

To create a table like that in Table 14.7, you would need to follow these steps:

1. → **Analyze** → **Descriptive Statistics** → **Crosstabs . . .** [opens the **Crosstabs** dialog box shown in Plate 15.13]
2. → ***othsourc*** → ▶ by **Row[s]** [**othsourc** will appear in the **Row[s]:** box]
3. → ***age3*** [this is the name we gave when we created a new variable with ***age*** recoded into three categories] → ▶ by **Column[s]:** [***age3*** will appear in the **Column[s]:** box] → ***gender*** → ▶ beneath **Previous** [***gender*** will appear in the box underneath **Layer 1 of 1**] → **Cells** [opens **Crosstabs: Cell Display** sub-dialog box shown in Plate 15.14]
4. Make sure **Observed** in the **Counts** box has been selected. Make sure **Column** under **Percentages** has been selected. If either of these has not been selected, simply click at the relevant point. → **Continue** [closes **Crosstabs: Cell Display** sub-dialog box and returns you to the **Crosstabs** dialog box shown in Plate 15.13]
5. → **OK**

The resulting table will look somewhat different from Table 14.7 in that ***gender*** will appear as a row rather than as a column variable.



# Further operations in SPSS

## Saving your data

You will need to save your data for future use. To do this, make sure that the **Data Editor** is the active window. Then,

→ **File** → **Save As . . .**

The **Save Data As** dialog box will then appear. You will need to provide a name for your data, which will be placed after **File name**: we called the file 'gym study'. You also need to decide where you are going to save the data—for example, onto a memory stick. To select the destination drive, → the downward pointing arrow to the left of **Look in** and then select the drive and folder into which you want to place your data. Then → **Save**.

Remember that this procedure saves your data *and* any other work you have done on your data—for example, value labels and recoded variables. If you subsequently use the data again and do more work on your data, such as creating a new variable, you will need to save the data again or the new work will be lost. SPSS will give you a choice of renaming your data, in which case you will have two files of data (one with the original data and one with any changes), or keeping the same name, in which case the file will be changed and the existing name retained.

## Retrieving your data

When you want to retrieve the data file you have created, → **File** → **Open. . . .** The **Open File** dialog box will appear. You then need to go to the location in which you have deposited your data to retrieve the file containing your data and then → **Open** → **Data . . .** A shortcut alternative to this procedure is to → the first button on the toolbar (it looks like an open file), which brings up the **Open File** dialog box.

## Printing output

To print all the output in the **SPSS Output Viewer**, make sure that the **Output 1—SPSS Viewer** is the active window and then → **File** → **Print . . .** The **Print** dialog box will appear and then → **OK**. To print just some of your output, hold down the Ctrl button on your keyboard and click once on the parts you want to print. The easiest way to do this is to select all the elements you want in the output summary in the left-hand segment of the **Output Viewer** shown in Plate 15.10. Then bring up the Print dialog box. When the **Print** dialog box appears, make sure **Selection** under **Print range** has been selected. The third button on the toolbar (which appears as a printer) provides a shortcut to the **Print** dialog box.



## *Key points*

- SPSS can be used to implement the techniques learned in Chapter 14, but learning new software requires perseverance and at times the results obtained may not seem to be worth the learning process.
- But it is worth it—it would take you far longer to perform calculations on a sample of around 100 than to learn the software.
- If you find yourself moving into much more advanced techniques, the time saved is even more substantial, particularly with large samples.
- It is better to become familiar with SPSS before you begin designing your research instruments, so you are aware of difficulties you might have in presenting your data in SPSS at an early stage.



# Questions for review

### *Getting started in SPSS*

- Outline the differences between: variable names, variable labels, and value labels.
- In what circumstances might you want to recode a variable?
- In what circumstances might you want to create a new variable?

### *Data analysis with SPSS*

Using the gym survey data, create:

- a frequency table for ***exercise***;
- a bar chart and pie chart for ***exercise*** and compare their usefulness;
- a histogram for ***cardmins***;
- measures of central tendency and dispersion for ***cardmins***;
- a contingency table and chi-square test for ***exercise*** and ***gender***;
- Pearson's *r* for ***age*** and ***cardmins***;
- Spearman's rho for ***carduse*** and ***weiuse***;
- a scatter diagram for ***age*** and ***cardmins***;
- a comparing means analysis for ***totalmin*** and **reasons for visiting**.



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Using SPSS for Windows.*

# Part Three

Part Three of this book is concerned with qualitative research. Chapter 16 sets the scene by exploring the main features of this research strategy. Chapter 17 deals with ethnography and participant observation, which are among the main ways of collecting qualitative data. Chapter 18 is concerned with the kind of interviewing that is carried out in qualitative research. Chapter 19 addresses the focus group method, which is an increasingly popular technique that allows groups of people to be interviewed. Chapter 20 explores two approaches to the study of language in business research: conversation analysis and discourse analysis. Chapter 21 explores the types of documents with which qualitative researchers tend to be concerned and approaches to examining them. Chapter 22 examines different approaches to qualitative data analysis and offers advice on how it can be carried out. Chapter 23 shows you how to use computer software in the form of NVivo to conduct the kind of analysis discussed in Chapter 22.

These chapters will provide you with the essential tools for doing qualitative research. They will take you from the very general issues to do with the generic features of qualitative research to the very practical issues of conducting your own observational studies or interviews and analysing your own data.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# 16

# The nature of qualitative research

## Chapter outline


**Introduction** 386

**The main steps in qualitative research** 389

**Theory and research** 392

**Concepts in qualitative research** 393

**Reliability and validity in qualitative research** 394

- Adapting reliability and validity for qualitative research 395
- Alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research 395
- Recent discussions about quality criteria for qualitative research 399

**The main preoccupations of qualitative researchers** 401

- Seeing through the eyes of the people being studied 402
- Description and the emphasis on context 403
- Emphasis on process 404
- Flexibility and limited structure 405
- Concepts and theory grounded in data 406

**The critique of qualitative research** 408

- Qualitative research is too subjective 408
- Difficult to replicate 408
- Problems of generalization 408
- Lack of transparency 409

**Is it always like this?** 409

**Some contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research** 410

**Some similarities between quantitative and qualitative research** 412

**Researcher–subject relationships** 413

- Action research 413
- Cognitive mapping 415
- Feminism and qualitative research 417
- Collaborative and participatory research 419

***Key points*** 421

***Questions for review*** 421



## Chapter outline

Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. As a research strategy it is inductivist, constructionist, and interpretivist, but qualitative researchers do not always subscribe to all three of these methods. This chapter is concerned with outlining the main features of qualitative research, which has become an increasingly established approach to business research. The chapter explores:

- the main steps in qualitative research: delineating the sequence of stages in qualitative research is more controversial than with quantitative research, because it exhibits somewhat less codification of the research process;
- the relationship between theory and research;
- the nature of concepts in qualitative research and their differences from concepts in quantitative research;
- how far reliability and validity are appropriate criteria for qualitative researchers and whether or not alternative criteria that are more tailored to the research strategy are necessary;
- the main preoccupations of qualitative researchers; five areas are identified in terms of an emphasis on: seeing through the eyes of research participants; description and context; process; flexibility and lack of structure; and concepts and theory as outcomes of the research process;
- some common criticisms of qualitative research;
- the main contrasts between qualitative and quantitative research;
- the stance of feminist researchers on qualitative research.

# Introduction

We began Chapter 6 by noting that *quantitative* research had been outlined in Chapter 1 as a distinctive research strategy. Much the same kind of general point can be registered in relation to *qualitative* research. In Chapter 1 it was suggested that qualitative research differs from quantitative research in several ways. Most obviously, qualitative research tends to be concerned with words rather than numbers, but three further features are particularly noteworthy:

- an inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, whereby the former is generated out of the latter;
- an epistemological position described as interpretivist, meaning that, in contrast to the adoption of a natural scientific model in quantitative research, the stress is on the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants; and
- an ontological position described as constructionist, which implies that social properties are outcomes of the interactions between individuals, rather than phenomena 'out there' and separate from those involved in its construction.

As Bryman and Burgess (1999) observe, although there has been a proliferation of writings on qualitative research since the 1970s, stipulating what it is and is not as a distinct research strategy is by no means straightforward. They propose three reasons for this state of affairs.

- As a term, 'qualitative research' is sometimes taken to imply an approach to business research in which quantitative data are not collected or generated. Many writers on qualitative research are critical of such a rendition of qualitative research, because (as we will see) the distinctiveness of qualitative research does not reside solely in the absence of numbers.

- Writers like Gubrium and Holstein (1997) have suggested that several traditions in qualitative research can be identified (see Key concept 16.1).
- Sometimes, qualitative research is discussed in terms of the ways in which it differs from quantitative research. A potential problem with this tactic is that it means that qualitative research ends up being addressed in terms of what quantitative research is *not*.



## Key concept 16.1
## Four traditions of qualitative research

Gubrium and Holstein (1997) suggest four traditions of qualitative research.

- *Naturalism*: seeks to understand social reality in its own terms; 'as it really is'; provides rich descriptions of people and interaction in natural settings.
- *Ethnomethodology*: seeks to understand how social order is created through talk and interaction; has a naturalistic orientation.
- *Emotionalism*: exhibits a concern with subjectivity and gaining access to 'inside' experience; concern with the inner reality of humans.
- *Postmodernism*: has an emphasis on 'method talk'; sensitive to the different ways social reality can be constructed. For more on postmodernism, see Key concept 27.4.

We encountered the term *naturalism* in Key concept 2.4. The use of the term here is more or less the same as the second meaning referred to in Key concept 2.4. The naturalist tradition has probably been the most common one over the years. The second tradition will be encountered in Chapter 20, when we will be looking at an approach to the collection of qualitative data known as **conversation analysis**. The more recent postmodern standpoint will be addressed in Chapter 27. The third tradition—emotionalism—has not become the focus of a significant stream of research and will not be emphasized in this book. However, the mere presence of these four contrasting traditions points to the difficulty of creating a definitive account of what qualitative research is and is not.

Silverman (1993) has been particularly critical of accounts of qualitative research that do not acknowledge the variety of forms that the research strategy can assume. Others, such as Denzin and Lincoln (2005*b*), have argued that qualitative research has evolved over time into a series of distinct phases or 'moments' (see Thinking deeply 16.2). In other words, writers like Silverman are critical of attempts to specify the nature of qualitative research as a general approach. However, unless we can talk to a certain degree about the nature of qualitative research, it is difficult to see how it is possible to refer to qualitative research as a distinctive research strategy. In much the same way that in Chapter 6 it was recognized that quantitative researchers employ different research designs, in writing about the characteristics of qualitative research we will need to be sensitive to the different orientations of qualitative researchers. Without at least a sense of what is common to a set of many if not most studies that might be described as qualitative, the very notion of qualitative research would be rendered problematic. Yet it is clear that, for many social scientists, it is a helpful and meaningful category that can be seen in a variety of ways. Examples are: the arrival of specialist journals, such as *Qualitative Sociology* and *Qualitative Inquiry*; texts on qualitative research (e.g. Silverman 1993, 2000; Seale 1999); a huge *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Denzin and Lincoln 2000); and a series of books on different facets of qualitative research (the Sage Qualitative Research Methods Series).

Several reasons might be proposed for the unease among some writers concerning the specification of the nature of qualitative research. Two reasons might be regarded as having particular importance. First, qualitative research subsumes several diverse research methods that differ from each other considerably. The following are the main research methods associated with qualitative research.



# Thinking deeply 16.2
## The nine moments of qualitative research

Denzin and Lincoln (2005*b*) have suggested that qualitative research has progressed through a number of stages. They portray this as a history of qualitative research in North America. It is not clear why the stages are presented as relating only to North America, but the distinctions are worth drawing attention to because they relate closely to the suggestion that there are different traditions of qualitative research.

1. *The traditional period*: the early twentieth century up to the Second World War. This phase refers to the work of social anthropologists and the Chicago School. It refers to in-depth studies of 'slices of life' that portrayed those who were studied as strange or alien. It was heavily imbued with positivism.
2. *The modernist phase*: post-Second World War to early 1970s. During this period, qualitative researchers built on the work of the traditional period but at the same time sought to enhance the rigour of qualitative enquiries and began to reflect on the nature of their craft. These investigations also showed a tendency towards positivism.
3. *Blurred genres*: 1970–86. This was a period when a variety of epistemological and ontological approaches, as well as theoretical ideas, were being explored as plausible bases for qualitative enquiries. According to Denzin and Lincoln, we see in this period a continued proclivity towards positivism, but with the beginnings of an interpretivist self-consciousness, influenced by Geertz's (1973*a*) insistence that qualitative researchers are involved in interpretations of the interpretations of those on whom they conduct their investigations.
4. *Crisis of representation*: mid-1980s onwards. Most of the key writings associated with this moment occurred in the 1980s. It refers to a period in which qualitative social researchers in general (though much of the writing stemmed initially from social anthropology) developed greater self-awareness concerning in particular the fact that their accounts of their fieldwork are just one way of representing reality and that, moreover, their representations are heavily influenced by their social locations. The 'crisis of representation', then, is the recognition that the researcher's written work has limited scientific authority. These ideas will be encountered again in Chapter 27 in the section 'Writing ethnography'.

The next three phases refer to a 'triple crisis' stemming from the fourth moment above.

5. *Postmodern period of experimental ethnographic writing.* Mid-1990s. Heavily influenced by postmodernism (see Key concept 27.4), work under this heading is characterized by an awareness of the different ways of representing research participants (often referred to as 'the other') when writing up findings. Qualitative researchers have tried different ways of representing the people whom they study.
6. *Post-experimental enquiry.* 1995–2000. This period is associated mainly with the emergence of AltaMira Press, a publisher of qualitative research that encourages experimental and interdisciplinary writing. It describes itself as having a 'focus on interdisciplinary work, breaking long-standing boundaries' (***www.altamirapress.com/RLA/About*** (accessed 7 June 2010)).
7. *The methodologically contested present*: 2000–4. This refers to a period in which there is considerable disagreement about how qualitative research should be conducted and the directions it should be heading. It is very much associated with the arrival of journals like *Qualitative Inquiry* and *Qualitative Research* that provide forums for these debates. While Denzin and Lincoln date this period as 2000–4, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that the contested methodological differences have not abated. One of the areas that has been a focus of the ongoing debates has been the issue of research quality criteria in relation to qualitative studies.
8. *Now*: 2005–. This period is characterized by a backlash against qualitative research with a reassertion in government circles of the value of traditional science. Some of these pressures are reviewed in Bryman (2007*b*).
9. *The fractured future*. Lincoln and Denzin (2005*b*: 1123) also speculate about what the immediate future holds: 'Randomized field trials . . . will occupy the time of one group of researchers while the pursuit of a socially and culturally responsive, communitarian, justice-oriented set of studies will consume the meaningful working moments of the other.'

This timeline of phases is useful because it highlights the difficulty of characterizing 'qualitative research'. As Silverman (1993) observes, the term covers a number of different research methods and approaches to qualitative data that differ considerably. On the other hand, Denzin and Lincoln's 'moments' have to be treated with some caution. First, it has to be borne in mind that work that could be depicted in terms very similar to the first two phases continues to be conducted. Indeed, many of the qualitative studies that serve as illustrations in Part Three of this book are of this type. Although qualitative researchers may be more self-conscious nowadays about their influence on the research process and the significance of how they write, many qualitative studies are still characterized by realism, at least to some degree. Secondly, Denzin and Lincoln's later phases are associated too much with particular events—the arrival of a new publisher or new journals—which looks strange when viewed in relation to the several decades with which the earlier moments are associated. Thirdly, their ninth and final moment seems to be concerned with a rift in social research in general, rather than within qualitative research as such.

- *Ethnography/participant observation*. While some caution is advisable in treating ethnography and participant observation as synonyms, in many respects they refer to similar if not identical approaches to data collection in which the researcher is immersed in a social setting for some time in order to observe and listen with a view to gaining an appreciation of the culture of a social group. It has been employed in such business research classics as Dalton's (1959) study of managerial work in the USA and Lupton's (1963) exploration of shopfloor factory life and restriction of output in England.
- *Qualitative interviewing*. This is a very broad term to describe a wide range of interviewing styles (see Key concept 8.2 for an introduction). Moreover, qualitative researchers employing ethnography or participant observation typically engage in a substantial amount of qualitative interviewing.
- *Focus groups* (see Key concept 8.2).
- *Language-based approaches to the collection of qualitative data*, such as discourse and conversation analysis.
- *The collection and qualitative analysis of texts and documents*.

Each of these approaches to data collection will be examined in Part Three. The picture with regard to the very different methods and sources that comprise qualitative research is made somewhat more complex by the fact that a mixed-methods approach (see Chapter 25) is frequently employed. As noted above, researchers employing ethnography or participant observation frequently conduct qualitative interviews. However, they also often collect and analyse texts and documents as well. Thus, there is considerable variability in the collection of data among studies that are typically deemed to be qualitative. Of course, quantitative research also subsumes several different methods of data collection (these were covered in Part Two), but the inclusion of methods concerned with the analysis of language as a form of qualitative research implies somewhat greater variability.

A second reason why there is some resistance to a delineation of the nature of qualitative research is that the connection between theory and research is somewhat more ambiguous than in quantitative research. With the latter research strategy, theoretical issues drive the formulation of a research question, which in turn drives the collection and analysis of data. Findings then feed back into the relevant theory. This is rather a caricature, because what counts as 'theory' is sometimes little more than the research literature relating to a certain issue or area. In qualitative research, theory is supposed to be an outcome of an investigation rather than something that precedes it. However, some writers, like Silverman (1993: 24), have argued that such a depiction of qualitative research is 'out of tune with the greater sophistication of contemporary field research design, born out of accumulated knowledge of interaction and greater concern with issues of reliability and validity'. This is particularly the case with conversation analysis, an approach to the study of language that will be examined in Chapter 20. However, qualitative research is more usually regarded as denoting an approach in which theory and categorization emerge out of the collection and analysis of data. The more general point being made is that such a difference within qualitative research may account for the unease about depicting the research strategy in terms of a set of stages.



## The main steps in qualitative research

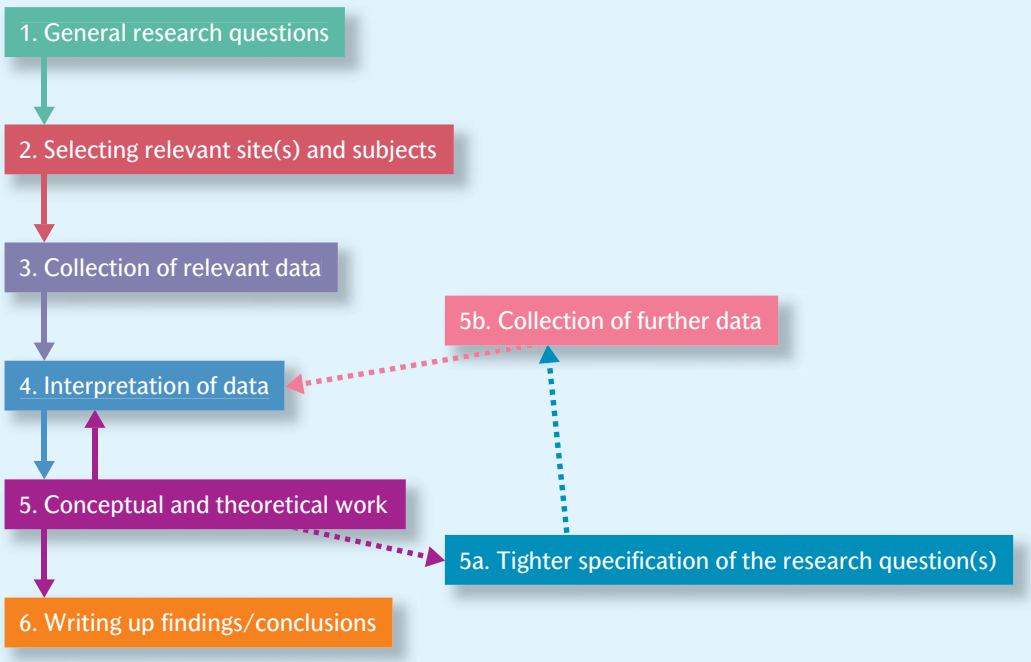
The sequence outlined in Figure 16.1 provides a representation of how the qualitative research process can be visualized. In order to illustrate these steps, a study by Prasad (1993) of work computerization will be used.

- *Step 1. General research questions* (see Thinking deeply 16.3). The starting point for Prasad's (1993) study of the computerization of work in a primary health-care organization was to focus on the symbolic processes involved in implementing information technology. Prasad chose to adopt a symbolic interactionist approach (see Chapter 1) to the study of technological change because this perspective emphasizes 'both process issues and the roles of meaning and symbols' (1993: 1403). Informed by this theoretical perspective, she then sets out to explore the subjective meanings associated with computers, which have hitherto, she suggests, been largely overlooked. This led her towards the development of research questions, including:

1. What are the multiple symbols associated with work computerization in the organization studied?

# Figure 16.1

**An outline of the main steps of qualitative research**




2. What are the local meanings of these symbolic representations?
3. What influences the process of sedimentation of symbols in the organization?
4. How do these symbolic realities influence the process of computerization and related organization-level action?

- *Step 2. Selecting relevant site(s) and subjects*. The organization studied was a medium-sized primary health-care provider (or health maintenance organization (HMO)) with 163 full-time staff, fictitiously named the 'Paragon Corporation'. Services offered included a medical centre, referrals, a pharmacy, and health education. The site was chosen on the basis that a recent decision had been made to computerize all administrative operations. It was expected that this would involve major changes in daily work practices and interactions between staff, as up until this point all administrative operations had been carried out manually.
- *Step 3. Collection of relevant data*. Prasad suggests that symbolic interaction 'rests on the assumption that every organizational situation is likely to be filled with multiple and frequently conflicting interpretations and meanings' (1993: 1404). This, she suggests, encourages the use of multiple research methods to capture complexity and contradictions in the data. In this way, Prasad neatly justifies her selection of multiple research methods in terms of the theoretical perspective she has already adopted in Step 1.

  Prasad commenced her study of Paragon Corporation at the beginning of 1989 and concluded it more than a year-and-a-half later. At the start of the study, the new technology had not yet arrived. This meant that Prasad was able to structure her data collection longitudinally, to cover the entire period of training and implementation and also to collect data after computerization was completed. During this period she visited the organization at least twice a week.

  Prasad describes her methods as interview and observation. The latter involved regularly spending between two and five hours at a time observing work and interactions. She watched 'receptionists, physician assistants, nurses and records clerks at work and on several occasions even operated the appointment



## Thinking deeply 16.3
## Research questions in qualitative research

Research questions in qualitative research are stated with varying degrees of explicitness. Sometimes, the research question is embedded within a general statement of the orientation of an article. Others opt for a more explicit treatment of research questions. Ashforth et al. (2007) were interested in the phenomenon of 'dirty work', a term first introduced nearly fifty years previously to refer to work that is tainted 'physically, socially or morally' (E. C. Hughes 1958: 122; quoted in Ashforth et al. 2007: 149). The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with managers in eighteen such occupations in order to explore how the work is 'normalized'—that is, how they develop ways of dealing with or reducing the significance of the taint of dirty work. After a discussion of the literature and their view of its implications for their own work, they write:

> In summary, our research questions were:
>
> *Research Question 1. What normalization challenges do managers in dirty work occupations face?*
>
> *Research Question 2. What tactics do managers report using to normalize dirty work?* (Ashforth et al. 2007: 151; emphasis in original)

One factor that may affect the degree of explicitness with which research questions are stated is the outlet in which the research is published. Ashforth et al. (2007) published this article in the *Academy of Managmeent Journal*, which in the past has tended to publish mainly empirical articles deriving from quantitative research. It may be that Ashforth et al. chose this format for presenting their research questions so that it would exhibit some of the characteristics of research questions or hypotheses in quantitative research that tend to be stated explicitly. Another article in the same issue also stated the research questions very explicitly, though they were not formatted to stand out in the same way.

> Thus two research questions guided this article: (1) What conditions trigger organizational stakeholders and leaders to engage in sensemaking activities? and (2) What conditions enable sensegiving on the part of stakeholders and leaders motivated to engage in sensemaking activities? (Maitlis and Lawrence 2007: 59)

The researchers went on to investigate these two research questions by collecting qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, observation, and examination of documents in connection with three British symphony orchestras.

and billing system if a receptionist or clerk was particularly busy' (1993: 1407). After every fieldwork visit she wrote up 'extensive notes' documenting these observations.

The second strand to Prasad's data collection strategy involved 'in-depth interviews'. In total, she interviewed thirty-four employees, representing a diverse range of occupations and organizational positions. The interviews were carried out towards the end of the data collection period, after the computer system had been in use for more than five months. They focused on understanding organization members' meaningful experiences with computerized work. Most of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed later.

- *Step 4. Interpretation of data*. Prasad describes her approach to the analysis of the data as being based on techniques of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This provided guidelines for the classification and organization of the data, in particular through the creation and maintenance of 'concept cards' (see Chapter 22 and Research in focus 22.5), through which Prasad grouped together incidents, events, or pieces of conversation related to a particular theme. As the analysis developed, new concepts were added and 'sometimes concept cards were reconstituted under different labels' (1993: 1411). Once patterns in the data had been identified, Prasad then started to place them in the context of relevant literature about technological change in organizations.

One of the key themes to emerge from the data is that employees associated the computerization of work with professionalism. Moreover, the symbolic meaning associated with professionalism held three distinct sets of meanings for different organizational members. First, it was linked to the notion that computers helped in the provision of good medical care. Secondly, it signalled the ability of the organization to move forward in keeping with technological advancement and progress. Thirdly, computerization was equated with professionalism because of its capacity to provide instant information and thereby transform employees into experts. These findings are linked to local circumstances that have shaped Paragon's history. Since its recent takeover by a large national health organization, there had been anxiety that Paragon did not 'measure up to the parent company's professional standards' (1993: 1417). 'Thus,

the symbolic association of computerization with professionalism in part gained strength because it was seen as making the HMO a more professional member of the Paragon group of companies' (1993: 1417–18).

- *Step 5. Conceptual and theoretical work*. The primary contribution of Prasad's research stems from her application of a symbolic interactionist perspective, which helped to reveal some of the symbolic aspects of technological change. Her focus on meanings, local interpretations, and enactment revealed some of the hidden meanings of work computerization. This enabled the development of propositions about the nature of symbolic realities associated with technological change, which form the basis of the study's findings. Prasad concludes with a suggestion as to the broader generalizability that may be associated with these findings: 'Understanding the nature of these broad symbolic realities may provide a way to understand resistance and adaptation to technological change in general' (1993: 1423).
- *Step 5a. Tighter specification of the research question(s), and Step 5b. Collection of further data*. There is some evidence from Prasad's account that she followed a process in which she collected further data and refined her research questions after several weeks of preliminary observations at the HMO. This approach corresponds with her grounded theory framework and emphasizes the interplay between interpretation and theorizing, on the one hand, and data collection, on the other. Such a strategy is frequently referred to as an *iterative* one. She does write at one point that data analysis was an iterative process, although the stages of data collection and analysis are presented as relatively sequential and discrete.
- *Step 6. Writing up findings/conclusions*. There is no real difference between the significance of writing up in quantitative research and qualitative research, so that exactly the same points made in relation to Step 11 in Figure 6.1 apply here. An audience has to be convinced about the credibility and significance of the interpretations offered. Researchers are not and cannot be simply conduits for the things they see and the words they hear. The salience of what researchers have seen and heard has to be impressed on the audience. Prasad does this by making clear to her audience that her methodology has implications for use in a variety of organizational situations that can benefit from the insights of symbolic interaction, including the phenomena of leadership transitions, mergers and acquisitions, new policy implementations, and organizational collaborations. She concludes that a symbolic interaction approach can provide insight into any situation that contains local meanings that influence organization-level action.

Two particularly distinctive aspects of the sequence of steps in qualitative research are the highly related issues of the links between theory and concepts with research data. It is to these issues that we now turn.



## Theory and research

Most qualitative researchers when writing about their craft emphasize a preference for treating theory as something that emerges out of the collection and analysis of data. For example, Marshall (1984) describes her approach to the analysis of research data on women managers' career histories as 'immersion', clearly derived from an inductive approach (see Chapter 1). This involves trying to appreciate inherent patterns rather than to impose preconceived ideas on the data. For Marshall (1981) in the early stages of data analysis, impressions seem to dominate, but at this point, although there is a sense that something is coming out of the data, it is not clear what. At the same time Marshall explains 'there is a kind of fear that *nothing* is going to come out of the research and that I'm going to be left with a pile of tapes and nothing to say at the end' (1981: 396). Structuring the data involves picking certain things out and putting them under some headings, but again Marshall states: 'I'm a bit unsure about this, because this seems to *rob* the individual case of its wholeness. So I have to compensate for parcelling out little bits of a person and putting them under different categories and headings, and try to appreciate the wholeness of each person as well' (1981: 396). The final stage involves a lot of attention; it demands mental space in order to allow insights to emerge from an unconscious level so that connections can be made at lots of different levels. Towards the end of the analysis there comes a point that Marshall describes as feeling almost overloaded and things need to be brought together into a structure. At this point 'it's almost like having the *essence* of things that I can always fall back on now, so it does become more solid and understandable. That feeling gives

me confidence that I can put it together' (1981: 398). As will be seen in Chapter 22, practitioners of grounded theory—a frequently cited approach to the analysis of qualitative data—especially stress the importance of allowing theoretical ideas to emerge out of one's data. But some qualitative researchers argue that qualitative data can and should have an important role in relation to the *testing* of theories as well. Silverman (1993), in particular, has argued that in more recent times qualitative researchers have become increasingly interested in the testing of theories and that this is a reflection of the growing maturity of the strategy. Certainly, there is no reason why qualitative research cannot be employed in order to test theories that are specified in advance of data collection. In any case, much qualitative research entails the testing of theories in the course of the research process. So, in Figure 16.1, the loop back from Step 5a 'Tighter specification of the research question(s)' to Step 5b 'Collection of further data' implies that a theoretical position may emerge in the course of research and may spur the collection of further data to test that theory. This kind of oscillation between testing emerging theories and collecting data is a particularly prominent feature of grounded theory. It is presented as a dashed line in Figure 16.1, because it is not as necessary a feature of the process of qualitative research as the other steps.

One key point that is implied by Figure 16.1 is that the typical sequence of steps in qualitative research entails the generation of theories rather than the testing of theories that are specified at the outset. Silverman (1993) is undoubtedly correct that pre-specified theories *can be* and sometimes *are* tested with qualitative data, but the generation of theory tends to be the preferred approach.



## Concepts in qualitative research

A central feature of Chapter 6 was the discussion of concepts and their measurement. For most qualitative researchers, developing measures of concepts will not be a significant consideration, but concepts are very much part of the landscape in qualitative research. However, the way in which concepts are developed and employed is often rather different from that implied in the quantitative research strategy. Blumer's (1954) distinction between 'definitive' and **'sensitizing' concepts** captures aspects of the different ways in which concepts are thought about.

Blumer (1954) argued stridently against the use of definitive concepts in social research. The idea of definitive concepts is typified by the way in which, in quantitative research, a concept, once developed, becomes fixed through the elaboration of indicators. For Blumer, such an approach entailed the application of a straitjacket on the social world, because the concept in question comes to be seen exclusively in terms of the indicators that have been developed for it. Fine nuances in the form that the concept can assume or alternative ways of viewing the concept and its manifestations are sidelined. In other words, definitive concepts are excessively concerned with what is common to the phenomena that the concept is supposed to subsume rather than with variety. Instead, Blumer recommended that social researchers should recognize that the concepts they use are sensitizing concepts in that they provide 'a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances' (1954: 7). For Blumer, then, concepts should be employed in such a way that they give a very general sense of what to look for and act as a means for uncovering the variety of forms that the phenomena to which they refer can assume. In providing a critique of definitive concepts, it is clear that Blumer had in mind the concept-indicator model described in Chapter 6. In other words, his views entailed in large part a critique of quantitative research and a programmatic statement that would form a springboard for an alternative approach that nowadays we would recognize as qualitative research.

Blumer's distinction is not without its problems. It is not at all clear how far a very general formulation of a concept can be regarded as a useful guide to empirical enquiry. If it is too general, it will simply fail to provide a useful starting point, because its guidelines are too broad; if too narrow, it is likely to repeat some of the difficulties Blumer identified in relation to definitive concepts. However, his general view of concepts has attracted some support, because his preference for not imposing preordained schemes on the social world chimes with that of many qualitative researchers. As the example in Research in focus 16.4 suggests, the researcher frequently starts out with a broad outline of a concept, which is revised and narrowed during the course of data collection. For subsequent researchers, the concept may be taken up and revised as it is employed in connection with different social contexts or in relation to somewhat different research questions.



## Research in focus 16.4

### The emergence of a concept in qualitative research: 'emotional labour'

Hochschild's (1983) idea of emotional labour—labour that 'requires one to induce or suppress feelings in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others' (1983: 7)—has become a very influential concept in the sociology of work and in the developing area of the sociology of emotions. Somewhat ironically for a predominantly qualitative study, Hochschild's initial conceptualization appears to have emerged from a questionnaire she distributed to 261 university students. Within the questionnaire were two requests: 'Describe a real situation that was important to you in which you experienced a deep emotion' and 'Describe as fully and concretely as possible a real situation that was important to you in which you either changed the situation to fit your feelings or changed your feelings to fit the situation' (1983: 13). Thus, although a self-completion questionnaire was employed, the resulting data were qualitative. The data were analysed in terms of the idea of emotion *work*, which is the same as emotional labour but occurs in a private context. Emotional labour is essentially emotion work that is performed as part of one's paid employment. In order to develop the idea of emotional labour, Hochschild looked to the world of work. The main occupation she studied was the flight attendant. Several sources of data on emotional labour among flight attendants were employed. She gained access to Delta Airlines, a large American airline, and in the course of her investigations she

- watched sessions for training attendants and had many conversations with both trainees and experienced attendants during the sessions;
- interviewed various personnel, such as managers in various sections, and advertising agents;
- examined Delta advertisements spanning thirty years;
- observed the flight attendant recruitment process at Pan American Airways, since she had not been allowed to do this at Delta;
- conducted 'open-ended interviews lasting three to five hours each with thirty flight attendants in the San Francisco Bay Area' (1983: 15).

As a contrasting occupational group that is nonetheless also involved in emotional labour, she also interviewed five debt-collectors. In her book, she explores such topics as the human costs of emotional labour and the issue of gender in relation to it. It is clear that Hochschild's concept of emotional labour began as a somewhat imprecise idea that emerged out of a concern with emotion work and that was gradually developed in order to address its wider significance.

The concept has been picked up by other qualitative researchers in management and organization studies. For example, Leidner (1993) has explored through ethnographic studies of a McDonald's restaurant and an insurance company the ways in which organizations seek to 'routinize' the display of emotional labour.



## Reliability and validity in qualitative research

In Chapters 2 and 6 it was noted that reliability and validity are important criteria in establishing and assessing the quality of research for the quantitative researcher. However, there has been some discussion among qualitative researchers concerning their relevance for qualitative research. Moreover, even writers who do take the view that the criteria are relevant have considered the possibility that the meanings of the terms need to be altered. For example, the issue of measurement validity almost by definition seems to carry connotations of measurement. Since measurement is not a major preoccupation among qualitative researchers, the issue of

validity would seem to have little bearing on such studies. As foreshadowed briefly in Chapter 2, a number of stances have been taken by qualitative researchers in relation to these issues.

## Adapting reliability and validity for qualitative research

One stance is to assimilate reliability and validity into qualitative research with little change of meaning other than playing down the salience of measurement issues. Mason (1996), for example, in her book on qualitative research, argues that reliability, validity, and generalizability (which is the main component of external validity (see Chapter 2)) 'are different kinds of measures of the quality, rigour and wider potential of research, which are achieved according to certain methodological and disciplinary conventions and principles' (1996: 21). She sticks very closely to the meaning that these criteria have in quantitative research, where they have been largely developed. Thus, validity refers to whether 'you are observing, identifying, or "measuring" what you say you are' (1996: 24). LeCompte and Goetz (1982) and Kirk and Miller (1986) also write about reliability and validity in relation to qualitative research but invest the terms with a somewhat different meaning from Mason. LeCompte and Goetz write about the following:

- *External reliability*, by which they mean the degree to which a study can be replicated. This is a difficult criterion to meet in qualitative research, since, as LeCompte and Goetz recognize, it is impossible to 'freeze' a social setting and the circumstances of an initial study to make it replicable in the sense in which the term is usually employed (see Chapter 6). However, they suggest several strategies that can be introduced in order to approach the requirements of external reliability. For example, they suggest that a qualitative researcher replicating ethnographic research needs to adopt a similar social role to that adopted by the original researcher. Otherwise what a researcher conducting a replication sees and hears will not be comparable to the original research.
- *Internal reliability*, by which they mean whether or not, when there is more than one observer, members of the research team agree about what they see and hear. This is a similar notion to *inter-observer consistency* (see Key concept 6.5).
- *Internal validity*, by which they mean whether or not there is a good match between researchers' observations and the theoretical ideas they develop. LeCompte and Goetz argue that internal validity tends to be a strength of qualitative research, particularly ethnographic research, because the prolonged participation in the social life of a group over a long period of time allows the researcher to ensure a high level of congruence between concepts and observations.
- *External validity*, which refers to the degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings. LeCompte and Goetz argue that, unlike internal validity, external validity represents a problem for qualitative researchers because of their tendency to employ case studies and small samples.

As this brief treatment suggests, qualitative researchers have tended to employ the terms reliability and validity in very similar ways to quantitative researchers when seeking to develop criteria for assessing research.

## Alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research

However, a second position in relation to reliability and validity in qualitative research can be discerned. Some writers have suggested that qualitative studies should be judged or evaluated according to quite different criteria from those used by quantitative researchers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) propose that it is necessary to specify terms and ways of establishing and assessing the quality of qualitative research that provide an alternative to reliability and validity. They propose two primary criteria for assessing a qualitative study: *trustworthiness* and *authenticity*.

Trustworthiness is made up of four criteria, each of which has an equivalent criterion in quantitative research:

- *credibility*, which parallels internal validity;
- *transferability*, which parallels external validity;
- *dependability*, which parallels reliability;
- *confirmability*, which parallels objectivity.

A major reason for Guba and Lincoln's unease about the simple application of reliability and validity standards to qualitative research is that the criteria presuppose that a single absolute account of social reality is feasible. In other words, they are critical of the view (described in Chapter 1 as *realist*) that there are absolute truths about the social world that it is the job of the social scientist to reveal. Instead, they argue that there can be more than one and possibly several accounts.

### Credibility

The significance of this stress on multiple accounts of social reality is especially evident in the trustworthiness criterion of *credibility*. After all, if there can be several possible accounts of an aspect of social reality, it is the feasibility or credibility of the account that a researcher arrives at that is going to determine its acceptability to others. The establishment of the credibility of findings entails both ensuring that research is carried out according to the canons of good practice *and* submitting research findings to the members of the social world who were studied for confirmation that the investigator has correctly understood that social world. This latter technique is often referred to as **respondent validation** or *member validation* (see Key concept 16.5). Another technique they recommend is *triangulation* (see Key concept 16.6).



## Key concept 16.5
## What is respondent validation?

*Respondent validation*, which is also sometimes called *member validation*, is a process whereby a researcher provides the people on whom he or she has conducted research with an account of his or her findings. The aim of the exercise is to seek corroboration or otherwise of the account that the researcher has arrived at. Respondent validation has been particularly popular among qualitative researchers, because they frequently want to ensure that there is a good correspondence between their findings and the perspectives and experiences of their research participants. The form that respondent validation can assume varies. There are several forms of respondent validation.

- The researcher provides each research participant with an account of what he or she has said to the researcher in an interview and conversations, or of what the researcher observed by watching that person in the course of an observational study. For example, Marshall (1995) reports that she wanted to tell the stories of a small group of women managers who had left or were leaving senior organization positions, from these women's points of view. To achieve this her proposed research approach involved a meeting with each manager, lasting between one-and-a-half and two hours, in which she would tell her story—facilitated by Marshall if appropriate. Marshall stated that she would be happy to discuss her own views and experiences if relevant. She also stated a preference for the meeting to be tape-recorded. Marshall would then take responsibility for having the tape transcribed and writing an initial draft of the woman's story, to be read by the manager herself. It was intended that each story would eventually form one chapter of the book.
- The researcher feeds back to a group of people or an organization his or her impressions and findings in relation to that group or organization. In Marshall's (1995) research, after reading the case the respondent would then meet Marshall again, or exchange letters and phone calls, in order to develop the case to their mutual satisfaction. Most of the women were generally happy with the drafts but wanted minor amendments. Marshall revised the stories, taking research participants' comments into account. She states that, ultimately, the woman manager had the right of veto over what appeared in 'her' chapter.

Later, all participants were invited to a one-day **collaborative enquiry** workshop, in which they would jointly review their experiences of employment and discuss issues of mutual interest.

In each case, the goal is to seek confirmation that the researcher's findings and impressions are congruent with the views of those on whom the research was conducted and to seek out areas in which there is a lack of correspondence and the reasons for it. However, the idea is not without practical difficulties.

- Respondent validation may occasion defensive reactions on the part of research participants and even censorship. Marshall was willing to accept this as a consequence of her collaborative approach. Hence one participant decided that her story made her too identifiable and vulnerable. Even though her reasons for this were highly relevant to the research, as they centred on the difficulties of establishing a positive, accepted identity as a lesbian manager, Marshall agreed only to write a brief account of 'Ruth's' experience, in a chapter amounting only to six pages.

- It is highly questionable whether research participants can validate a researcher's analysis, since this entails inferences being made for an audience of business and management academics. This means that, even though these methods of respondent validation may receive a corroborative response, the researcher still has to make a further leap, through the development of concepts and theories, in providing a framework for the resulting publications. Marshall was therefore careful to define the boundaries between data over which participants had a right of veto (the stories) and other material over which she wished to retain control, to put her own views and pursue her 'more academic concerns' (1995: 336), stressing from the outset that she would want to be able to use this in her publications.

To summarize, respondent validation can provide a means of confirming the validity of individual accounts. It can also help to redress the power imbalance between researcher and researched by providing the participants with a degree of authority in relation to the writing of the final research account. However, a distinction must be made between seeking validation from individuals and seeking validation from organizations, or—as is more likely—key groupings within organizations, such as senior managers. The latter option, by giving powerful groups within the organization control over the research, can introduce particular problems of censorship.



## Key concept 16.6
## What is triangulation?

*Triangulation* entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena. The triangulation metaphor is taken from navigation and military strategy, where it refers to the process whereby multiple reference points are used to locate an object's exact position. The term has been employed somewhat more broadly by Denzin (1970: 310) to refer to an approach that uses 'multiple observers, theoretical perspectives, sources of data, and methodologies', but the emphasis has tended to be on methods of investigation and sources of data. One of the reasons for the advocacy by Webb et al. (1966) of greater use of unobtrusive methods was their potential in relation to a strategy of triangulation (see Key concept 13.12). Triangulation can operate within and across research strategies. It was originally conceptualized by Webb et al. (1966) as an approach to the development of measures of concepts, whereby more than one method would be employed in the development of measures, resulting in greater confidence in findings. As such, triangulation was very much associated with a quantitative research strategy. However, triangulation can also take place within a qualitative research strategy. In fact, ethnographers often check out their observations with interview questions to determine whether they might have misunderstood what they had seen. Increasingly, triangulation is also being used to refer to a process of cross-checking findings deriving from both quantitative and qualitative research (Deacon, Bryman, and Fenton 1998). For example, Kanter (1977) draws attention to the *triangulation* of methods, which characterized her approach, stating, 'I used each source of data, and each informant, as a check against the others' (1977: 337). She suggests that 'a combination of methods . . . emerges as the most valid and reliable way to develop understanding of such a complex social reality as the corporation' (1977: 337).

Another example of the way in which quantitative and qualitative methods can be combined in order to check the validity of findings is provided by Faules (1982), who conducted research in a local government agency in the USA to consider issues relating to performance appraisal. Data were collected by survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire comprised 51 items concerned with contentious aspects of appraisal (such as goals, feedback, and judging its importance) and was administered to 250 employees in the agency, of whom 138 responded. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 62 individuals and dealt with what people talk about in connection with appraisal and with 'stories' about performance appraisal in the agency. Faules concentrated on two areas: the functions of appraisal and the perceived quality of the system. Areas of convergence were found, for example, with both sets of data pointing to a questioning by employees of the relationship between performance ratings and job performance. Also, the questionnaire data provided evidence of differences in the responses of superiors and subordinates, which was supported by the analysis of

stories. However, divergent findings emerged as well. The stories picked up a phenomenon referred to by Faules as a 'change in evaluation', which occurs when an initial appraisal by a person's superior is changed by someone else; this practice was seen as unfair by subordinates, but deemed acceptable by supervisors, who believed in the importance of comparing people's ratings and of ensuring that they were not excessively skewed. However, this element had not been included in the questionnaire and so was not addressed by this method. Although Faules believes that the results were broadly consistent, the nature of the information gleaned was often divergent—the questionnaire provided data on general attitudes, while the stories allowed access to issues of how people make sense of the appraisal process.

This example suggests that, in addition to allowing the cross-checking of data, the use of quantitative and qualitative research in conjunction may often allow access to different levels of reality. However, triangulation represents just one way in which it may be useful to think about the integration of these two research strategies; it is covered in Chapter 25.

### Transferability

As qualitative research typically entails the intensive study of a small group, or of individuals sharing certain characteristics (that is, depth rather than the breadth that is a preoccupation in quantitative research), qualitative findings tend to be orientated to the contextual uniqueness and significance of the aspect of the social world being studied. As Guba and Lincoln put it, whether or not findings 'hold in some other context, or even in the same context at some other time, is an empirical issue' (Lincoln and Guba 1985: 316). Instead, qualitative researchers are encouraged to produce what Geertz (1973*a*) calls **thick description**—that is, rich accounts of the details of a culture. Guba and Lincoln argue that a thick description provides others with what they refer to as a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieux.

### Dependability

As a parallel to reliability in quantitative research, Guba and Lincoln propose the idea of dependability and argue that, to establish the merit of research in terms of this criterion of trustworthiness, researchers should adopt an 'auditing' approach. This entails ensuring that complete records are kept of all phases of the research process—problem formulation, selection of research participants, fieldwork notes, interview transcripts, data analysis decisions, and so on—in an accessible manner. Peers would then act as auditors, possibly during the course of the research and certainly at the end, to establish how far proper procedures are being and have been followed. This would include assessing the degree to which theoretical inferences can be justified. Auditing has not become a popular approach to enhancing the dependability of qualitative research within management and business, partly because of some of the problems that are associated with it. One is that it is very demanding for the auditors, bearing in mind that qualitative research frequently generates extremely large datasets, and it may be that this is a major reason why it has not become a pervasive approach to validation.

### Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with ensuring that, while recognizing that complete objectivity is impossible in business research, the researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith; in other words, it should be apparent that he or she has not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of the research and findings deriving from it. Guba and Lincoln propose that establishing confirmability should be one of the objectives of auditors.

### Authenticity

In addition to these four trustworthiness criteria, Guba and Lincoln suggest criteria of *authenticity*. These criteria raise a wider set of issues concerning the wider political impact of research. These are the criteria.

- *Fairness*. Does the research fairly represent different viewpoints among members of the social setting? For example, according to Starbuck (1981) one of the most serious deficiencies of the early (1963–72) Aston studies stems from the fact that the data about contexts and structures were collected primarily through interviews with senior managers. The first wave of interviews (1962–4) was conducted with chief executives and heads of departments, whereas the second set of interviews involved just one (senior) executive in the organization. Starbuck suggests that the data thus represent managerial perceptions and exclude the perceptions of other stakeholders, including first-line workers, customers, and suppliers.

- *Ontological authenticity*. Does the research help members to arrive at a better understanding of their social milieu?
- *Educative authenticity*. Does the research help members to appreciate better the perspectives of other members of their social setting?
- *Catalytic authenticity*. Has the research acted as an impetus to members to engage in action to change their circumstances?
- *Tactical authenticity*. Has the research empowered members to take the steps necessary for engaging in action?

The authenticity criteria are thought provoking but have not been influential, and their emphasis on the wider impact of research is controversial. However, the main point of discussing Guba and Lincoln's ideas is that they differ from writers like LeCompte and Goetz in seeking criteria for evaluating qualitative research that represent a departure from those employed by quantitative researchers. The authenticity criteria also have certain points of affinity with **action research**, which became popular as a research method within business and management during the 1980s and 1990s. The emphasis on practical outcomes differentiates action research from other forms of qualitative investigation. We will return to the subject of action research later in this chapter.

## Recent discussions about quality criteria for qualitative research

The main point of discussing Lincoln and Guba's ideas is that they differ from those of writers like LeCompte and Goetz in seeking criteria for evaluating qualitative research that represent a departure from those employed by quantitative researchers. The issue of research quality in relation to qualitative investigations has become a rather contested area in recent years, with several schemes of criteria being proposed as possible alternatives to reliability and validity as criteria and to schemes like Lincoln and Guba's list. For example, Yardley (2000) has proposed the following four criteria:

- *Sensitivity to context*: sensitivity not just to the context of the social setting in which the research is conducted but also to potentially relevant theoretical positions and ethical issues.
- *Commitment and rigour*: substantial engagement with the subject matter, having the necessary skills, and through data collection and analysis.
- *Transparency and coherence*: research methods clearly specified, clearly articulated argument, and a reflexive stance (see Key concept 27.6 on reflexivity).
- *Impact and importance*: importance of having an impact on and significance for theory, the community on which the research is conducted and for practitioners.

When compiling these criteria, Yardley had in mind health researchers who are likely to emphasize the impact of a study, but this emphasis can also be seen clearly in business research, as discussed in Chapter 1. The emphasis on impact probably accounts for the presence of the last of these four criteria—impact and importance—which has some affinities with Lincoln and Guba's authenticity criteria.

Perhaps in response to the proliferation of different lists of qualitative research criteria and also because of the lack of agreed criteria, Spencer et al. (2003) have produced an extremely comprehensive list (see Thinking deeply 16.7). This list of quality criteria draws on the schemes that already existed at the time of their research and also on consultations with researchers in various fields. These consultations were in the form of semi-structured interviews and focus groups with practising researchers and writers on social research methods, including one of the authors of this book, Alan Bryman.

Even though qualitative researchers have sought to make progress in formulating quality criteria appropriate to their approach, this has not necessarily had an impact on the reception of their research. Pratt (2008) has shown that many qualitative researchers believe that their work continues to be judged by criteria associated with validity and reliability that were introduced in Chapter 2, which tend to be viewed as more appropriate to quantitative research. This tendency has implications for the nature of the research that gets published in academic journals, in that it gives an advantage to those researchers working within a quantitative research tradition. In other words, although qualitative researchers have sought to develop what they deem to be appropriate criteria, the impact on evaluation of research is not as great as might be expected.

### Between quantitative and qualitative research criteria

Hammersley (1992*a*) lies midway between the two positions outlined above. He proposes that validity is an important criterion but reformulates it somewhat. For Hammersley, validity means that an empirical account must be plausible and credible and should take into account



# Thinking deeply 16.7
## Checklists for appraising quality in qualitative research

Spencer et al. (2003) were commissioned to produce a report for the UK government's Cabinet Office that aimed to provide a framework for assessing the quality of evaluation research studies that derived from qualitative investigations. Although their report focused upon evaluation research (see Key concept 2.10), they drew on considerations relating more generally to qualitative research so that their scheme has a relevance beyond evaluation research.

The authors produced what is probably the most comprehensive list of criteria around. Here are the criteria that they suggest should be used when appraising the quality of a qualitative research study. In the case of each criterion, the original wording has been used.

1. How credible are the findings?
2. Has knowledge/understanding been extended by the research?
3. How well does the evaluation address its original aims and purposes?
4. Scope for drawing wider influences—how well is this explained?
5. How clear is the basis of the evaluative appraisal?
6. How defensible is the research design?
7. How well defended is the sample design/target selection of cases/documents?
8. Sample composition/case inclusion—how well is the eventual coverage described?
9. How well was the data collection carried out?
10. How well has the approach to, and formulation of, the analysis been conveyed?
11. Contexts of data sources—how well are they retained and portrayed?
12. How well has diversity of perspective and content been explored?
13. How well has detail, depth and complexity (richness?) of the data been conveyed?
14. How clear are the links between data, interpretations and conclusions—i.e. how well can the route to any conclusions be seen?
15. How clear and coherent is the reporting?
16. How clear are the assumptions/theoretical perspectives/values that have shaped the form and output of the evaluation?
17. What evidence is there of attention to ethical issues?
18. How adequately has the research process been documented?

Each of these eighteen criteria comes with 'quality indicators' that are desgined to help in the appraisal of a study. What is not clear is how such a framework should be used. It has the appearance of a checklist, but, as Spencer et al. (2003: 90) note, there is resistance within the qualitative research community to the possibly rigid application of any list of criteria that a checklist would entail. The researchers found that the idea of checklists of quality criteria were generally regarded rather negatively by interviewees. In fact, Spencer et al. do not promote their framework as a checklist, noting various concerns about their use in qualitative research, such as the risk of checklists becoming too prescriptive or being applied too rigidly. However, the fact that the authors do not treat their work as leading to a checklist does not mean that the framework cannot or should not be used in that way. Indeed, around the same time that Spencer and his colleagues published their report, Michael Quinn Patton, a leading qualitative evaluation researcher, published online a list of criteria that *was* designed to be used as a checklist:
***www.wmich.edu/evalctr/checklists/qec.pdf*** (accessed 7 June 2010)

What do you think? Can checklists be valuable for appraising the quality of qualitative studies? If your answer is no, why is that? Is it something to do with the nature of qualitative research that makes checklists of quality inappropriate? Might checklists be more valuable in appraising the quality of quantitative research?

the amount and kind of evidence used in relation to an account. In proposing this criterion, Hammersley shares with realism (see Key concept 1.9) the notion that there is an external social reality that can be accessed by the researcher. However, he simultaneously shares with the critics of the empirical realist position the rejection of the notion that such access is direct and in particular that the researcher can act as a mirror on the social world, reflecting its image back to an audience. Instead, the researcher is always engaged in representations or constructions of that world. The plausibility and credibility of a researcher's 'truth claims' then become the main considerations in evaluating qualitative research.

Hammersley also suggests *relevance* as an important criterion of qualitative research. Relevance is taken to be assessed from the vantage point of the importance of a topic within its substantive field or the contribution it makes to the literature on that field. Hammersley also discusses the question of whether or not the concerns of practitioners (that is, people who are part of the social setting being investigated and who are likely to have a vested interest in the research question and the implications of findings deriving from it) might be an aspect of considerations of relevance. In this way, his approach touches on the kinds of consideration that are addressed by Guba and Lincoln's authenticity criteria (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Guba and Lincoln 1994). However, he recognizes that the kinds of research questions and findings that might be of interest to practitioners and researchers are likely to be somewhat different. As Hammersley notes, practitioners are likely to be interested in research that helps them to understand or address problems with which they are confronted. These may not be (and perhaps are unlikely to be) at the forefront of a researcher's set of preoccupations. However, there may be occasions when researchers can combine the two and may even be able to use this capability as a means of securing access to organizations in which they wish to conduct research (see Chapter 17 for a further discussion of access issues).

### Overview of the issue of criteria

There is a recognition—albeit to varying degrees—that a simple application of the quantitative researcher's criteria of reliability and validity to qualitative research is not desirable, but writers vary in the degree to which they propose a complete overhaul of those criteria. Nor do the three positions outlined above represent the full range of possible stances on this issue (Hammersley 1992*a*; Seale 1999). To a large extent, the differences between the three positions reflect divergences in the degree to which a realist position is broadly accepted or rejected. Writers on qualitative research who apply the ideas of reliability and validity with little if any adaptation broadly position themselves as realists—that is, as saying that social reality can be captured by qualitative researchers through their concepts and theories. Lincoln and Guba reject this view, arguing instead that qualitative researchers' concepts and theories are representations and that there may, therefore, be other equally credible representations of the same phenomena. Hammersley's position occupies a middle ground in terms of the axis, with realism at one end and anti-realism at the other, in that, while acknowledging the existence of social phenomena that are part of an external reality, he disavows any suggestion that it is possible to reproduce that reality for the audiences of social scientific endeavour. Most qualitative researchers nowadays probably operate around the midpoint on this realism axis, though without necessarily endorsing Hammersley's views. Typically, they treat their accounts as one of a number of possible representations, rather than as definitive versions of social reality. They also bolster those accounts through some of the strategies advocated by Lincoln and Guba, such as thick descriptions, respondent validation exercises, and triangulation.



## The main preoccupations of qualitative researchers

As was noted in Chapter 6, quantitative and qualitative research can be viewed as exhibiting a set of distinctive but contrasting preoccupations. These preoccupations reflect epistemologically grounded beliefs about what constitutes acceptable knowledge. In Chapter 1, it was suggested that, at the level of epistemology, whereas quantitative research is profoundly influenced by a natural science approach of what should count as acceptable knowledge, qualitative researchers are more influenced by *interpretivism* (see Key concept 1.10). This position can itself be viewed as the product of the confluence of three related stances: Weber's notion of *Verstehen*; symbolic interactionism; and phenomenology. In this section, five distinctive preoccupations among qualitative researchers will be outlined and examined.

## Seeing through the eyes of the people being studied

An underlying premiss of many qualitative researchers is that the subject matter of the social sciences (that is, people and their social world) does differ from the subject matter of the natural sciences. A key difference is that the objects of analysis of the natural sciences (atoms, molecules, gases, chemicals, metals, and so on) cannot attribute meaning to events and to their environment. However, people *do*. This argument is especially evident in the work of Schutz (1962) and can particularly be seen in the passage quoted on page 18, where Schutz draws attention to the fact that, unlike the objects of the natural sciences, the objects of the social sciences—people—are capable of attributing meaning to their environment. Consequently, many qualitative researchers have suggested that a methodology is required for studying people that reflects these differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences. As a result, many qualitative researchers express a commitment to viewing events and the social world through the eyes of the people that they study. The social world must be interpreted from the perspective of the people being studied, rather than as though those subjects were incapable of their own reflections on the social world. The epistemology underlying qualitative research has been expressed by the authors of one widely read text as involving two central tenets: '(1) . . . face-to-face interaction is the fullest condition of participating in the mind of another human being, and (2) . . . you must participate in the mind of another human being (in sociological terms, "take the role of the other") to acquire social knowledge' (Lofland and Lofland 1995: 16).

It is not surprising, therefore, that many researchers make claims in their reports of their investigations about having sought to take the views of the people they studied as the point of departure (see Research in focus 16.8). This tendency reveals itself in frequent references to empathy and seeing through others' eyes. Here are some examples.

- Nichols and Beynon (1977) wanted to understand the working lives of workers, foremen, and managers at 'ChemCo', a British-owned multinational chemical producer, from a Marxist perspective. Nichols and Beynon suggest that theory 'fails to connect with the lives that people lead, whereas most descriptive social surveys too often fail to grasp the structure of social relations and the sense which people make of them. It is almost as if another way of writing has to be developed; something which "tells it like it is", even though in any simple sense this is not possible' (1977: 2).



### Research in focus 16.8
### Gaining an insider view of strategic change

In their study of strategic change in the context of a university, Gioia et al. (1994) describe themselves as adopting an interpretative approach to the research in attempting 'to represent the experience and interpretations of informants without giving precedence to prior theoretical views that might not be appropriate' (1994: 367). To this end, they give priority to the insider's perspective, in order to counterbalance the arrogant stance that they suggest organizational researchers tend to adopt towards their subjects of study. However, they also recognize the limitations of this reliance on informant views, which do not address the 'dimensions or structure of phenomena' (1994: 367). They therefore juxtapose this first-hand account with a grounded theoretical analysis of the case, to develop a triangulated approach.

Similarly, in another study of strategic change, Harfield and Hamilton (1997) suggest that the majority of research in strategic management has adopted a detached, outsider approach, which is 'bound up in a straightjacket of "dated" organizational concepts and "multivariate statistical methodology"' (1997: 61; quoting Bettis 1991). As an alternative, they seek to accommodate managers' experiences by using the storytelling method, in the belief that this will have greater relevance to other managers in dealing with rapidly changing environments. They suggest that an interpretative methodology enables strategy to be presented as a continually unfolding experience, and not, as much of the traditional view of strategy explains it, as an end point or destination.

These examples illustrate the way that some researchers within the field of strategic management have suggested that qualitative approaches can provide an important complement to the explanations enabled by statistical methods that tend to be used within the strategic management literature.

- Marshall (1984) describes herself as an 'interpreter' rather than a manipulator of data, 'concerned with capturing other people's meanings rather than testing hypotheses' (1984: 116).
- Jackall (1988), in his ethnographic study of bureaucracy and morality within large corporations, seeks to generate an understanding of 'how men and women in business actually experience their work' (1988: 5), in order to ascertain its moral salience for them.
- Casey (1995) acknowledges that her study interprets and analyses the speech of her interviewees, albeit highly selectively, and thereby does to some extent attempt to '"give voice" to other voices' (1995: 203), even though the selection of data was based on her own interpretation as an academic researcher.

This predilection for seeing through the eyes of the people studied in the course of qualitative research is often accompanied by the closely related goal of seeking to probe beneath surface appearances. After all, if you take the position of the people you are studying, the prospect is raised that they might view things differently from the way an outsider with little direct contact might have expected. This stance reveals itself in:

- Dalton's (1959) research study of the informal organization, in which he found that the boundaries between unofficial reward obtained through expense accounting, and organizational theft, or pilfering, were defined quite differently by individual managers, depending on their position within the hierarchy;
- the work of Collinson (1992*a*), who found that shopfloor workers at 'Slavs' dealt with their occupational status partly by channelling their personal ambitions and energies outside the workplace into the alternative domains of family and home, investing in 'the self-sacrificing role of parental breadwinner' (1992*a*: 185);
- Marshall's (1984) study of women in management, which showed that this issue could not be understood without taking into account the wider social context, including society's values about work, and the way of life in large organizations, in order to make sense of the kinds of job roles that women in employment adopt;
- Ram's (1994) study of management in small firms, which showed that workers were not just controlled through direct supervision and intensive working methods, as previous studies had suggested. Using ethnographic methods, Ram was able to pick up on a variety of largely informal negotiating processes, whereby employees negotiated a 'fair' rate for the job, taking into account considerations such as the time of the year, the type of work, caste, and culture.

The empathetic stance of seeking to see through the eyes of one's research participants is very much in tune with interpretivism and demonstrates well the epistemological links with phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and *Verstehen*. However, it is not without practical problems. For example: the risk of 'going native' and losing sight of what you are studying (see Key concept 17.8); the problem of how far the researcher should go, such as the potential problem of participating in illegal or dangerous activities; and the possibility that the researcher will be able to see through the eyes of only some of the people who form part of a social scene but not others, such as only people of the same gender. These and other practical difficulties will be addressed in the chapters that follow.

## Description and the emphasis on context

Qualitative researchers are much more inclined than quantitative researchers to provide a great deal of descriptive detail when reporting the fruits of their research. This is not to say that they are exclusively concerned with description. They *are* concerned with explanation, and indeed the extent to which qualitative researchers ask 'Why?' questions is frequently understated. In addition, more critical or radical qualitative researchers are often concerned with understanding the political and economic interests that inform organizational actions, in order to enhance the possibilities for changing them. For example, in her critical ethnography of a multinational corporation, Casey (1995) describes herself as concerned with understanding dominant social constructions about work, the self, and society, in the hope that this might increase the likelihood of societal transformation.

Many qualitative studies provide a detailed account of what goes on in the setting being investigated. Very often qualitative studies seem to be full of apparently trivial details. However, these details are frequently important for the qualitative researcher, because of their significance for their subjects and also because the details provide an account of the context within which people's behaviour takes place. It was with this point in mind that Geertz (1973*a*) recommended the provision of thick descriptions of social settings, events, and often individuals. As a result of this emphasis on description, qualitative studies are often full of detailed information about the social

worlds being examined. On the surface, some of this detail may appear irrelevant, and, indeed, there is a risk of the researcher becoming too embroiled in descriptive detail. Lofland and Lofland (1995: 164–5), for example, warn against the sin of what they call 'descriptive excess' in qualitative research, whereby the amount of detail overwhelms or inhibits the analysis of data.

One of the main reasons why qualitative researchers are keen to provide considerable descriptive detail is that they typically emphasize the importance of the contextual understanding of social behaviour. This means that behaviour and values must be understood in context. This recommendation means that we cannot understand the behaviour of members of a social group other than in terms of the specific environment in which they operate. In this way, behaviour that may appear odd or irrational can make perfect sense when we understand the particular context within which that behaviour takes place. The emphasis on context in qualitative research goes back to many of the classic studies in social anthropology, which often demonstrated how a particular practice, such as the magical ritual that may accompany the sowing of seeds, made little sense unless we understand the belief systems of that society. One of the chief reasons for the emphasis on descriptive detail is that it is often precisely this detail that provides the mapping of context in terms of which behaviour is understood. The propensity for description can also be interpreted as a manifestation of the naturalism that pervades much qualitative research (see Key concept 2.4 and Key concept 16.1), because it places a premium on detailed, rich descriptions of social settings.

## Emphasis on process

Qualitative research tends to view social life in terms of processes. This tendency reveals itself in a number of ways. One of the main ways is that there is often a concern to show how events and patterns unfold over time. As a result, qualitative evidence often conveys a strong sense of change and flux. As Pettigrew (1997: 338) explains, process is 'a sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context'. This includes understanding how the past history of an organization shapes the present reality and how the 'interchange between agents and contexts occurs over time and is cumulative' (Pettigrew 1997: 339). This aspect of qualitative research is explicitly recognized in the distinction that is sometimes made between variance and process theories in organizational life (Mohr 1982; Langley 2009). With the former, the goal is to express explanations of organizational characteristics and events in terms of connections between independent and dependent variables. In contrast, process theories 'provide explanations in terms of patterns in events, activities, and choices over time' (Langley 2009: 409). As Langley observes, time is a key ingredient of organizational life, so *not* taking it into account (as variance theory does) is to miss out on something that is core to organizational reality.

Qualitative research that is based in ethnographic methods is particularly associated with this emphasis on process. It is the element of participant observation that is a key feature of ethnography that is especially instrumental in generating this feature. Ethnographers are typically immersed in a social setting for a long time—sometimes years. Consequently, they are able to observe the ways in which events develop over time or the ways in which the different elements of a social system (values, beliefs, behaviour, and so on) interconnect. Such findings can inject a sense of process by seeing social life in terms of streams of interdependent events and elements (see Research in focus 16.9 for an example).

This is not to say, however, that ethnographers are the only qualitative researchers who inject a sense of process into our understanding of social life. It can also be achieved through semi-structured and unstructured interviewing, by asking participants to reflect on the processes leading up to or following on from an event. Broussine and Vince (1996), for example, were interested in the way that managers use metaphors in relation to the management of change. Research was undertaken in a public-sector organization at a time when the public services were experiencing a high level of uncertainty. Broussine and Vince chose a relatively unusual research method within management and organizational research, based on the analysis of managers' drawings. By drawing pictures, managers reflected on their experience of the change process. Analysis of the drawings involved 'listening to the drawing's story', its style, use made of colour, the way that space is represented, and the general atmosphere. A total of eighty-six managers produced drawings and individually and collectively they reflected on their emotional content. A picture of a ship swamped by a tidal wave was construed as reflecting the emotions of anxiety, fear, and dread, whereas drawings of piles of paperwork and queues of people reflected feelings of powerlessness and debility. The discussions were tape-recorded and comparisons were made between groups of senior and middle managers, to see if there were differences in the use of metaphor between colleagues at different hierarchical levels. Broussine and Vince suggest



## Research in focus 16.9
## Process in strike action

D. Waddington (1994) describes his experiences of participant observation of a strike at the Ansells brewery in Birmingham in the 1980s. As a participant observer, he was involved in 'attending picket lines, mass meetings and planning discussions, and accompanying the strikers of flying picketing and intelligence gathering manoevres' (1994: 113). In addition to observation, he carried out informal interviews and linked these data to other sources, such as 'material deriving from newspaper archives, company and trade union documents, letters and richly detailed minutes of trade-union management meetings' (1994: 115). As a result, he was able to show 'how the contemporary beliefs, values and attitudes of the workforce, and the mutual feelings of animosity and distrust between employees and management, were shaped by a sequence of historical events stretching back over 20 years' (1994: 115). We can see in this example the development of a sense of process in three ways: through observation of the strike over its entirety, so that developments and interconnections between events could be brought out; through connecting these events with historical and other data, so that the links between the strike and previous and other events and actions could be outlined; and through the sketching of the context (in the form of the past, as well as current beliefs and values) and its links with behaviour during the strike.

that on some occasions this process enabled managers to appreciate each other's perspectives; in other cases, it simply made apparent their differences.

The life history approach is another form of qualitative research, although one that is relatively little used in business and management research. This technique takes as research data accounts of individuals about their lives or specific areas of their social world. Accounts focus on the relationship between the individual and his or her social context. G. Jones (1983) suggests that the life history approach is useful as a means of researching organizational socialization and career development. This involves leading individuals through an account of their organizational careers and asking them to chart out significant events through which they came to an understanding of their social organizational context.

An example relating to experiences of work is provided by Terkel's (1974) anthology of working lives in the USA. Written as a series of first-person narratives detailing the everyday reality of working lives, the accounts link individuals' past and present experiences of employment with their hopes, fears, ambitions, home, and family lives. Although Terkel acknowledges that he used 'no one method or technique' in searching out the feelings of 'ordinary' people, this diverse set of narratives—which covers everyone from factory mechanics to washroom attendants—provides a colourful example of the life history approach.

Other qualitative studies begin with an ethnographic approach in order to gain access to organizational data and then proceed to analyse it using other methods. For example, in his study of a public inquiry concerning a fatal pipeline accident, Gephart (1993) employed what he calls a 'textual approach'. This involved systematically gathering together a set of documents concerning the event, which he subsequently analysed using a combination of theoretical sampling, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis, and expansion analysis. The documents, including official proceedings of the public inquiry, company documents, field notes, reports, and newspaper articles, enabled reconstruction of the events leading up to the pipeline disaster. Passages of text were selected to illustrate the unfolding sense-making about key decisions relating to the disaster, highlighting issues such as risk, blame, and responsibility. These quite different approaches to data analysis and collection highlight the diverse nature of qualitative research within management and business.

## Flexibility and limited structure

Many qualitative researchers are disdainful of approaches to research that entail the imposition of predetermined formats on the social world. This position is largely to do with the preference for seeing through the eyes of the people being studied. After all, if a structured method of data collection is employed, since this is bound to be the product of an investigator's ruminations about the object of enquiry, certain decisions must have been made about what he or she expects to find and about the nature of the social reality that is to be encountered. Therefore, the researcher is limited in the degree to which he or she can

genuinely adopt the world view of the people being studied. Consequently, most qualitative researchers prefer a research orientation that entails as little prior contamination of the social world as possible. To do otherwise risks imposing an inappropriate frame of reference on people. Keeping structure to a minimum is supposed to enhance the opportunity of genuinely revealing the perspectives of the people you are studying. Also, in the process, aspects of people's social world that are particularly important to them, but that might not even have crossed the mind of a researcher unacquainted with it, are more likely to be forthcoming. As a result, qualitative research tends to be a strategy that tries not to delimit areas of enquiry too much and to ask fairly general rather than specific research questions (see Figure 16.1).

Owing to the preference for a loosely structured approach to the collection of data, qualitative researchers adopt methods of research that do not require the investigator to develop highly specific research questions in advance and therefore to devise instruments specifically for those questions to be answered. Ethnography, with its emphasis on participant observation, is particularly well suited to this orientation. It allows researchers to submerge themselves in a social setting with a fairly general research focus in mind and gradually to formulate a narrower emphasis by making as many observations of that setting as possible. They can then formulate more specific research questions out of their collected data. Similarly, interviewing is an extremely prominent method in the qualitative researcher's armoury, but it is not of the kind we encountered in the course of most of Chapter 8—namely, the structured interview. Instead, qualitative researchers prefer less structured approaches to interviewing, as we will see in Chapter 18. Blumer's (1954) argument for sensitizing rather than definitive concepts (that is, the kind employed by quantitative researchers) is symptomatic of the preference for a more open-ended, and hence less structured, approach. Some researchers have argued that this is more likely to lead to research that is interesting, in terms of standing out in some way from other studies and changing the way that we think about the social world (see Thinking deeply 16.10).



## Thinking deeply 16.10
## Is qualitative research more 'interesting'?

The *Academy of Management Journal* featured a discussion in which editors and invited contributors pondered on what makes research interesting (Bartunek, Rynes, and Ireland 2006). The discussion was prompted by a survey that found that, while articles in the journal were considered to be technically highly competent, they did not find very many of the papers to be interesting in terms of engaging readers' attention or challenging commonly held assumptions about a subject. This prompted the journal editors to try to expand the remit of the journal to include research that develops theory in addition to research that tests or extends it (see discussion of deductive and inductive research strategies in Chapter 1). In terms of being interesting, Barley (2006) argues that qualitative researchers have greater potential to produce interesting papers because, unlike quantitative researchers, they have 'already departed from mainstream methods, [and] have less to lose by studying odd topics and taking theoretical risks' (Barley 2006: 19).

An advantage of the unstructured nature of most qualitative enquiry (that is, in addition to the prospect of gaining access to people's world views) is that it offers the prospect of flexibility. The researcher can change direction in the course of his or her investigation much more easily than in quantitative research, which tends to have a built-in momentum once the data collection is under way: if you send out hundreds of postal questionnaires and realize after you have started to get some back that there is an issue that you would have liked to investigate, you are not going to find it easy to retrieve the situation. Structured interviewing and structured observation can involve some flexibility, but the requirement to make interviews as comparable as possible for survey investigations limits the extent to which this can happen. See Research in focus 16.11 for an illustration of the ways in which the unstructured data collection style of qualitative research can be used to suggest alternative avenues of enquiry or ways of thinking about the phenomenon being investigated.

## Concepts and theory grounded in data

This issue has already been addressed in much of the exposition of qualitative research above. For qualitative researchers, concepts and theories are usually inductively arrived at from the data that are collected (see Research in focus 16.4 and Research in focus 16.12).



## Research in focus 16.11
## Flexibility in action

Bryman and his colleagues carried out a multiple case study investigation of strategic responses to deregulation in nine British bus companies (Bryman, Gillingwater, and McGuinness 1996). The research was carried out largely through semi-structured interviews with senior managers and the examination of documents. The researchers were especially interested in the significance of organizational culture for types of strategic response. The bus companies were selected to reflect a range of post-deregulation experiences and ownership patterns. In spite of the diversity among the case study companies, it became apparent after interviews at four of the companies that their responses to deregulation were remarkably similar, reflecting a concentration on survival at a time of declining passenger numbers. The rest of the findings reflected minor variations on this theme.

Having achieved **theoretical saturation** for their main concepts and interconnections, Bryman and his colleagues began to focus on the similarities between the companies and started to explore the possibility that organizational culture was far less significant to the nine companies than what the researchers had termed 'industry culture'. In their subsequent questioning this idea was explored further. This shift in focus was important because it helped the researchers to understand the firms and how they were coping with declining patronage, but it was also theoretically significant because of the attention that organizational culture had attracted among scholars in the 1980s and early 1990s. Although the research had been influenced by this stream of thinking, Bryman and his colleagues began to view organizational culture as less significant in this particular study.



## Research in focus 16.12
## Emerging concepts

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, most UK universities were in the throes of introducing staff appraisal schemes for both academic and academic-related staff. Staff appraisal is employed to review the appraisee's performance and activities over a period of usually one or two years. Along with some colleagues, Bryman undertook an evaluation of staff appraisal schemes in four universities (Bryman, Haslam, and Webb 1994). The research entailed the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data within the framework of a comparative research design. The qualitative data were derived from large numbers of interviews with appraisers, appraisees, senior managers, and many others. In the course of conducting the interviews and analysing the subsequent data the researchers became increasingly aware of a cynicism among many of the people interviewed. This attitude revealed itself in several ways, such as: a view that appraisal had been introduced just to pacify the government; a belief that nothing happened of any significance in the aftermath of an appraisal meeting; the view that it was not benefiting universities; and a suggestion that many participants to the appraisal process were just going through the motions. As one of the interviewees said in relation to this last feature: 'It's like going through the motions of it [appraisal]. It's just get it over with and signed and dated and filed and that's the end of it' (quoted in Bryman, Haslam, and Webb 1994: 180).

On the basis of these findings it was suggested that the attitudes towards appraisal and the behaviour of those involved in appraisal were characterized by *procedural compliance*, which was defined as 'a response to an organizational innovation in which the technical requirements of the innovation . . . are broadly adhered to, but where there are substantial reservations about its efficacy and only partial commitment to it, so that there is a tendency for the procedures associated with the innovation to be adhered to with less than a total commitment to its aims' (1994: 178).



# The critique of qualitative research

In a similar way to the criticisms that have been levelled at quantitative research mainly by qualitative researchers, a parallel critique has been built up of qualitative research. Some of the more common ones follow.

## Qualitative research is too subjective

Quantitative researchers sometimes criticize qualitative research as being too impressionistic and subjective. By these criticisms they usually mean that qualitative findings rely too much on the researcher's often unsystematic views about what is significant and important, and also upon the close personal relationships that the researcher frequently strikes up with the people studied. Precisely because qualitative research often begins in a relatively open-ended way and entails a gradual narrowing-down of research questions or problems, the consumer of the writings deriving from the research is given few clues as to why one area was the chosen area upon which attention was focused rather than another. By contrast, quantitative researchers point to the tendency for the problem formulation stage in their work to be more explicitly stated in terms of such matters as the existing literature on that topic and key theoretical ideas.

## Difficult to replicate

Quantitative researchers also often argue that these tendencies are even more of a problem because of the difficulty of replicating a qualitative study, although replication in business and management research is by no means a straightforward matter regardless of this particular issue (see Chapter 6). Precisely because it is unstructured and often reliant upon the qualitative researcher's ingenuity, it is almost impossible to conduct a true replication, since there are hardly any standard procedures to be followed. In qualitative research, the investigator him or herself is the main instrument of data collection, so that what is observed and heard and also what the researcher decides to concentrate upon is very much a product of his or her predilections. There are several possible components of this criticism: what qualitative researchers (especially perhaps in ethnography) choose to focus upon while in the field is a product of what strikes them as significant, whereas other researchers are likely to empathize with other issues; the responses of participants (people being observed or interviewed) to qualitative researchers is likely to be affected by the characteristics of the researcher (personality, age, gender, and so on); and, because of the unstructured nature of qualitative data, interpretation will be profoundly influenced by the subjective leanings of a researcher. Because of such factors it is difficult—not to say impossible—to replicate qualitative findings. The difficulties ethnographers experience when they revisit grounds previously trodden by another researcher (often referred to as a 'restudy') do not inspire confidence in the replicability of qualitative research (Bryman 1994).

## Problems of generalization

It is often suggested that the scope of the findings of qualitative investigations is restricted. When participant observation is used or when unstructured interviews are conducted with a small number of individuals in a certain organization or locality, they argue that it is impossible to know how the findings can be generalized to other settings. How can just one or two cases be representative of all cases? In other words, can we really treat Perlow's (1997; see Key concept 17.1) research on the time and the work–life balance of software engineers in a high-tech corporation in the USA as representative of all software engineers; or Prasad's (1993) research on computerization in a health management organization as representative of the symbolic effects of implementing new technology in other types of work organization? In the case of research based on interviews rather than participation, can we treat interviewees who have not been selected through a probability procedure or even quota sampling as representative? Are Watson's (1994*a*) managers typical of all managers working within the telecommunications industry, or are Ram's (1994; see Research in focus 17.4) small-firm case studies in the West Midlands typical of small firms elsewhere?

The answer in all these cases is, of course, emphatically 'no'. A case study is not a sample of one drawn from a known population. Similarly, the people who are interviewed in qualitative research are not meant to be representative of a population and indeed, in some cases, like managers, we may find it more or less impossible to enumerate the population in any precise manner. Instead, the findings of qualitative research are to generalize to

theory rather than to populations. It is 'the cogency of the theoretical reasoning' (J. C. Mitchell 1983: 207), rather than statistical criteria, that is decisive in considering the generalizability of the findings of qualitative research. In other words, it is the quality of the theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalization.

These three criticisms reflect many of the preoccupations of quantitative research that were discussed in Chapter 6. A further criticism that is often made of qualitative research, but that is perhaps less influenced by quantitative research criteria, is the suggestion that qualitative research frequently lacks transparency in how the research was conducted.

## Lack of transparency

It is sometimes difficult to establish from qualitative research what the researcher actually *did* and how he or she arrived at the study's conclusions. For example, qualitative research reports are sometimes unclear about such matters as how people were chosen for observation or interview. This deficiency contrasts sharply with the sometimes laborious accounts of sampling procedures in reports of quantitative research. However, it does not seem plausible to suggest that outlining in some detail the ways in which research participants are selected constitutes the application of quantitative research criteria. Readers have a right to know how far research participants were selected to correspond to a wide range of people. Also, the process of qualitative data analysis is frequently unclear (see Bryman and Burgess 1994*a*). It is often not obvious how the analysis was conducted—in other words, what the researcher was actually doing when the data were analysed and therefore how the study's conclusions were arrived at. To a large extent, these issues of lack of transparency are increasingly being addressed by qualitative researchers.



# Is it always like this?

This was a heading that was employed in Chapter 6 in relation to quantitative research, but it is perhaps less easy to answer in relation to qualitative research. To a large extent, this is because qualitative research is less codified than quantitative research—that is, it is less influenced by strict guidelines and directions about how to go about data collection and analysis. For example, Dalton (1964; see Chapter 17) explains that no explicit hypotheses formed the basis for his participant-observational study of managerial work, for three reasons. First, he was not able to be sure what was relevant until he had gained 'some intimacy with the situation'; secondly, once uttered, a hypothesis becomes somewhat 'obligatory'; and, thirdly, there is a danger that the hypothesis carries a quasi-scientific status. Instead he worked on the basis of 'hunches', which guided him through the research.

As a result, and this may be noticed by readers of the chapters that follow this one, accounts of qualitative research are frequently less prescriptive in tone than those encountered in relation to quantitative research. Instead, they often exhibit more of a descriptive tenor, outlining the different ways qualitative researchers have gone about research or suggesting alternative ways of conducting research or analysis based on the writer's own experiences or those of others. To a large extent, this picture is changing, in that there is a growing number of books that seek to make clear-cut recommendations about how qualitative research should be carried out.

However, if we look at some of the preoccupations of qualitative research that were described above, we can see certain ways in which there are departures from the practices that are implied by these preoccupations. One of the main departures is that qualitative research is sometimes a lot more focused than is implied by the suggestion that the researcher begins with general research questions and narrows it down so that theory and concepts are arrived at during and after the data collection. There is no *necessary* reason why qualitative research cannot be employed to investigate a specific research problem. For example, Truss (2001; see Research in focus 25.7) takes as her research problem the relationship between organizational performance and human resource management (HRM). However, instead of devising a list of 'best-practice' indicators from the literature and testing their impact on performance, this study looked at a firm that was successful—Hewlett-Packard—and asked what human resources policies and practices were used and how they were being enacted. Using a variety of methods, including interviews and focus groups, Truss found that many of the company's human resources

policies and practices were contradictory, particularly in relation to training and career management, where a large number of employees did not believe they received the training they needed. Yet, even though the company did not achieve a high level of 'fit' within its human resources system, it still managed to achieve high levels of financial performance. Truss concludes that there is a disjuncture between formal policy and informal organization, which quantitative studies of High Performance Work Systems fail to capture. A related way in which qualitative research differs from the standard model is in connection with the notion of a lack of structure in approaches to collecting and analysing data. As will be seen in Chapter 20, techniques like conversation analysis entail the application of a highly codified method for analysing talk. Moreover, the growing use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (**CAQDAS**), which will be the subject of Chapter 23, is leading to greater transparency in the procedures used for analysing qualitative data. This greater transparency may lead to more codification in qualitative data analysis than has previously been the case.



## Some contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research

Several writers have explored the contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research by devising tables that allow the differences to be brought out (e.g. Halfpenny 1979; Bryman 1988*a*; Hammersley 1992*b*). Table 16.1 attempts to draw out the chief contrasting features.

- *Numbers vs Words*. Quantitative researchers are often portrayed as preoccupied with applying measurement procedures to social life, while qualitative researchers are seen as using words in the presentation of analyses of society, although, as Research in focus 16.13 illustrates, qualitative researchers are also concerned with the analysis of visual data.

### Table 16.1

**Some common contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research**

| Quantitative | Qualitative |
|---|---|
| Numbers | Words |
| Point of view of researcher | Points of view of participants |
| Researcher distant | Researcher close |
| Theory testing | Theory emergent |
| Static | Process |
| Structured | Unstructured |
| Generalization | Contextual understanding |
| Hard, reliable data | Rich, deep data |
| Macro | Micro |
| Behaviour | Meaning |
| Artificial settings | Natural settings |

- *Point of view of researcher vs Point of view of participants*. In quantitative research, the investigator is in the driving seat. The set of concerns that he or she brings to an investigation structures the investigation. In qualitative research, the perspective of those being studied—what they see as important and significant—provides the point of orientation.
- *Researcher is distant vs Researcher is close*. In quantitative research, researchers are uninvolved with their subjects and in some cases, as in research based on postal questionnaires or on hired interviewers, may have no contact with them at all. Sometimes, this lack of a relationship with the subjects of an investigation is regarded as desirable by quantitative researchers, because they feel that their objectivity might be compromised if they become too involved with the people they study. The qualitative researcher seeks close involvement with the people being investigated, so that he or she can genuinely understand the world through their eyes.
- *Theory and concepts tested in research vs Theory and concepts emergent from data*. Quantitative researchers typically bring a set of concepts to bear on the research instruments being employed, so that theoretical work precedes the collection of data, whereas in qualitative research concepts and theoretical elaboration emerge out of data collection.
- *Static vs Process*. Quantitative research is frequently depicted as presenting a static image of social reality with its emphasis on relationships between variables. Change and connections between events over time tend not to surface, other than in a mechanistic fashion.

Qualitative research is often depicted as attuned to the unfolding of events over time and to the interconnections between the actions of participants of social settings.

- *Structured vs Unstructured*. Quantitative research is typically highly structured, so that the investigator is able to examine the precise concepts and issues that are the focus of the study; in qualitative research the approach is invariably unstructured, so that the possibility of getting at actors' meanings and of concepts emerging out of data collection is enhanced.
- *Generalization vs Contextual understanding*. Whereas quantitative researchers want their findings to be generalizable to the relevant population, the qualitative researcher seeks an understanding of behaviour, values, beliefs, and so on in terms of the context in which the research is conducted.



## Research in focus 16.13
## Not just words . . .

Although qualitative research is most commonly associated with spoken and written words, rather than numbers, qualitative research can also involve the use of visual methods as a means of understanding social life. In addition to the various kinds of secondary documents that can provide sources of visual material, such as annual reports and company archives, which will be discussed in Chapter 21, visual material can be obtained at the behest of the researcher in a similar way to data involving spoken or written words. This can involve the taking of photographs or recording of video, either by the researcher or by research participants. Here are two examples.

Bolton, Pole, and Mizen's (2001) research into the meaning of child employment in Britain involved giving the young people a disposable camera with which to take photographs of their workplace. The photographic aspect of the study was part of a wider year-long research project that included interviews, written diaries, and focus groups. The researchers argue that their primary purpose was to generate data through visual techniques and sources, rather than to collect visual material to represent, illuminate, or document known processes, events, or meanings. Hence, in addition to confirming written and spoken accounts of the content of the jobs and the nature of workplaces, the photographs portrayed areas normally unseen by customers or researchers, such as stockrooms, rubbish skips, and toilets. Consequently they claim that photography has the capacity to facilitate analysis 'which may tell us more about social phenomena than analysis of textual, verbal or observational data' (2001: 516).

S. Warren (2002) looked at the role of photographs in exploring the aesthetic dimension of organization. Warren was prompted to use visual methods because she was convinced that 'in order to explore the relationship between the feel, sights, smells, and even the tastes of the organizational setting . . . a more "sensually complete" methodology' (2002: 230) was required in order to record things that could not be spoken or written down. Her case study was the website design department of a global IT company, where she carried out participant observation, taking photographs of the physical environment of the workplace. She also gave the camera to her respondents, asking them to show her 'how it feels to work here'. She claims that 'the photographs make an interesting data set in their own right regarding the ways in which the respondents chose to define their work environments, what they felt to be worthy (and not worthy) of photographing, and the individual and sometimes innovative ways they framed their subjects' (2002: 232). The photographs were then discussed in the context of an interview conversation with the respondent. Warren suggests that the photographs added to the richness of data gathered through their imagery, which she argues was used by respondents to give an emotional sense of the work environment. She concludes, 'the choice of what to photograph and how to place it within the frame are inextricably bound up with the visual culture of the photographer and his or her intentions and motives' (2002: 236).

However, although visual literacy is suggested to be a crucial skill in contemporary society, visual methods remain relatively uncommon in organizational research, even though visual sociology has become increasingly popular in other disciplines. Strangleman (2004) claims this is in part because researchers do not see the main business and management journals publishing this kind of material and so they fail to see it as a legitimate research project.

- *Hard, reliable data vs Rich, deep data*. Quantitative data are often depicted as 'hard' in the sense of being robust and unambiguous, owing to the precision offered by measurement. Qualitative researchers claim, by contrast, that their contextual approach and their often prolonged involvement in a setting engender rich data.
- *Macro vs Micro*. Quantitative researchers are often depicted as involved in uncovering large-scale social trends and connections between variables, whereas qualitative researchers are seen as concerned with small-scale aspects of social reality, such as interaction.
- *Behaviour vs Meaning*. It is sometimes suggested that the quantitative researcher is concerned with people's behaviour and the qualitative researcher with the meaning of action.
- *Artificial settings vs Natural settings*. Whereas quantitative researchers conduct research in a contrived context, qualitative researchers investigate people in natural environments.

However, as we will see in Chapter 24, while these contrasts depict reasonably well the differences between quantitative and qualitative research, they should not be viewed as constituting hard and fast distinctions. These issues will be returned to in the next three chapters.



## Some similarities between quantitative and qualitative research

It is also worth bearing in mind the ways in which quantitative and qualitative research are *similar* rather than different. Hardy and Bryman (2004) have pointed out that, although there are clearly differences between quantitative and qualitative research, it should also be recognized that there are similarities too. They draw attention to the following points:

- *Both are concerned with data reduction*. Both quantitative and qualitative researchers collect large amounts of data. These large amounts of data represent a problem for researchers, because they then have to distill the data. By reducing the amount of data, they can then begin to make sense of it. In quantitative research, the process of data reduction takes the form of statistical analysis—something like a mean or frequency table is a way of reducing the amount of data on large numbers of people. In qualitative data analysis, as will be seen in Chapter 22, qualitative researchers develop concepts out of their often rich data.
- *Both are concerned with answering research questions*. Although the nature of the kinds of research questions asked in quantitative and qualitative research are typically different (more specific in quantitative research, more open-ended in qualitative research), they are both fundamentally concerned with answering questions about the nature of social reality.
- *Both are concerned with relating data analysis to the research literature*. Both quantitative and qualitative researchers are typically concerned to relate their findings to points thrown up by the literature relating to the topics on which they work. In other words, the researcher's findings take on significance in large part when they are related to the literature.
- *Both are concerned with variation*. In different ways, both quantitative and qualitative researchers seek to uncover and then to represent the variation that they uncover. This means that both groups of researchers are keen to explore how organizations (or whatever the unit of analysis is) differ and to explore some of the factors connected to that variation, although, once again, the *form* that variation takes differs.
- *Both treat frequency as a springboard for analysis*. In quantitative research, frequency is a core outcome of collecting data, as the investigator typically wants to reveal the relative frequency with which certain types of behaviour occur or how many newspaper articles emphasize a certain issue in their articles. In qualitative research, issues of frequency arise in the fact that, in reports of findings in publications, terms like 'often' or 'most' are commonly employed. Also, when analysing qualitative data, the frequency with which certain themes occur commonly acts as a catalyst for which ones tend to be emphasized when writing up findings.
- *Both seek to ensure that deliberate distortion does not occur*. Very few business researchers nowadays subscribe to the view that it is possible to be an entirely objective dispassionate student of organizational life. Further, sometimes researchers can be partisan (Chapter 5). However, that does not imply that 'anything goes'. In particular, researchers seek to ensure

that 'wilful bias' (Hammersley and Gomm 2000) or what Hardy and Bryman (2004: 7) call 'consciously motivated misrepresentation' does not occur.

- *Both argue for the importance of transparency*. Both quantitative and qualitative researchers seek to be clear about their research procedures and how their findings were arrived at. This allows others to judge the quality and importance of their work. In the past, it has sometimes been suggested that qualitative researchers could be opaque about how they went about their investigations, but increasingly transparency surfaces as an expectation.
- *Both must address the question of error*. In Chapter 8, readers were introduced to the significance of error for quantitative research (or, more specifically, survey research) and what steps are taken to reduce its likelihood. For the quantitative researcher, error must be reduced as far as possible so that variation that is uncovered is real variation and not the product of problems with how questions are asked or how research instruments are administered. In qualitative research, the investigator seeks to reduce error by ensuring that, for example, there is a good fit between his or her concepts and the evidence that has been amassed.
- *Research methods should be appropriate to the research questions*. This is not addressed by Hardy and Bryman (2004), but a further issue is that both groups of researchers seek to ensure that, when they specify research questions, they select research methods and approaches to the analysis of data that are appropriate to those questions.

These tend to be rather general points of similarity, but they are an important corrective to any view that portrays them as completely different. There *are* differences between quantitative and qualitative research but that is not to say that there are no points of similarity.



# Researcher–subject relationships

One difference between quantitative and qualitative research arises in relation to the way that qualitative researchers relate to their research subjects. Specifically, qualitative researchers tend to take greater account of the power relations that exist between the researcher him or herself and the people who are the main subject of study. This has led to the development of several qualitative approaches that enable research subjects to play a more active part in designing the research and influencing the outcomes of the process. Action research, feminism, and collaborative and participative forms of enquiry all fall into this category. In the last section of this chapter we will consider the main features of each of these approaches and explore the implications that they have for researcher–subject relationships.

## Action research

There is no single type of action research, but broadly it can be defined as an approach in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis. A common theme among management and business researchers is that action research output results from 'involvement with members of an organization' over a matter of 'genuine concern to them' (Eden and Huxham 1996: 75). Many writers therefore stress the need for action research to be useful to the practitioner and suggest it should provide a means of empowering participants. For an example of action research, see Research in focus 16.14.

Action research is defined by Argyris, Putnam, and Smith (1985) as follows:

- Experiments are on real problems within an organization and are designed to assist in their solution.
- This involves an iterative process of problem identification, planning, action, and evaluation.
- Action research leads eventually to re-education, changing patterns of thinking, and action. This depends on the participation of research subjects (who are often referred to in action research as clients) in identifying new courses of action.
- It is intended to contribute both to academic theory and practical action.

Eden and Huxham (1996) define the characteristics of action research in terms of outcomes and processes. Good and effective action research should have the following outcomes:



## Research in focus 16.14
## Action research

Participatory action research can be seen as an emergent process; indeed, it may not even begin as explicitly participatory. Based on their involvement with the US-based multinational Xerox corporation, Greenwood, Whyte, and Harkavy (1993) propose that the aim of participatory action research is to encourage continuous learning on the part of both the professional researchers and the members of the organization involved.

The case began as a 'fairly conventional consulting program' (1993: 181). However, in response to declining market share and profits, the company implemented a competitive benchmarking programme that threatened major job losses. This led to the emergence of a participatory action research project that focused on socio-technical change processes. The project involved management and union officials in the establishment of a team that worked together with researchers drawing on theories and ideas from a variety of fields. The team learned how to address the internal cost accounting procedures that 'could lead management to make decisions adverse to the economic interests of both company and workers' (1993: 183).

Greenwood and his colleagues say little about how the shift from consulting programme to action research project was negotiated. However, they do say that a sense of organizational crisis was important in precipitating this shift. This in part depends on organizational leaders being willing to take risks and allow action researchers to engage in processes that senior management does not control.

- It should have implications that relate to situations other than the one that is studied.
- As well as being usable in everyday life, action research should also be concerned with theory.
- It should lead to the generation of emergent or grounded theory, which emanates from the data in gradual incremental steps.
- Action researchers must recognize that their findings will have practical implications and they should be clear about what they expect participants to take away from the project.

In business and management, action research plays a particular role in bridging the gap between researchers and practitioners (by which it is usually meant managers). Gummesson (2000) stresses the need for business and management researchers to be involved in practice and he suggests that there is actually very little difference between the roles of the academic researcher and the management consultant (see Key concept 1.1). Action research is seen as particularly useful in researching processual problems in organizations such as learning and change. Hence many action research projects are undertaken by part-time students who take their own work organization and problems within it to be their primary focus of study. These individuals are already immersed in the organizations as complete participants and have an understanding of it that is derived from being an actor in the processes being studied. They face three interrelated sets of issues that relate to:

- their preunderstanding of the setting;
- role duality;
- organizational politics (Coghlan 2001).

Preunderstanding refers to the knowledge, insight, and experience that researchers have about the lived experience of their own organization; for example, they already know the history, key events, and jargon used within the organization and who to turn to for information. Their role duality sets them apart from other organizational members and can affect the data that are generated, particularly when they are engaged in research that may threaten existing organizational norms.

A further source of action research projects is related to organizational consultancy, which is conducted by some business school academics as a way of informing their own practice and as a source of additional income. However, this alternative source of research material can also cause problems. Even though consultancy settings provide access to data, a clear design must be formulated for the action research before the setting is encountered (Eden and Huxham 1996). In addition, the tendency to refer to research subjects as clients suggests that research participants are employing the services of the researcher. This can create conflicts of interest for the researcher and introduce bias towards those who are financially

supporting the research. Action researchers must, therefore, possess a high degree of self-awareness in order to combine the roles of researcher and consultant and be prepared to defend their research in these terms.

The collection of data is likely to be involved in the formulation of the diagnosis of a problem and in the evaluation of a problem. Action research can involve the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Data collection methods can include keeping a diary of subjective impressions, a collection of documents relating to a situation, observation notes of meetings, questionnaire surveys, interviews, tape or video recordings of meetings, and written descriptions of meetings or interviews (which may be given to participants for them to validate or amend). In action research, the investigator becomes part of the field of study, and, as with participant observation, this has its own attendant problems. In their action research study of an outpatient health centre, Ramirez and Bartunek (1989) suggest that they were involved in dilemmas that related to conflicting organizational roles, which led to conflict over researcher loyalties. This affected how the action researcher (who was an internal consultant) was seen, as rumours were spread in order to discredit the action researcher by suggesting that she was using the project to set up a favourable position within the organization for herself.

A further claim of action research is that the research outputs are more readable, relevant, and interesting to practitioner as well as academic audiences. When the research is written up, the action research report is seen primarily as a discussion document, which presents a number of action strategies from which collaborators will jointly select a course to take. The narrative format is recommended as an appropriate way of expressing the sequence of practice and reflection that is entailed in the action research role (Winter 1989).

Action research is criticized, in a similar way to other qualitative methods, for its lack of repeatability and consequent lack of rigour and for concentrating too much on organizational action at the expense of research findings. In their defence, action researchers claim that involvement with practitioners concerning issues that are important to them provides a richness of insight that cannot be gained in other ways. It is also claimed that theory generated from action research is 'grounded in action' (Eden and Huxham 1996), thereby overcoming some of the difficulties of relying on talk as a source of data, instead of action or overt behaviour.

Action research should not be confused with *evaluation research* (see Key concept 2.10), which usually denotes the study of the impact of an intervention, such as a new social policy or a new innovation in organizations. The research referred to in Research in focus 16.11 was conducted broadly with an evaluation research frame of reference, in that it was concerned to evaluate the impact of the introduction of performance appraisal in British universities.

## Cognitive mapping

**Cognitive mapping** is a predominantly qualitative method that has been used widely by business and management researchers in a variety of contexts (see Research in focus 16.15 for an example), particularly in the field of strategy development. Cognitive mapping is seen as complementary to action research, because the maps can be used as a problem-solving device by researchers, who work interactively with managers to address a particular organizational issue. Thus, in addition to its potential use as a research method, mapping is also commonly used as a management consulting technique.

Eden (1992) suggests that cognitive mapping is used to capture individual perspectives, because it is based on the assumption that people interpret data differently and they will therefore understand problems in different ways. The method draws on personal construct theory (Kelly 1955), which also informs the use of repertory grid technique (see Chapter 8), and is based on the assumption that people are actively engaged in constructing models, hypotheses, or representations that enable them to make sense of the world around them. While cognitive maps can be seen as models of cognition, their primary function is as a tool for reflective thinking about a problem that enables steps to be taken towards its solution. Cause maps are a particular version of cognitive mapping that attempt to capture arguments and propositions in the form of a hierarchical structure that relates means to ends.

The mapping process involves participants identifying the factors that affect a particular decision-making 'goal'. Ideas or 'concepts' relating to the decision are generated on the basis of either individual or group interviews. The role of the interviewer in this context is to ask questions that explore *why* concepts are important to the individual and *how* they are related. This process, known as 'laddering' (Eden 1988), enables the researcher to understand an individual's construct system. It consists of 'laddering up'—asking why a particular construct is important—and 'laddering down'—finding out how a particular construct is affected by the particular decision.

These data are then interpreted by the researcher and put into a diagram that reflects the relationship between



## Research in focus 16.15
## Cognitive mapping

In their study of senior managerial decision-making in a UK electrical retail company, Clarke and Mackaness (2001) began by conducting a collective group interview with all senior directors and managers who were involved in making new store investment decisions. The aim of this interview was to identify the problem-solving goal that would form the focus for cognitive mapping. This was defined as 'the opening of high-performing superstores' (2001: 155). High-performing superstores were measured in terms of turnover per outlet and return on capital employed in investment. The group identified six 'prototype' stores that were seen as representative of high- and low-performing stores within the company.

The performance of these 'prototype' stores was then used as the focus for individual interviews with three senior managers who were jointly responsible for strategic decisions relating to investment in and construction of new superstores—the Managing Director, the Operations Manager, and the Estates Manager. All three interviewees knew about the 'prototype' stores and had been involved in the original investment decisions.

Illustrative materials were used to prompt discussion about each prototype store, including site maps and aerial photographs. Using these examples, they were asked to identify the most influential factors in producing high-performance superstores. These interviews were transcribed and used to generate a cognitive map for each manager, which was shown to each respondent for clarification and elaboration. Links between the concepts were also ascribed on three status levels: 'causal' links, in which one concept influences another directly; 'connotative' links, which imply indirect association; and 'temporal' links, which change over time and have either positive or negative dimensions.

Clarke and Mackaness conclude that senior managers tend to opt for simpler cognitive explanations of the decision-making process and rely on fewer constructs than their lower-level counterparts. They also tend to 'benchmark' their thoughts against previous decisions. This suggests that they are able to make use of past experience as well as factual information in a decision-making situation.

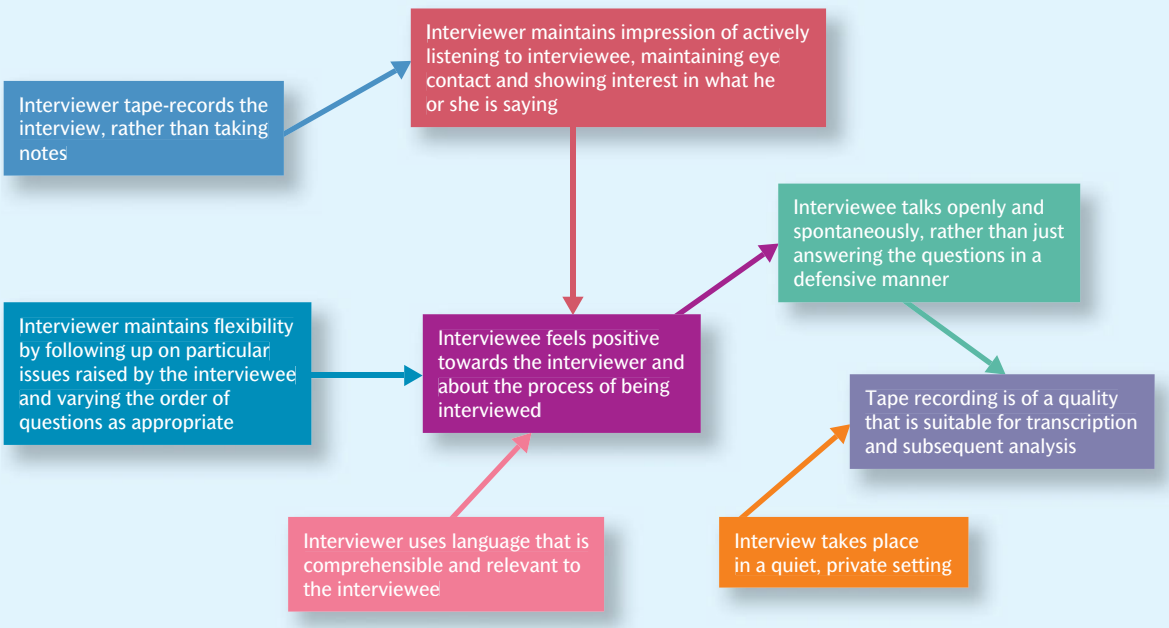
the concepts. This process results in the construction of a map-like diagram that represents elements of understanding or thinking at a given time. A cognitive map is usually drawn as short pieces of text linked by arrows that show the direction of causality (see Figure 16.2 for a simplified example). This is intended to make it easy to see how concepts are related to each other and to show the overall structure of assertions, although some cognitive maps place less emphasis on the directional or causal nature of these relationships, focusing instead on the patterns or connections between them. In some cases, individuals are involved in validating their own maps; in others the interpretation of the data into a map is a task undertaken solely by the researcher.

The method is intended not only to enable understanding of an individual's construct system, but also to enable groups of individuals, usually managers, to understand the way that others in the group perceive a problem. The map can thus form the basis for discussion and provide a resource that can help them to form a coherent view in relation to an issue and decide on an appropriate course of action. Maps can, therefore, relate to the thinking processes of individuals, groups, organizations, or even industries, although there is a need for researchers to be clear about the level of analysis they are adopting. An underlying assumption of the approach is that the process of interaction between researcher and research subjects leads to the production of understanding.

There are several software packages on the market that have been developed to support the process of cognitive mapping. One of these is **Decision Explorer**, developed by Eden and other academics at the universities of Bath and Strathclyde. This enables the display and analysis of maps, and can be used interactively with research subjects or in problem-solving teams. The software, which is produced by a company called Banxia, has been used for a variety of academic and management consultancy projects. More information about the software and its potential applications can be found on its website: ***www.banxia.com*** (accessed 13 July 2010)

# Figure 16.2

**An example of a part of a cognitive map to show the process of qualitative interviewing**




*Source*: adapted from Eden, Ackermann, and Cropper (1992).

## Feminism and qualitative research

A further dimension to add to this discussion is that, in the view of some writers, qualitative research is associated with a feminist sensitivity, and that, by implication, quantitative research is viewed by many feminists as incompatible with feminism. Moreover, feminist research could be seen as having a particularly important role to play in relation to business and management research, which has typically been pursued from a masculine perspective (see Thinking deeply 16.16). Furthermore, the bias towards a masculine perspective in business and



## Thinking deeply 16.16
## Feminist research in business and management

Organizational research has typically been pursued from a male-orientated perspective, which, according to Wilson (1995), regards men and women as alike and fails to consider gender as a significant variable within organizational processes. To illustrate this point, Wilson cites the example of the Hawthorne studies (see also Research in focus 2.8), which involved the observational study of a group of female employees in the 'test room' and a group of male employees in the 'bank wiring room'. 'The men were observed under normal working conditions while the female group was pressured, by male supervisors, into an experimental situation. Despite the fact that output was increased by the women and restricted by the men, the overall findings were presented as an explanation of the behaviour of employees *per se*' (1995: 1–2). Other studies have tended to treat women as entirely peripheral to organizational life. This bias is particularly evident in the study of management. As the majority of managers are men, studies of management have mainly focused on observation of male managers. Therefore, recommendations about what makes effective management often erroneously assume that better managers are more masculine, reinforcing this masculine gender stereotype. Despite the growth of feminist research in various disciplines, much of this has occurred outside the boundaries of business and management research. If, as Wilson suggests, we need to 'see reality differently' and reformulate the way in which work organizations are understood, feminist methods provide a means whereby the male-orientated values in business and management can be exposed and challenged.

management research may be related to the dominance of quantitative methods, which are regarded as 'hard' or 'masculine', rather than qualitative methods, which are seen as 'soft' and lacking in concreteness (Gherardi and Turner 1987). However, the link between feminism and qualitative research is by no means a cut-and-dried issue, in that, although it became something of an orthodoxy among some writers, it has not found favour with all feminists. Indeed, there are signs at the time of writing that views on this issue are changing.

The notion that there is an affinity between feminism and qualitative research has at least two main components to it: a view that quantitative research is inherently incompatible with feminism, and a view that qualitative research provides greater opportunity for a feminist sensitivity to come to the fore. Quantitative research is frequently viewed as incompatible with feminism for the following reasons:

- According to Mies (1993), quantitative research suppresses the voices of women either by ignoring them or by submerging them in a torrent of facts and statistics.
- The criteria of valid knowledge associated with quantitative research are ones that turn women, when they are the focus of research, into objects. This means that women are again subjected to exploitation, in that knowledge and experience are extracted from them with nothing in return, even when the research is conducted by women (Mies 1993).
- The emphasis on controlling variables further exacerbates this last problem, and indeed the very idea of control is viewed as a masculine approach.
- The use of predetermined categories in quantitative research results in an emphasis on what is already known and consequently in 'the silencing of women's own voices' (Maynard 1998: 128).
- The criteria of valid knowledge associated with quantitative research also mean that women are to be researched in a value-neutral way, when in fact the goals of feminist research should be to conduct research specifically *for* women.
- It is sometimes suggested that the quest for universal laws is inconsistent with feminisms's emphasis on the situated nature of social reality, which is seen as embedded in the various social identities (based on gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, etc.) that are unique to individuals (Miner-Rubino, Jayaratne, and Konik, 2007)

By contrast, qualitative research was viewed by many feminists as either more compatible with feminism's central tenets or as more capable of being adapted to those tenets. Thus, in contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research allows:

- women's voices to be heard;
- exploitation to be reduced by giving as well as by receiving in the course of fieldwork;
- women *not* to be treated as objects to be controlled by the researcher's technical procedures; and
- the emancipatory goals of feminism to be realized.

*How* qualitative research achieves these goals will be addressed particularly in the next three chapters, since the issues and arguments vary somewhat from one method to the other. In fact, the issue of qualitative research as providing the opportunity for a feminist approach has somewhat different aspects when looking at ethnography, qualitative interviewing, and focus groups—the topics of the next three chapters. However, feminist research is much less established in the field of business and management than in other social science disciplines. Indeed, some would go so far as to say that business and management research has a tendency towards gender-blindness in terms of the way that research topics are defined. For example, Mirchandani (1999) observes that much of the research on women's experiences of entrepreneurship focuses on identifying similarities and differences between female and male business-owners, and on providing explanations of these differences. She argues that, although this is useful in compensating for the exclusion of women in earlier studies, it does not explain why entrepreneurship is defined and understood only in terms of the behaviour of men. Mirchandani argues that the construction of the category of 'the female entrepreneur' prioritizes gender over other important aspects of identity, such as social stratification, business ownership, organizational structure, and industry, that need to be explored in relation to female *and* male businessowners. However, some business and management researchers have sought to adopt a feminist approach—for an example see Research in focus 16.17. However, it also ought to be recognized that there has been a softening of attitude among some feminist writers towards quantitative research in recent years. Examples of this softening are as follows:

- There is a recognition that many of the worst excesses of discrimination against women might not have come to light so clearly were it not for the collection and analysis of statistics revealing discrimination (Maynard 1994; Oakley 1998). The very presence of factual



## Research in focus 16.17
## Feminist analyses of embodied identity at work

The subject of embodied identities at work has attracted interest from feminist researchers, who have seen the principles of feminism as key to understanding how bodies, and in particular women's bodies, are understood in the workplace. For example, Trethewey (1999), who describes her methodology as a Foucauldian feminist analysis, interviewed nineteen professional women about their definitions and experiences of their professional bodies using the friendship model of interviewing (Oakley 1981), explained in Chapter 18. Trethewey explains: 'I felt more comfortable approaching the participants as friends rather than as subjects or data. I have since formed friendships with several of the participants, have joined the reading group of another participant, and was invited to participate in a local women's mentoring committee by yet another participant' (1999: 427). Similarly, Davies et al.'s (2005) data collection method involved five women who were also the co-authors of the paper published from the research. Their focus was on exploring female embodiment in academic work through the method of a collective biography. The five participant researchers spent five days in a research workshop on an island, which they designed and facilitated collectively, doing exercises and having discussions that focused on various aspects of their embodiment at work. They also explain that they shared food, wine, walking, swimming, and working as part of the data-gathering process, which led to the production of written memories of themselves in workplaces, as students, and as children. Both of these studies show how feminist researchers seek to break down the boundaries between the researcher and (female) research participants as a means of trying to make the research relationship more equal.

evidence of this kind has allowed the case for equal opportunities legislation to be made much more sharply, although, needless to say, there is much more that still needs to be done in this field.

- Qualitative research can be enlisted as an aid to implementing social change for feminists. Miner-Rubino, Jayaratne, and Konik (2007) suggest that knowledge about the distribution of attitudes and behaviours in a sample can be used to establish the most appropriate course of action for social change.
- As Jayaratne and Stewart (1991) and Maynard (1994, 1998) have pointed out, at the very least it is difficult to see why feminist research that combines quantitative and qualitative research would be incompatible with the feminist cause.
- There has also been a recognition of the fact that qualitative research is not *ipso facto* feminist in orientation. If, for example, ethnography, which is covered in the next chapter, provided for a feminist sensitivity, we would expect subjects like social anthropology, which have been virtually founded on the approach, to be almost inherently feminist, which is patently not the case (Reinharz 1992: 47–8). If this is so, the question of appropriate approaches to feminist research would seem to reside in the *application* of methods rather than something that is inherent in them. Consequently, some writers have preferred to write about *feminist research practice* rather than about *feminist methods* (Maynard 1998: 128).

## Collaborative and participatory research

Like action research and some kinds of feminist research, collaborative and participatory researchers assume that research should be driven by practical outcomes rather than by theoretical understanding. However, the distinguishing feature of collaborative methods of enquiry is that they assume members of the organization being studied should actively participate in the research process and also benefit from it. Collaborative methods are seen as particularly important in researching groups such as children who would otherwise be at a particular power disadvantage in dealing with researchers. For example, Bolton, Pole, and Mizen (2001), mentioned earlier in this chapter, wanted to conduct research into child employment with children as active participants, rather than as passive subjects. Their aim was to explore 'the shape and meaning of child employment in Britain today from the point of view of the children themselves' (2001: 510). To do this they offered seventy young workers an opportunity to make a photographic account of their part-time jobs. The children were given disposable cameras and the researchers offered to make two sets of prints, one for

them to keep and one for the research. They note that the photographs were composed and selected by the young workers, rather than the researchers, to show what it was like to work and what work meant to them. By giving their research participants a degree of control in taking the photographs and also involving them in the analysis, the researchers were seeking to make the research process more collaborative. Collaborative research can be seen as a form of respondent validation (see Key concept 16.5) by attempting to redistribute power between the researcher and research participants. P. Park (1999) describes participatory research as focused on disempowered groups that can be helped through research that addresses problems related to their welfare in an organized way. The researcher should ideally be someone who is familiar with the community and committed to working towards improving their conditions. This, he argues, is what differentiates participatory researchers from other types of action researchers who are concerned only with solving problems of a job-related nature. This is similar to critical or emancipatory action research (Zuber-Skerritt 1996), which is a form of collaborative enquiry engaged in by practitioners who want to explore a problem or issue in relation to their own practice.

An important milestone in the development of these research traditions was the publication of a book by Reason and Rowan (1981), which brought together writers from these traditions and argued for the legitimacy of a 'new paradigm' of research based on increased participation and collaboration with research subjects. (For an example of the kind of research that this book encouraged, see Research in focus 16.18.) This set of perspectives broadly defined research as a two-way process whereby the researcher becomes involved in the participant's world and the practitioner gets involved in the generation of research outputs. At its most radical, this leads to cooperative enquiry, where all those involved are both co-researchers and co-subjects (Reason 1999).

Collaborative methods of enquiry stem from a desire to challenge the conventional methods whereby knowledge is constructed in the social sciences. This involves challenging the monopoly, traditionally held by universities, over the processes and outcomes of research and offering a more democratic alternative whereby research participants are treated as active agents rather than as passive subjects. It is about doing research 'with people' rather than 'on people' (Heron and Reason 2000). It also seeks to acknowledge that the motivation to do research is related to our own personal needs for development, change, and learning (Reason and Marshall 1987) and that research often involves personal growth (see Research in focus 16.19 for an illustration).



## Research in focus 16.18
## Participative research

In the 1970s, Brown and Kaplan (1981) engaged in a five-year research and development project at Northern Chemical Works, a subsidiary of a large multinational corporation. The research focused on employee relations problems experienced by the firm. Interviews were held with managers and employees at the Textiles Plant and an 'empathic' questionnaire was devised using direct quotations from the interviews. Following analysis of these data, plant personnel met in small groups to discuss the findings and generate action steps to be taken.

Brown and Kaplan suggest that their research involvement illustrates five aspects of participative research.

1. It involved diverse parties, including management and union leaders, whose interactions could not be predicted or controlled.
2. The research involved ideological choices, in that the researchers were unable to remain neutral in their research as they were pressed to take sides with either union or management (eventually deciding to work exclusively with management—who had financially supported the research initially).
3. The diverse perspectives of different parties had somehow to be integrated, despite the high degree of misunderstanding and conflict that existed between them.
4. The research was organized in a way that enabled the use of resources to solve concrete problems as well as to generate abstract knowledge.
5. The outcomes of the research were complex and ambiguous, producing competing explanations that reflected multiple realities.



## Research in focus 16.19
## Collaborative enquiry into workplace diversity

In order to consider the resources necessary to support an increasingly diverse workforce, Bond and Pyle (1998) used a social ecological perspective in order to suggest that the environment, and in particular the distribution of resources, exerts a powerful influence on human behaviour. Their observations are based on an organizational case study called 'Chemical Products', where they used a collaborative enquiry process. They explain:

> We chose a collaborative inquiry process because of our ecologically-driven belief that organization members are not only in the best position to answer questions about their own setting, but they are also the most knowledgeable about what questions to ask, how to ask the questions, and how to understand participants' responses. To facilitate such a participative process, we worked closely with the HR Manager and her staff. After getting approval for the project from the President, we reviewed goals with the Unit Managers Group. We then established a Steering Team to guide the Workplace Chemistry Project. We clarified project goals with other existing groups such as the cross-department People Team. These meetings were followed by thirty-six in-depth interviews, participant observation of meetings, and a series of feedback sessions. (Bond and Pyle 1998: 597)



## *Key points*

- There is disagreement over what precisely qualitative research is.
- Qualitative research does not lend itself to the delineation of a clear set of linear steps.
- It tends to be a more open-ended research strategy than is typically the case with quantitative research.
- Theories and concepts are viewed as outcomes of the research process.
- There is considerable unease about the simple application of the reliability and validity criteria associated with quantitative research to qualitative research. Indeed, some writers prefer to use alternative criteria that have parallels with reliability and validity.
- Action research is an approach in which the researcher and a client collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in the development of a solution to the problem based on the diagnosis. It is connected with the method of cognitive mapping.
- Most qualitative researchers reveal a preference for seeing through the eyes of research participants.
- Several writers have depicted qualitative research as having a far greater affinity with a feminist standpoint than quantitative research can exhibit.
- Action research, feminism, and collaborative methods of enquiry have changed the relationship between the researcher and the research subject.



## *Questions for review*

- What are some of the difficulties with providing a general account of the nature of qualitative research?
- Outline some of the traditions of qualitative research.
- What are some of the main research methods associated with qualitative research?

### *The main steps in qualitative research*

- Does a research question in qualitative research have the same significance and characteristics as in quantitative research?

### *Theory and research*

- Is the approach to theory in qualitative research inductive or deductive?

### *Concepts in qualitative research*

- What is the difference between definitive and sensitizing concepts?

### *Reliability and validity in qualitative research*

- How have some writers adapted the notions of reliability and validity to qualitative research?
- Why have some writers sought alternative criteria for the evaluation of qualitative research?
- Evaluate Lincoln and Guba's criteria.
- What is respondent validation?
- What is triangulation?

### *The main preoccupations of qualitative researchers*

- Outline the main preoccupations of qualitative researchers.
- How do these preoccupations differ from those of quantitative researchers, which were considered in Chapter 6?

### *The critique of qualitative research*

- What are some of the main criticisms that are frequently levelled at qualitative research?
- To what extent do these criticisms reflect the preoccupations of quantitative research?

### *Is it always like this?*

- Can qualitative research be employed in relation to hypothesis testing?

### *Some contrasts and similarities between quantitative and qualitative research*

- 'The difference between quantitative and qualitative research revolves entirely around the concern with numbers in the former and with words in the latter.' How far do you agree with this statement?

### *Researcher–subject relationships*

- What is action research?
- How are cognitive maps used in problem solving?
- Is there a role for feminist research in the study of business and management?
- How have collaborative approaches to qualitative research changed the relationship between the researcher and research subjects?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in The Nature of Qualitative Research.*

17

# Ethnography and participant observation

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 424

**Organizational ethnography** 425

**Access** 427

- Overt versus covert? 433
- Ongoing access 435
- Key informants 436

**Roles for ethnographers** 436

- Active or passive? 440

**Sampling** 441

- Purposive sampling 441
- Theoretical sampling 441
- Not just people 443

**Field notes** 444

- Types of field notes 447

**Bringing ethnographic fieldwork to an end** 448

**Can there be a feminist ethnography?** 449

**Visual ethnography** 451

***Key points*** 462

***Questions for review*** 462



## Chapter outline

Ethnography and participant observation entail the extended involvement of the researcher in the social life of those he or she studies (see Key concept 17.1). However, the former term is also frequently taken to refer to the written output of that research. This chapter explores:

- the problems of gaining access to different settings and some suggestions about how they might be overcome;
- the issue of whether or not a covert role is practicable and acceptable;
- the role of key informants and gatekeepers for the ethnographer;
- the different kinds of roles that ethnographers can assume in the course of their fieldwork;
- sampling strategies in ethnography, in particular *theoretical sampling*, which is associated with the grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis, which will be examined in Chapter 22;
- the role of field notes in ethnography and the variety of forms they can assume;
- bringing ethnography to an end.

# Introduction

Discussions about the merits and limitations of participant observation have been a fairly standard ingredient in textbooks on business research for many years. However, for some time, writers on research methods have increasingly preferred to write about ethnography rather than participant observation. It is difficult to date the point at which this change of terminology (though it is more than just this) occurred, but sometime in the 1970s ethnography began to become the preferred term. Prior to that, ethnography was primarily associated with social anthropological research, whereby the investigator visits a (usually) foreign land, gains access to a group (for example, a tribe or village), spends a considerable amount of time (often many years) with that group with the aim of uncovering its culture, watches and listens to what people say and do, engages people in conversations to probe specific issues of interest, takes copious field notes, and returns home to write up the fruits of his or her labours.

Ethnography could be viewed as a simple process of joining a group, watching what goes on, making some notes, and writing it all up. In fact, ethnography is nowhere nearly as straightforward as this implies. This chapter will outline some of the main decision areas that confront ethnographers, along with some of the many contingencies they face. However, it is not easy to generalize about the ethnographic research process in such a way as to provide definitive recommendations about research practice. As prefigured at the end of the previous chapter, the diversity of experiences that confront ethnographers and the variety of ways in which they deal with them does not readily permit clear-cut generalizations. The following comment in a book on ethnography makes this point well.

> Every field situation *is* different and initial luck in meeting good informants, being in the right place at the right time and striking the right note in relationships may be just as important as skill in technique. Indeed, many successful episodes in the field do come about through good luck as much as through sophisticated planning, and many unsuccessful episodes are due as much to bad luck as to bad judgement. (Sarsby 1984: 96)

However, this statement should not be taken to imply that forethought and an awareness of alternative ways of doing things are irrelevant. It is with this kind of issue that the rest of this chapter will be concerned. However, issues to do with the conduct of interviews by ethnographers will be reserved for Chapter 18.



## Organizational ethnography

Ethnography has also become a 'label of choice' for researchers working in professional and applied fields, who have discovered and adapted ethnographic methods to suit their own purposes. Among these are business researchers who have imported the methods and many of the conventions of ethnography into the study of organizational settings. Rosen (1991) understands organizational ethnography to be distinctive because it is concerned with social relations that are related to certain goal-directed activities. He suggests that the rules, strategies, and meanings within a structured work situation are different from those that affect other areas of social life. An ethnographic approach implies intense researcher involvement in the day-to-day running of an organization, so that the researcher can understand it from an insider's point of view. In order to become immersed in other people's realities, organizational ethnographers, like their anthropological predecessors, engage in fieldwork that tends to commit them to a period of time spent in the organization, or a long stay 'in the field'.

Indeed, many of these early studies draw attention to the similarities between ethnography and participant observation (see Key concept 17.1 for an explanation of the relationship between these terms). Industrial sociologists working out of the Chicago School were followed by a group of writers who studied UK-based work organizations and relied heavily on the traditional ethnographic method of participant observation. These studies, which sometimes involved taking jobs in the research sites, included:

- D. Roy (1958), who spent two months working as a machine operator in the 'clicking room' of a factory in Chicago. The same factory was later used as a research setting by Burawoy (1979), who also worked as a machine operator for ten months in the same plant.
- Lupton (1963), who became a participant-observer in Manchester factories in order to explore processes of work group influence on production levels. Lupton compared an engineering plant in which 'fiddles' were prevalent with a clothing factory where these practices were absent.
- Beynon (1975), who over a period of five years studied the Ford Motor Company's Halewood assembly plant in Liverpool to produce an account of factory life that described the process whereby people became shop stewards, the way they understood the job, and the kinds of pressures they experienced. This study also involved understanding the experience of people who worked on the assembly lines and the way they made sense of industrial politics.

However, since the 1980s the popularity of organizational culture as a concept has meant that ethnographic methods have enjoyed something of a revival within business and management research. Ethnography, which denotes the practice of writing (*graphy*) about people and cultures (*ethno*), has provided researchers with an obvious method for understanding work organizations as cultural entities. Studies that focus on the construction of cultural norms, expressions of organizational values, and patterns of workplace behaviour include:

- Kunda's (1992) study of the fictitiously named high-technology company 'Lyndsville Tech' in Silicon Valley, USA.
- Watson's (1994*a*) account of managerial identity in a UK-based telecommunications firm.
- Casey's (1995) exploration of new-product development workers in an American-based multinational corporation.
- Delbridge's (1998) study of the impact of new manufacturing techniques on worker experiences in a Japanese-owned consumer electronics plant, 'Nippon CTV', and a European-owned automotive components supplier, 'Valleyco'.



## Key concept 17.1
# What are ethnography and participant observation?

Many definitions of ethnography and participant observation are very difficult to distinguish. Both draw attention to the fact that the participant observer/ethnographer immerses him or herself in a group for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions. It is possible that the term 'ethnography' is sometimes preferred, because 'participant observation' seems to imply just observation, though in practice participant observers do more than simply observe. Typically, participant observers and ethnographers will gather further data through interviews and the collection of documents. It may be, therefore, that the apparent emphasis on observation in the term 'participant observation' has meant that an apparently more inclusive term would be preferable, even though in fact it is generally recognized that the method entails a wide range of methods of data collection and sources. Ethnography is also sometimes taken to refer to a study in which participant observation is the prevalent research method but that also has a specific focus on the culture of the group in which the ethnographer is immersed.

However, the term 'ethnography' has an additional meaning, in that it frequently simultaneously refers to both a method of research of the kind outlined above *and* the written product of that research. Indeed, 'ethnography' frequently denotes both a research process and the written outcome of the research. A typical account of the ethnographic research process is provided by Perlow (1997), in her study of work–life issues in post-industrial American corporations.

> I spent much of each day wandering around, talking to people and observing their daily activities. I had an office in the same corridor, where I would type my field notes on a laptop computer. Even when typing notes, I left my office door open. I sat facing the door, looking up when people walked by, inviting conversation if an engineer or manager chose to enter.
>
> In addition to being present and available to talk to the engineers, I conducted interviews and attended meetings . . . Later, I shadowed engineers . . . to get a sense of how they accomplished their work. Moreover, I sat for hours in each of the software labs observing and talking to the engineers at work and listening to the 'natural' interactions that occurred in the labs. (1997: 143)

As part of this research was about the relationship between work and home domains, Perlow also wanted to understand the engineers' lives outside work. She therefore asked the married engineers to let her visit their homes and interview their spouses. Finally, Perlow describes how she participated in many social events during the fieldwork; she went to lunch with the engineers on a regular basis, joined them for 'happy hour' on Friday nights at one of the bars downtown, went with them on a three-day bus trip to New York city, and attended official celebrations organized by the company.

Perlow also describes how she adopted the role of confidante:

> It was my job to listen, regardless of what I was doing or how I was feeling, I made myself available when the engineers wanted to tell me something. I found myself privy to many unsolicited conversations whether engineers had something specific they felt I should know or they were simply looking for a break in their work and wanted someone to chat with. (1997: 146)



## Tips and skills
## Micro-ethnography

If you are doing research for an undergraduate project or Master's dissertation, it is unlikely that you will be able to conduct a full-scale ethnography, because this would almost certainly involve you spending a considerable period of time in an organizational setting. Nevertheless, it may be possible for you to carry out a form of *micro-ethnography* (Wolcott 1995). This involves focusing on a particular aspect of an organizational culture, such as the way the organization has implemented TQM, and showing how the culture is reflected through this managerial initiative. A shorter period of time (from a couple of weeks to a few months) could be spent in the organization—on either a full-time or a part-time basis—to achieve this more closely defined cultural understanding.



## Telling it like it is
## Participant observation in a small-scale research project

Lucie felt that participant observation would enable her to gain an insider perspective on the process of constructing entrepreneurial identity among university students. Being a university student herself, she was in a good position to be able to try to view these events through the eyes of the people she was studying and to be accepted into the research setting. So she made arrangements to attend some of the events and workshops that were intended to help university students to develop entrepreneurial behaviour. As Lucie explained, this meant 'I could get the feel of how the organizers were trying to present enterprise to me as a student. I could get first-hand experience of it and embrace what they were trying to say.'

However, Lucie found the pressures associated with ethnographic participant observation significant. 'Because I was trying to research this, I don't know if I was looking at things a bit too deeply and not just kind of taking it for what it was. I found myself looking around and trying to kind of gauge other people's reactions as well, so I don't know if I sat there and did it as much as kind of just sitting there and taking everything in really. It was quite difficult. I was trying to write everything down because they didn't want me to tape record anything so I had to take notes and I didn't want to miss anything. So it was quite difficult really to decide "Is that important or is that irrelevant?" and it got a bit kind of confusing at times. It was quite a lot of information to take in I suppose.'



*To hear more about Lucie's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# Access

One of the key and yet most difficult steps in ethnography is gaining access to a social setting that is relevant to the research problem in which you are interested. The way in which access is approached differs according to whether the setting is a relatively open one or a relatively closed one (Bell 1969). The majority of organizational ethnography is done in predominantly closed or non-public settings of various kinds, such as factories or offices. The negotiation of access involves gaining permission to enter these privately managed spaces or situations. Gaining access to organizations can initially be a very formal process involving a lengthy sequence of letter writing and meetings, in order to deal with managerial concerns about your goals. However, the

distinction between open and closed settings is not a hard-and-fast one. Organizations also have a highly public character, made visible through marketing and public-relations activities.

Buchanan, Boddy, and McCalman (1988) suggest that researchers should adopt an opportunistic approach towards fieldwork in organizations, balancing what is desirable against what is possible. 'The research timetable must therefore take into account the possibility that access will not be automatic and instant, but may take weeks and months of meetings and correspondence to achieve' (1988: 56). As Van Maanen and Kolb (1985: 11) observe, 'gaining access to most organizations is not a matter to be taken lightly but one that involves some combination of strategic planning, hard work and dumb luck'. Sometimes, ethnographers will be able to have their paths smoothed by individuals who act as both sponsor and gatekeeper. Some of the most influential organizational research relationships are those made with senior management, who may act as 'gatekeepers' to the research setting. Gaining access is also sometimes seen as a process of exchange whereby the organizational ethnographer cannot expect to get something out, in the form of data, without giving something in return, often in the form of their physical, mental, or emotional labour.

In selecting a particular social setting to act as a case study in which to conduct an ethnographic investigation, the researcher may employ several criteria. These criteria should be determined by the general research area in which he or she is interested. Very often a number of potential cases (and sometimes very many) will be relevant to your research problem. Hence, during his year of participant observation at ZTC Ryland, Watson (1994*a*) used to joke with managers about the fact that he had chosen the company for the study because of its convenient location, just a twenty-minute walk from his house. The other reason he gave for choosing the company as a research site was because management had been involved in a succession of change initiatives associated with the development of a 'strong' corporate culture. These policies had been informed by the advice of consultants who were academics, providing Watson with potential insight into the processes whereby managerial ideas about culture building were transferred into practice.

You may also choose a certain case because of its 'fit' with your research questions, but there are no guarantees of success, as Van Maanen and Kolb's remark suggests. Sometimes, sheer perseverance pays off. Leidner (1993) was determined that one of the organizations in which she conducted ethnographic research on the routinization of service work should be McDonald's. She writes:

> I knew from the beginning that I wanted one of the case studies to be of McDonald's. The company was a pioneer and exemplar of routinized interaction, and since it was locally based, it seemed like the perfect place to start. McDonald's had other ideas, however, and only after tenacious pestering and persuasion did I overcome corporate employees' polite demurrals, couched in terms of protecting proprietary information and the company's image. (Leidner 1993: 234–5)

This kind of determination is necessary for any instance in which you want to study a specific organization, where rejection is likely to require a complete rethink.

However, with many research questions, several potential cases are likely to meet your criteria. Organizational researchers have developed a range of tactics, many of which may seem rather unsystematic in tone, but they are worth drawing attention to.

- Use friends, contacts, colleagues, academics to help you gain access; provided the organization is relevant to your research question, the route should not matter.
- Try to get the support of someone within the organization who will act as your champion. This person may be prepared to vouch for you and the value of your research. Such people are placed in the role of 'sponsors'.
- Usually you will need to get access through top management/senior executives. Even though you may secure a certain level of agreement lower down the hierarchy, you will usually need clearance from them. Such senior people act as 'gatekeepers'.
- Offer something in return (for example, a report). This helps to create a sense of being *trustworthy*. However, this strategy also carries risks, in that it may turn you into a cheap consultant and may invite restrictions on your activities, such as insistence on seeing what you write or restrictions on who is willing to talk to you. For example, Milkman (1997) in her study of General Motors (see Research in focus 17.2) found that, although her research approach gained her legitimacy in the eyes of management, it stimulated scepticism and lack of trust among the workers.
- Provide a clear explanation of your aims and methods and be prepared to deal with concerns. Suggest a meeting at which you can deal with worries and provide an explanation of what you intend to do in terms that can readily be understood by others.



## Telling it like it is
## Gaining research access through family or friends

In setting up a small-scale research project, it is important to make use of whatever practical resources and personal contacts are available to you, providing that you are working within ethical guidelines (see Chapter 5). Nirwanthi and Angharad both made use of family members who helped to facilitate their research access to organizations, whereas Tom had a friend who was the manager where he carried out his research project and Lucie had several friends who worked at the institute where she did her fieldwork.

Nirwanthi's father is a director of the company that she used for her research project. As she explained, this meant that 'I knew that I would have access to all the departments of the company'. However, she was also aware that her use of this personal contact might jeopardize the validity of her findings. 'I discussed it with my supervisor because I was telling him that I would try to keep it as structured as possible but there would be some employees who would recognize me and would know me because of my father and my involvement as well in the company. So I have acknowledged that in my research, saying that it could have influenced some of the data.'

Angharad was advised by her university lecturers to 'go for somewhere where you're likely to be able to get access' and Angharad felt that a public-sector organization would probably be more receptive to requests from students to do research. Since her mother works for a county council organization, she was able to put Angharad in contact with the human resources manager, and Angharad negotiated her access from there. 'Apart from providing the first name to contact, my mum didn't really do anything else and have any other involvement. So it wasn't the same as sort of like I was just going in with my mum. It was kind of separate. I mean it was in her department so she was there, but I wouldn't have liked it if it had looked like I was clinging to my mum and my mum was organizing it.'

Tom's friend managed a call centre run by a local government authority, which, he explained, is quite unusual, since 'the majority of call centres are managed in the private sector and almost all the literature that's been published is about call centres in the private sector, so that seemed to be another dimension to this study in looking at different ways of running call centres. I negotiated access through this contact. I'm not quite sure how I'd have gone about it if I hadn't had that contact. I think the majority of people on my course either did research in their own workplace or did research which wasn't specific to one organization or they had some sort of contact like I did. I'm sure you could just approach people cold, but it's a lot easier if you've got a link.'

Lucie had several friends who were university students working at the institute where she did her fieldwork. 'It was quite easy [to get] access. A lot of my friends who are students work with the institute, so through recommendations from them I met with the administrator of the institute and the director of the institute and asked for their written consent. I wrote them a letter requesting access, then, when they wrote back, they wanted to meet with me to know more about my research and I had to talk to them about what I was hoping to gain and how they could benefit from it as well. They basically agreed and said I could have access. They said it was up to me whether I attended the courses because they were free courses for everyone so I could just attend those without their permission anyway, but to actually come and interview them and have access to their databases I would need their permission and they agreed, so that was quite lucky.'

Another common theme that runs through these students' accounts of their research experiences is a concern that the practical constraints associated with their choice of research project will impact upon the validity of their findings. We discuss the concept of validity in detail in Chapters 6 and 16, but it is important to note that the meaning of validity will vary according to whether the student is using a quantitative or a qualitative research design.



*To hear more about these students' research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

- Be prepared to negotiate—you will want complete access but it is unlikely you will be given a *carte blanche*. Milkman (1997) describes how, in negotiating access to the General Motors automobile assembly plant, the promise to produce 'hard', quantitative data to management, through survey research, was what eventually secured the researchers' access to the plant—even though she had no previous experience in designing or conducting surveys!
- Be reasonably honest about the amount of people's time you are likely to take up. This is a question you will almost certainly be asked if you are seeking access to commercial organizations and probably many not-for-profit ones too.



## Research in focus 17.2
## Finding a working role in the organization

Being an organizational ethnographer involves managing the impressions others have of you by developing a role that helps you to blend into a particular organizational setting. One way of doing this is by developing a working role, some examples of which can be found in Table 17.1. The first possibility involves the ethnographer casting him or herself in the role of a management consultant. This involves being seen as a credible outsider, as someone who can be trusted and allowed to develop close relationships with management. Watson (1994*a*) illustrates how he used this role to gain access to and credibility within the organization. He agreed that his year-long access to the company would result in the development of a scheme identifying and expressing the competencies that the company could use in selecting and developing its future managers. However, there may be dangers in becoming too closely identified with managerial groupings, as this can cut off access to potentially valuable informants in other non-managerial roles within the organization. For example, Milkman (1997) describes how the very fact that she had legitimacy with both management and the union at General Motors rendered her untrustworthy in the eyes of workers whom she was most interested in studying. This was because, 'in the intensely political world of the factory, academic researchers were an entirely unknown quantity and could only be understood as servicing someone else's immediate interests' (1997: 192).

A second option involves becoming a confidant. Dalton (1959), for example, describes how a female secretary helped him to obtain confidential data about managerial salaries. In exchange, she asked Dalton, given his sociological training, to provide her with some relationship counselling to help her to work out the feelings she held towards a man she was seriously dating. Dalton obliged, in exchange for the data; the secretary married the man within a year. Similarly, Casey (1995: 203) describes how she was accorded the roles of witness, scribe, analyst, and therapist. She did not discourage the therapeutic role, as it gave her access to considerable data and insights and 'provided some catharsis for employees' who were trying to make sense of their organizational lives. M. Parker (2000) suggests the role of the confidant is the most productive one for revealing insights into the politics of the particular organization. He describes how his interviewees saw him as someone who would listen to their problems when others wouldn't. D. Fletcher (2002) describes how she adopted a role as 'emotional-nurturer' in her study of a small engineering company. The gendered understandings that defined her fieldwork interactions in a masculine organizational setting led her subconsciously to 'choose' this role as a way of responding to her feelings of 'femaleness' and difference. She explains that she felt 'out of place and "different"' (2002: 430) and so, in order to try to gain acceptance and gain access within the organization, she assigned herself to non-threatening and menial tasks, such as photocopying and filing, and 'provided positive stroking concerning job/marital problems' (2002: 411). In this way Fletcher describes how she 'tried to create a non-threatening comfort zone in which people could have a break from work and talk about their work' (2002: 412). However, Fletcher also explains that she felt that something of herself was 'lost' through this process, making her sometimes tired, depressed, and frustrated, as 'constantly providing emotional nurture is exhausting and neverending' (2002: 414).

A third potential role involves the researcher becoming an apprentice, adopting a more active work role in the setting. For example, Sharpe (1997) describes how she gained insider status by taking up employment as a shopfloor worker in a Japanese car manufacturing company on a six-month student job placement contract. She explains: 'by immersing myself in the shopfloor life, I believed I would be able to offer a richer, reflexive understanding of social processes and dynamics than if I took a more conventional approach of research as an outsider or distant observer' (1997: 230).

'Hanging around' is another common access strategy. As a strategy, it typically entails either loitering in an area until you are noticed or gradually becoming incorporated into or asking to join a group. For example, as well as interviewing shop stewards who represented assembly-line workers and a selection of workers from each of the four main production departments, Beynon (1975) spent a day each week at the Ford plant, observing and listening to the shop stewards 'as they negotiated, argued and discussed issues amongst themselves and with their members' (1975: 13). He describes how he 'sat at tables in the canteens and at benches around the coffee-vending machines at break times' and 'talked with workers as they queued up for their dinner, for buses or to clock their cards at the beginning and the end of every day' (1975: 13). Similarly, Casey, in her study of a group of professional workers at the multinational 'Hephaestus' Corporation, tells how she 'spent a great deal of time lingering around individual people' (1995: 201). Similarly, M. Parker (2000: 236) describes how he spent time waiting 'outside managers' offices, often for long periods of time, and wandering around the factory or offices' just to collect small details or fragments of data. The example given in Research in focus 17.3 uses the technique of shadowing, which could form part of an ethnographic study.

Sometimes, as research relationships evolve, they come to a point where a degree of informal interaction becomes significant in developing insider status. For example, Heyes (1997), whose research took place inside a chemical plant, lists the many social aspects of organizational life in which he was eventually involved, including 'general conversation, banter, smoke breaks' and rituals such as 'the take-away meals which were consumed on the week-end night-shift' (1997: 69).



## Research in focus 17.3
## Shadowing as a technique for studying team leaders

McDonald (2005) used the technique of shadowing in the study of team leaders in a high-tech organization. She defines shadowing as 'a research technique which involves a researcher closely following a member of an organization over an extended period of time' (2005: 456). This includes shadowing him or her at meetings as well as time spent writing at his or her desk. Although shadowing need not necessarily form part of an ethnographic study—it could also be used as a stand-alone method—it does bear some similarity to the kinds of participant observation that ethnographers typically engage in. In addition to following the member of the organization throughout his or her working day, the researcher also asks him or her questions about what he or she is doing: 'some of the questions will be for clarification, such as what was being said on the other end of a phone call, or what a departmental joke means. Other questions will be intended to reveal purpose, such as why a particular line of argument was pursued in a meeting, or what the current operational priorities are' (2005: 456). During this process, the researcher will also write field notes (for more on field notes, see Tips and skills 'Writing field notes') recording the times and subject of conversation and the body language and moods of the person being shadowed. McDonald claims that one of the advantages of shadowing is that, rather than relying on an individual's account of his or her role in an organization, it enables the researcher to view the behaviour directly. McDonald also lists a number of practical recommendations for shadowing, which are broadly similar to those given to ethnographers:

- *never go in cold*: spend time getting to know the organization and the person you intend to shadow beforehand;
- *use a small, hardback notebook* rather than a digital recorder, which is less practical for shadowing;
- *write down as much as you can*, including descriptions of settings, meaning of acronyms, your first impressions of people, your emotional reaction to situations;
- *find a mentor* who is not part of the organization to talk to about your research;
- *make a daily tape dump* recording your thoughts at the end of the work day, which will help you to understand your notes when you go back to them later;
- *plan your data* management before you go into the field.

As these anecdotes suggest, gaining access to social settings is a crucial first step in ethnographic research, in that, without access, your research plans will be halted in their tracks. As Ram (1994) illustrates in his study of employment relations in small firms (see Research in focus 17.4), attention to cultural context and local norms and values can be very important considerations when seeking access to closed settings. Gender can also be an important dynamic when negotiating access to many male-dominated organizational settings (see Research in focus 17.17). In summary, gaining access is often fraught with difficulties. Therefore this discussion of access strategies can be only a starting point in knowing what kinds of approach can be considered.



## Research in focus 17.4
## A complete participant?

One of the aims of Ram's (1994) ethnographic study of employment relations in small firms was to consider some of the ways in which employees and employers negotiated the labour process.

However, just getting into clothing companies in the West Midlands, which formed the focus of his study, was known to be 'notoriously difficult' (1994: 26). In order to gain access to the three clothing firms that formed the basis for his study, Ram relied on his family and community connections to establish the trust necessary for him to 'tap into the workplace culture' (1994: 23). Being able to speak fluent Punjabi was essential to understanding people in the workplace, but equally important for Ram in becoming an 'insider' was being able to understand how the shopfloor manufacturing industry culture worked. Crucial to this was his own first-hand experience of the clothing industry. Ram describes himself as having been involved in the clothing trade for most of his life.

> My two elder sisters and one younger sister are married into clothing families, where they work as sewing machinists and assist in the management of the in-laws' firms. My elder brother runs a clothing manufacturing business with a cousin . . . My younger brother is in charge of the family-owned warehouse. (1994: 24)

Ram adopted an 'opportunistic' approach to the fieldwork, relying on his friends and relatives, and personal background as a member of a 'respected' family in the local Asian community. Ram's own father was in charge of 'Company A', which formed one of Ram's case studies. In addition, Ram himself had worked for this company either full- or part-time, 'since it came into being' (1994: 30). He had the power to 'sign cheques, purchase stock, make use of the firm's equipment and give instructions to the company's workers' (1994: 30), and during one period of the fieldwork his father went on holiday, leaving Ram and his younger brother to run the firm. However, despite his apparent role as a total participant, it was hard for Ram to talk to the shopfloor machinists, who were mostly women, because of the customary regulation of gender relationships within Asian society. He therefore used a chaperone, a senior female machinist, who accompanied him when he questioned individual female operatives.

However, opportunities for access can also arise from studying contexts with which the researcher is already involved as a complete participant—for example, through being employed in the organization he or she intends to study. Spradley and McCurdy (1972) suggest that the ethnographer's own place of work may even have special advantages as a research site, such as ease of access and already formed relationships with key informants. This may make the time needed to conduct the research shorter. However, this ethnographic approach is not without its own difficulties as, the more familiar you are with a social situation, the less you may be able to recognize the tacit cultural rules that are at work. Alvesson (2003) uses the term self-ethnography to refer to a particular type of ethnographic study based on settings with which the researcher is highly familiar, such as universities, which he argues offer particular advantages in terms of gaining research access, understanding the culture, and managing the time demands associated with qualitative research. Brannick and Coghlan (2007) also refer to this as 'insider research', which they suggest is related to action research, which was discussed in Chapter 16.

## Overt versus covert?

One way to ease the access problem is to assume a *covert* role—in other words, not to disclose the fact that you are a researcher. This strategy obviates the need to negotiate access to organizations or to explain why you want to intrude into people's lives and make them objects of study. As we have seen, seeking access is a highly fraught business, and the adoption of a covert role removes some of these difficulties. An outline of the advantages and disadvantages of covert ethnography is given in Key concept 17.5.



### Key concept 17.5
### What is the covert role in ethnography?

Advantages

- *There is no problem of access*. Adopting a covert role largely gets around the access problem, because the researcher does not have to seek permission to gain entry to a social setting or organization.
- *Reactivity is not a problem*. Using a covert role also reduces reactivity (see Key concept 11.8), because participants do not know the person conducting the study is a researcher. Therefore, they are less likely to adjust their behaviour because of the researcher's presence.

Disadvantages

- *The problem of taking notes*. As Ditton (1977; see Research in focus 17.6) discovered, it is difficult and probably in some circumstances impossible to take notes when people do not realize you are conducting research. As we will see below, notes are very important to an ethnographer, and it is too risky to rely exclusively on your memory.
- *The problem of not being able to use other methods*. Ethnography entails the use of several methods, but, if the researcher is in a covert role, it is difficult to steer conversations in a certain direction for fear of detection and it is essentially impossible to engage in interviewing.
- *Anxiety*. The ethnographer is under constant threat of having his or her cover blown. Ethnography is frequently a stressful research method, and the worries about detection can add to those anxieties. Moreover, if the ethnographer *is* found out, the whole research project may be jeopardized.
- *Ethical problems*. Covert observation transgresses two important ethical tenets: it does not provide participants with the opportunity for 'informed consent' (whereby they can agree or disagree to participate on the basis of information supplied to them) and it entails deception. It can also be taken to be a violation of the principle of privacy. Also, many writers take the view that, in addition to being potentially damaging to research participants, it can also harm the practice of research, because of fears about social researchers being identified by the public as snoopers or voyeurs if they are found out. Ethical issues were considered in greater detail in Chapter 5.

However, as the main text points out, in some circumstances the overt/covert distinction may be a matter of degree.

Covert ethnography is relatively uncommon within studies of management and business. An exception is Dalton's (1959) classic study of managers, *Men Who Manage*, which focused on the gap between official and unofficial action. Dalton describes how, in setting up access, he made no formal approach to the top management of any of the four firms he studied in the heavily industrialized area of 'Mobile Acres' in the USA. He relied instead on his status as an employee in two of the firms he studied and relied primarily on the method of covert participant observation. Describing some of the difficulties associated with his covert research role, Dalton draws attention to the problem of 'knowing too much', describing how his situation became more sensitive as he

acquired more unofficial information about practices such as 'pilfering' (employee theft of materials).

Dalton describes his work role as giving him 'great freedom of movement and wide contacts' (1959: 278) within the firm. However, it is not clear from his accounts of the research process to what extent people in the firms actually knew what he was doing. Dalton draws attention to the importance of 'intimates', trusted individuals who gave information and aid to the research process. This circle of individuals had shown over a period of about three years that 'they could be counted on not to jeopardize the study' (Dalton 1964: 66) and did not pry too much into the information that he was getting from others. As far as these intimates were concerned, therefore, it is not clear to what extent they encountered his research role as truly covert.

In another classic study, Donald Roy (1958) was similarly oblique with his co-workers about why he was working at the factory. Working under the pseudonym 'Danelly', he describes how workers knew that he had been attending 'college' but 'the specific course of study remained somewhat obscure' (1958: 164) to them. In answer to the question 'Why are you working here?', Roy stressed the importance of working 'lots of overtime' and this, according to Roy, seemed to 'suffice' for the workers.

However, the overt versus covert distinction is not without problems. For example, while an ethnographer may seek access through an overt route, there may be many people with whom he or she comes into contact who will not be aware of the ethnographer's status as a researcher. Also, some ethnographers move between the two roles (see Research in focus 17.6).



## Research in focus 17.6

## An example of the perils of covert observation: the case of field notes in the lavatory

Ditton's (1977) research on 'fiddling' in a bakery provides an interesting case of the practical difficulties of taking notes during covert observation, as well as an illustration of an ethnographer who shifted his position from covert to overt observation at least in part because of those difficulties:

> Nevertheless, I *was* able to develop personal covert participant–observation skills. Right from the start, I found it impossible to keep everything that I wanted to remember in my head until the end of the working day . . . and so had to take rough notes as I was going along. But I was stuck 'on the line', and had nowhere to retire to privately to jot things down. Eventually, the wheeze of using innocently provided lavatory cubicles occurred to me. Looking back, all my notes for that third summer were on Bronco toilet paper! Apart from the awkward tendency for pencilled notes to be self-erasing from hard toilet paper . . . my frequent requests for 'time out' after interesting happenings or conversations in the bakehouse and the amount of time I was spending in the lavatory began to get noticed. I had to pacify some genuinely concerned work-mates, give up totally undercover operations, and 'come out' as an observer—albeit in a limited way. I eventually began to scribble notes more openly, but still not in front of people when they were talking. When questioned about this, as I was occasionally, I coyly said that I was writing things down that occurred to me about 'my studies'. (1977: 5)

Another interesting case is provided by Glucksman (1994), who in the 1970s left her academic post to work on a factory assembly line to explore the reasons why feminism appeared not to be relevant to working-class women. In a sense, she was a covert observer, but her motives for the research were primarily political, and she says that, at the time she was undertaking the research, she had no intention of writing the book that subsequently appeared and that was published under a pseudonym (Cavendish 1982). After the book's publication, it was treated as an example of ethnographic research. Was she an overt or a covert observer (or neither or both)? Whichever description applies, this is an interesting case of what might be termed *retrospective ethnography*.

Ethnographers are far more likely to be in an overt role than a covert one. Some of the reasons for this situation are extremely practical. For example, Freeman (2000) explains that being white and American made it impossible for her to adopt a covert role in her study of data entry workers in Barbados, and company

production demands and limited space made it impossible for her to work on an unpaid temporary basis. However, as Key concept 17.5 reveals, the reasons for the preference of most ethnographers for an overt role are to do with ethical considerations. Because of the ethical problems that beset covert research (and indeed some of the practical difficulties), the bulk of the discussion of access issues that follows will focus upon ethnographers seeking to employ an overt role.

## Ongoing access

Negotiation of access does not finish when you have made contact and gained an entrée to the organization. You still need access to *people*. Simply because you have gained access to an organization does not mean that you will have an easy passage through it. Securing access is in many ways an ongoing activity, which takes considerable effort and time. This is likely to prove a particular problem in closed contexts like organizations, as Delbridge (1998) so effectively illustrates when describing his attempts to become integrated as a worker on the shopfloor of a factory sited in a small Welsh valley community. At first, 'I stood out like a sore thumb, I was even noticed and looked at in the street'. However, 'my actual participation in the tasks which faced the workers helped to break down the barriers and several people approached me over the weeks and told me that when they actually saw me sitting there alongside them day after day they began to have some respect for what I was doing' (1998: 19).

Even so, there are various concerns that group members may have, and these will affect the level of ongoing access that you are able to achieve.

- People will have suspicions about you, perhaps seeing you as an instrument of top management (it is very common for members of organizations to believe that researchers are placed there to check up on them or even to mistake them for other people). For example, Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) describe how one of the interviewers in the Hawthorne studies was mistaken for a rate setter.

> There was a buzz of conversation and the men seemed to be working at great speed. Suddenly there was a sharp hissing sound. The conversation died away, and there was a noticeable slowing up in the work pace. The interviewer later discovered from an acquaintance in the department that he had been mistaken for a rate setter. One of the workmen, who acted as a lookout, had stepped on a valve releasing compressed air, a prearranged signal for slowing down. (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939: 386)

Another example is provided by Freeman (2000), who found that her research access was halted because of fears that she was a corporate spy, sent by a competitor organization to poach members of the workforce.

- People will worry that what they say or do may get back to bosses or to colleagues. Van Maanen (1991*a*) notes from his research on the police that, when conducting ethnographic research among officers, you are likely to observe activities that may be deeply discrediting and even illegal. Your credibility among police officers will be determined by your reactions to situations and events that are known to be difficult for individuals.
- If they have these worries, they may go along with your research, but in fact sabotage it, engaging in deceptions, misinformation, and not allowing access to 'back regions' (Goffman 1959).

There are four things you can do to smooth the path of ongoing access.

- Play up your credentials—past work and experience; your knowledge of the organization and/or its sector; understanding of their problems—and be prepared for tests of either competence or credibility. An example of this is provided by Perlow (1997), who claims that a critical factor in gaining the support of engineers at the Ditto corporation was that she came from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), as 'there is no institution that the engineers we studied hold in higher regard' (1997: 142).
- Pass tests—be non-judgemental when things are said to you about informal activities or about the organization; make sure information given to you does not get back to others, whether bosses or peers. M. Parker (2000) describes how, when at the end of his fieldwork he submitted his report to management, an uncomplimentary comment about the Managing Director was traced back to an insufficiently anonymized source. Parker subsequently came in for a humiliating grilling from three of the company directors. He claims that this event probably damaged the manager's reputation in the organization, and his trust in him.

- You may need a role—if your research involves quite a lot of participant observation, the role will be related to your position within the organization (see Research in focus 17.2). Otherwise, you will need to construct a 'front', as Ditton (1977; see Research in focus 17.6) did when referring to 'his studies'. This will involve thinking about your dress and your explanations about what you are doing there, and possibly helping out occasionally with work or offering advice. Make sure you have thought about ways in which people's suspicions can be allayed and be consistent and do not behave ambiguously or inconsistently.
- Be prepared for changes in circumstances that may affect your access, such as changes of senior management.

## Key informants

One aspect of having sponsors or gatekeepers who smooth access for the ethnographer is that they may become *key informants* in the course of the subsequent fieldwork. The ethnographer relies a lot on informants, but certain informants may become particularly important to the research. They often develop an appreciation of the research and direct the ethnographer to situations, events, or people likely to be helpful to the progress of the investigation.

An interesting example is provided by Kanter (1977), who describes the relationships she developed with a small group of people with whom she worked closely at Indsco Corporation. 'These people were largely in functions where they were well placed to see a large number of people in a large number of levels . . . They could tell me about the history of the company and a variety of experiences in the organization as well as provide information about the issues in their own careers. I could also use them to check out stories I gathered elsewhere' (1977: 336). Similarly, Collinson (1992*b*) describes how being a man researching equal opportunities sometimes resulted in research respondents withholding cooperation. He describes how the identification of key women informants, who were prepared to assist the 'young lad from the university', was crucial in providing him with 'insider' information. One woman trade unionist in particular provided extensive help with the project. Collinson and the woman trade unionist developed 'a much closer and mutually supportive working relationship than would usually be the case between researcher and respondents' (1992*b*: 115). This provided him with 'deeper insight into the difficulties faced by women in employment and within the trade union movement' (1992*b*: 115) and greater understanding of the problems of managing work and home.

In summary, key informants can clearly be of great help to the ethnographer and frequently provide a support that helps with the stress of fieldwork. However, it also needs to be borne in mind that they carry risks in that the ethnographer may develop an undue reliance on the key informant, and, rather than seeing social reality through the eyes of members of the social setting, the researcher is seeing social reality through the eyes of the key informant.

In addition, the ethnographer will encounter many other people who will also act as informants. Their accounts may be solicited or unsolicited (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). Some researchers prefer the latter, because of its greater spontaneity and naturalism. Very often, research participants develop a sense of the kinds of events the ethnographer wants to see or encounters that it would be beneficial to be present at. Such unsolicited sources of information are highly attractive to the ethnographer because of their relative spontaneity, although, as Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 130–1) observe, they may on occasions be staged for the ethnographer's benefit. Solicited accounts can occur in two ways: by interview (see Chapter 18) or by casual questioning during conversations (though in ethnographic research the boundary between an interview and a conversation is by no means clear-cut, as Burgess (1984) makes clear). When the ethnographer needs specific information concerning an issue that is not amenable to direct observation or that is not cropping up during 'natural' conversations, solicited accounts are likely to be the only way forward.

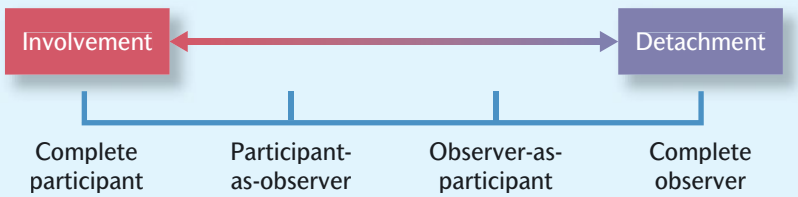


# Roles for ethnographers

Related to the issue of ongoing access (or relationships in the field, as it is sometimes called) is the question of the kind of role the ethnographer adopts in relation to the social setting and its members. Several schemes have been devised by writers on research methods to describe the various roles that can be and have been adopted by ethnographers. One of the most widely cited schemes is Gold's (1958) classification of participant observer roles, which can be arrayed on a continuum of degrees of involvement with and detachment from members of the social setting (see Figure 17.1). There are four roles.

# Figure 17.1

**Gold's classification of participant observer roles**




- *Complete participant*. According to Gold, the complete participant is a fully functioning member of the social setting and his or her true identity is not known to members. As such, the complete participant is a covert observer, like D. Roy (1958) and Dalton (1959).
- *Participant-as-observer*. This role is the same as the complete participant one, but members of the social setting are aware of the researcher's status as a researcher. The ethnographer is engaged in regular interaction with people and participates in their daily lives and is open about their research. In organizational ethnography this frequently involves taking up either paid or unpaid employment in the research setting, as did Delbridge (1998) in his study of contemporary manufacturing under TQM and Sharpe (1997) in her study of Japanese work practices in a UK-based car manufacturing plant.
- *Observer-as-participant*. In this role, the researcher is mainly an interviewer. There is some observation, but very little of it involves any participation. Many of the studies covered in Chapter 18 are of this type. Prasad's (1993) study of the effects of computerization of work, described in Chapter 16, also fits into this category, as her research relied on structured periods of observation during which she would watch the staff at work and document these observations, only helping out occasionally on the reception desk when it was particularly busy. See also Research in focus 17.7 for a further illustration.
- *Complete observer*. The researcher does not interact with people. According to Gold, people do not have to take the researcher into account. This kind of role relies on forms of observation that are unobtrusive in character. For example, in studies at the Western Electric Company's Hawthorne plant, investigators spent a total of six months observing the informal social relationships between operators in the Bank Wiring Observation Room. Investigations involved an observer, who maintained a role as 'disinterested spectator' with the aim of observing and describing what was going on. Observation involved certain general rules: the investigator should not give orders or answer any questions that necessitated the assumption of authority; he should not enter voluntarily into any argument and generally should remain as non-committal as possible; he should not force himself into any conversation or appear anxious to overhear; he should never violate confidences or give information to supervisors; and he should not by his manner of speech or behaviour 'set himself off from the group' (Roethlisberger and Dickson 1939: 388–9).

However, most writers would take the view that, since ethnography entails immersion in a social setting and fairly prolonged involvement, the complete observer role should not be considered as participant observation or ethnography at all, since participation is likely to be more or less entirely missing. Some writers might also question whether research based on the observer-as-participant role can genuinely be regarded as ethnography, but, since it is likely that certain situations are unlikely to be amenable to the immersion that is a key ingredient of the method, it could be argued that to dismiss it totally as an approach to ethnography is rather restrictive. It is significant in this context that Gold referred to the four roles in relation to conducting 'fieldwork', which has the potential for a broader meaning than either participant observation or ethnography.

Each role carries its own advantages and risks. The issues concerning being a complete participant were



## Research in focus 17.7
## An example of observer-as-participant in the Magic Kingdom

An interesting illustration of research that comes very close to the observer-as-participant role is Raz's (1999) study of Tokyo Disneyland. His main sources of data were: many visits to the theme park, including being part of several official and unofficial tours; interviews with current and former employees; a textual analysis of company guidebooks; and an examination of the reception of the park by visitors through a focus group. Raz's goal was to explore the meeting place of the forces of globalization, in the form of the familiar themes associated with the Disney company, and forces of the 'local', in the form of the distinctive character of Japanese culture. He draws on ideas like 'globalization' in order to develop an understanding of the ways in which the combination of global and local forces is played out, and on Hochschild's (1983) concept of 'emotional labour' (see Research in focus 16.4) to develop an appreciation of the world of work for the Disney employee.

covered in Key concept 17.5. According to Gold, the participant-as-observer role carries the risk of over-identification and hence of 'going native' (see Key concept 17.8), but offers the opportunity to get close to people. Gold argues that the observer-as-participant role carries the risk of not understanding the social setting and people in it sufficiently and therefore of making incorrect inferences. The complete observer role shares with complete participation the removal of the possible problem of reactivity, but it carries even further risks than the observer-as-participant role of failing to understand situations.



## Key concept 17.8
## What is 'going native'?

'Going native' refers to a plight that is supposed sometimes to afflict ethnographers when they lose their sense of being a researcher and become wrapped up in the world view of the people they are studying. The prolonged immersion of ethnographers in the lives of the people they study, coupled with the commitment to seeing the social world through their eyes, lie behind the risk and actuality of going native. Going native is a potential problem for several reasons but especially because the ethnographer can lose sight of his or her position as a researcher and therefore find it difficult to develop a business angle on the collection and analysis of data.

Gans (1968) has devised a classification of participant observer roles, but he views these as roles that will coexist in any project. In other words, the three roles he outlines will be employed at different times in the course of ethnographic research and for different purposes. The three roles are:

- *total participant*, in which the ethnographer is completely involved in a certain situation and has to resume a researcher stance once the situation has unfolded and then write down notes;
- *researcher–participant*, whereby the ethnographer participates in a situation but is only semi-involved, so that he or she can function fully as a researcher in the course of the situation;
- *total researcher*, which entails observation without involvement in the situation, as in attendance at a public meeting or watching what is going on in a bar; when in this role, the researcher does not participate in the flow of events.

The advantage of Gans's classification is that, like Gold's, it reflects degrees of involvement and detachment, but has the advantage that it deals only with overt observation and recognizes that ethnographers do not typically adopt a single role throughout their dealings.

For example, looking at the research process described by Ram (1994; see Research in focus 17.4), it is clear that in one sense Ram was a total participant, running the firm, speaking Punjabi, and having first-hand experience of the clothing industry. However, in relation to the women shopfloor machinists, he was a total researcher, unable, because of the customary regulation of gender relationships in Asian society, to participate in the flow of events.

Table 17.1 outlines some of the working roles that organizational ethnographers take on in order to secure access to closed settings. However, it is evident from the table and the organizational ethnographies referred to in this chapter that more than one role may be involved in a particular setting. Holliday (1995), who took on the role of the apprentice, accounts for the value of her labour in exchange for access, which she estimates to have cost her approximately £2,500. Some more examples of working roles are given in Research in focus 17.2.

Clearly these three organizational roles are overlapping, and more than one may be adopted in a particular setting. They are also likely to change over time as the fieldwork progresses. It is arguably the case that, even if it were possible to adopt a single ethnographic role over the entire course of a project, it is likely that it would be undesirable, because there would be a lack of flexibility in handling situations and people, and risks of excessive involvement (and hence going native) or detachment

## Table 17.1

**Three roles for organizational ethnographers**

| | Ethnographer's role | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Consultant | Apprentice | Confidant |
| Characteristics | Competent, knowledgeable, professional | Naïve, unthreatening, personable | Mature, attentive, trustworthy |
| | A credible outsider who secures the trust of management | A younger person who can make him or herself useful within the organization | An impartial outsider who is able to listen to people's problems |
| | Exchange of access for knowledge or information, often in the form of a written report or verbal presentation | Exchange of access for productive labour | Exchange of access for psycho-social support or therapy |
| Examples | Ram (1994) | Dalton (1959) | Collinson (1992*a*) |
| | Watson (1994*a*) | Casey (1995) | Crang (1994) |
| | Holliday (1995) | Perlow (1997) | Holliday (1995) |
| | Parker (2000) | Freeman (2000) | Sharpe (1997) |
| | | Parker (2000) | Delbridge (1998) |
| | | | Fletcher (2002) |



## Research in focus 17.9
## An example of going native

In the preface to the second edition of his classic study *Working for Ford* (1975: 11–12), Beynon describes how he was criticized by reviewers for 'going native' following publication of the first edition of the book. It was suggested that he had become a spokesperson for the Ford factory workers, and his emotional involvement was seen as having gone a stage too far. He was accused of having a 'prolonged love affair' with 'foul mouthed shop stewards' and of having used the 'picturesque language of Billingsgate' in his 'confused, chatty, repetitive and ungrammatical' book, which was dismissed by one source as being of 'doubtful value as an objective sociological study'. The accuracy and validity of Beynon's account of working life at the Ford factory were thus called into question, and the study was dismissed by some as subjective, naïve reportage.

would loom large. This is a criticism that was levelled at Beynon (1975) in his ethnographic study of *Working for Ford* (see Research in focus 17.9). The issue of the kind of role(s) the ethnographer adopts is therefore of considerable significance, because it has implications for field relationships in the various situations that are encountered.

Further, the kind of role adopted by an ethnographer is likely to have implications for his or her capacity to penetrate the surface layers of an organization. One of the strengths of organizational ethnography is that it offers the prospect of being able to find out what an organization is 'really' like, as opposed to how it formally depicts itself. For example, Michael Humphreys conducted ethnographic research in the UK headquarters of a US bank referred to pseudonymously as Credit Line (Humphreys and Watson 2009). He was aware of the firm's commitment to corporate social responsibility but became increasingly aware that, although people working in the organization were publicly enthusiastic about its ethical stance, many were privately sceptical about the firm's actual commitment. For example, he quotes one employee (Charity) as saying: 'My problem is that, in this organization, corporate social responsibility is a sham—it's just rhetoric—I mean how can we call ourselves responsible when we give credit cards to poor people and charge them 30 per cent APR [annual percentage rate] just because they are high risk?' (Humphreys and Watson 2009: 50). For employees to divulge such private views, which cast doubt on the integrity of their organization, the ethnographer will probably need to be closer to the confidant role referred to in Table 17.1, since it requires the organizational participants to be confident about sharing their private views, which could lead to them being censured by senior managers.

## Active or passive?

A further issue that is raised about any situation in which the ethnographer participates is the degree to which he or she should be or can be an active or a passive participant (Van Maanen 1978). Even when the ethnographer is in an observer-as-participant role, there may be contexts in which either participation is unavoidable or a compulsion to join in a limited way may be felt. For example, Fine's (1996) research on the work of chefs in restaurants was carried out largely by semi-structured interview. In spite of his limited participation, he found himself involved in washing up in the kitchens to help out during busy periods. Sometimes ethnographers may *feel* they have no choice but to get involved, because a failure to participate actively might indicate to members of the social setting a lack of commitment and lead to a loss of credibility. Another example is provided by Holliday (1995), who describes how in smaller organizations active work-role participation is more likely to be expected of the ethnographer than in larger companies where there is more space to 'hang around'. She describes how at FranTech she was given 'a variety of jobs, from typing and answering the telephone to "managerial" tasks such as auditing the production schedule and writing procedures for the BS5750' (Holliday 1995: 27). Similarly Ram (1994; see Research in focus 17.4), in his study of family-owned and managed firms in the West Midlands clothing industry, talks about helping with social security queries, housing issues, and passport problems, advising on higher education, and even tying turbans while in the field. However, the pressure to get involved raises ethical considerations, as the ethnographer may be asked to participate in an activity that involves a degree of deception or even illegal activity (see Chapter 5 for more on ethical considerations).



## Tips and skills

## Being a participant observer in a familiar situation

It is easy to gain the impression that, in order to become a participant observer, you need to gain access to an organization to which you do not belong as a member. However, it may be that you already have access to an organizational setting that could provide the basis for a more modest study using the method of participant observation. Several examples of this are provided by Spradley and McCurdy (1972), who encouraged their undergraduate students to engage in participant observation in organizations with which they were already familiar. This could include a place of work where you work either full- or part-time, or an organization where you are a volunteer or social member, such as a church group or the Territorial Army. The important thing to remember is that, if you are studying a cultural scene with which you are familiar, it is even more important to develop a high degree of self-awareness so that you do not take what you see for granted.



# Sampling

The sampling of informants in ethnographic research is often a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling (see Chapter 7 for an explanation of these terms). Much of the time ethnographers are forced to gather information from whatever sources are available to them. Very often they face opposition or at least indifference to their research and are relieved to glean information or views from whoever is prepared to divulge such details. For example, Dalton (1959) refers to the importance of 'conversational interviewing' as the basis for his data collection strategy. These are not interviews in the usual sense, but a series of broken and incomplete conversations that, when written up, may, according to Dalton, be 'tied together as one statement' (1959: 280). Conversational interviews are characterized by being precipitated by events. In some instances, these were prompted by Dalton, who asked managers at the end of an important meeting an open-ended question like 'How did things go?', but in others they were simply the result of overheard exchanges in shops or offices.

Ethnographers who take on a role that is closer to the observer-as-participant one rely somewhat more on formally asking for names of others who might be relevant and who could be contacted. For example, Marshall (1984) describes how, in order to identify her sample of thirty women managers, she would first make a contact within a particular company (sometimes a woman manager and sometimes a helpful member of the personnel department) and then ask him or her to suggest other potential interviewees.

In other instances, greater emphasis may be placed on how representative interviewees are of the overall population, using a *stratified sampling* approach. Casey (1995) describes how she interviewed sixty people during her research at the Hephaestus Corporation, in an effort to gain a wide sample of occupation, rank, tenure, and demographic features such as gender, race, ethnicity, and regional origin. She goes on to describe how interviewees came from a variety of occupational groupings, including engineers, computer professionals, scientists, technical analysts, financial analysts, administrators, managers, and manufacturing workers. Finally, some individuals were chosen on the basis of their strategic importance within the team or division, including the Vice-President, a union representative, a new entry employee, and a returned retiree.

Whichever of the two strategies is adopted, the question is raised as to the degree to which either can result in a representative sample of informants. Probability sampling is almost never used in ethnographic research and is even rarely employed in qualitative research based on interviews. In many cases, it is not feasible to conduct a probability sampling exercise because of the constraints of ongoing fieldwork and also because it can be difficult and often impossible to map 'the population' from which a random sample might be taken—that is, to create a sampling frame. Instead, ethnographers have to ensure that they gain access to as wide a range of individuals relevant to the research question as possible, so that many different perspectives and ranges of activity are the focus of attention.

## Purposive sampling

Most sampling in qualitative research entails purposive sampling of some kind. This term is explained in Key concept 17.10, and one of its main forms—theoretical sampling—is examined in the next section and in Key concept 17.11. In qualitative research, purposive sampling considerations often apply to the sampling of the the cases in which the research will be conducted and then to people within those cases.

## Theoretical sampling

An alternative strategy is *theoretical sampling* (see Key concept 17.11), advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1998) in the context of an approach to qualitative data analysis they developed known as grounded theory. In Glaser and Strauss's view, because of its reliance on statistical rather than theoretical criteria, probability sampling is not appropriate to qualitative research. Theoretical sampling is meant to be an alternative strategy. As they put it: 'Theoretical sampling is done in order to discover categories and their properties and to suggest the interrelationships into a theory. Statistical sampling is done to obtain accurate evidence on distributions of people among categories to be used in descriptions and verifications' (Glaser and Strauss 1967: 62).

Figure 17.2 outlines the main steps in theoretical sampling. The reference in Research in focus 17.11 to 'places,

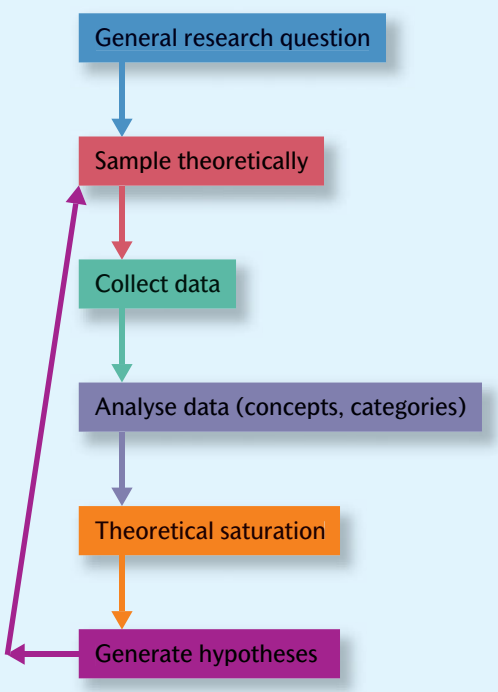


## Key concept 17.10
## What is purposive sampling?

Purposive sampling is a non-probability form of sampling. The researcher does not seek to sample research participants on a random basis. The goal of purposive sampling is to sample cases/participants in a strategic way, so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions being posed. Very often, the researcher will want to sample in order to ensure that there is a good deal of variety in the resulting sample, so that sample members differ from each other in terms of key characteristics. Because it is a non-probability sampling approach, purposive sampling does not allow the researcher to generalize to a population. Although a purposive sample is not a random sample, it is not a convenience sample either (see Chapter 7 on convenience sampling). A convenience sample is simply available by chance to the researcher, whereas in purposive sampling the researcher samples with certain research goals in mind. In purposive sampling, sites, like organizations, and employees (or whatever the unit of analysis is) are selected because of their relevance to understanding a social phenomenon. The researcher needs to be clear in his or her mind what the criteria are that will be relevant to the inclusion or exclusion of cases (whether 'cases' means organizations, employees, or something else). Examples of purposive sampling in qualitative research are snowball sampling (see Research in focus 7.8 for an example) and theoretical sampling (see Key concept 17.11). In quantitative research, quota sampling is a form of purposive sampling.

## Figure 17.2

**The process of theoretical sampling**




people, or events' reminds us that, in ethnographic research, it is not just people who are being sampled but events and contexts as well.

In grounded theory, you carry on collecting data (observing, interviewing, collecting documents) until you have achieved *theoretical saturation* (see Key concept 17.12). This means that: successive interviews/observations have both formed the basis for the creation of a category and confirmed its importance; there is no need to continue with data collection in relation to that category or cluster of categories; instead, the researcher should move on and generate hypotheses out of the categories that are building up and then move on to collecting data in relation to these hypotheses. Proponents of grounded theory argue that there is a great deal of redundancy in statistical sampling. For example, committing yourself to interviewing *x* per cent of an organization's members may mean that you end up wasting time and resources because you could have confirmed the significance of a concept and/or its connections with other concepts by using a much smaller sample. Instead, grounded theory advocates that you sample in terms of what is relevant to and meaningful for your theory. The key is to ensure you sample so as to test your emerging theoretical ideas.

The ideas of theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation will be encountered again when grounded theory



## Key concept 17.11
## What is theoretical sampling?

According to Glaser and Strauss (1967: 45), theoretical sampling 'is the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. The process of data collection is *controlled* by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal.' This definition conveys a crucial characteristic of theoretical sampling—namely, that it is an ongoing process rather than a distinct and single stage, as it is, for example, in probability sampling. Moreover, it is important to realize that it is not just people that are the 'objects' of sampling, as can be seen in a more recent definition: 'Data gathering driven by concepts derived from the evolving theory and based on the concept of "making comparisons", whose purpose is to go to places, people, or events that will maximize opportunities to discover variations among concepts and to densify categories in terms of their properties and dimensions' (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 201). For Charmaz (2000: 519), theoretical sampling is a 'defining property of grounded theory' and is concerned with the refinement of ideas, rather than boosting sample size.



## Key concept 17.12
## What is theoretical saturation?

The key idea is that you carry on sampling theoretically until a category has been saturated with data. 'This means, until (*a*) no new or relevant data seem to be emerging regarding a category, (*b*) the category is well developed in terms of its properties and dimensions demonstrating variation, and (*c*) the relationships among categories are well established and validated' (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 212). In the language of grounded theory, a category operates at a somewhat higher level of abstraction than a concept, in that it may group together several concepts that have common features denoted by the category. Theoretical sampling refers to the sampling not just of people but also of settings and events.

is examined in greater detail in the context of qualitative data analysis in Chapter 22.

### Not just people

As was pointed out in the previous section, in ethnographic research sampling is not just about people but also about other things. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) mention time and context as units that need to be considered in the context of sampling. Attending to *time* means that the ethnographer must make sure that people or events are observed at different times of the day and different days of the week. To do otherwise risks drawing inferences about certain people's behaviour or about events that are valid only for mornings or for weekdays rather than weekends. It is impossible to be an ethnographer all the time for several reasons: need to take time out to write up notes; other commitments (work or domestic); and body imperatives (eating, sleeping, and so on). When the group in question operates a different cycle from the ethnographer's normal regime (such as night shifts in a factory or hospital), the requirement to time sample may necessitate a considerable change of habit. Delbridge (1998), for example, describes how tired he felt after a day making windscreen wipers or circuit boards for televisions. In addition, he explains that 'there was real pressure and intensity during the fieldwork, particularly during the early stages when I was negotiating my informal access and acceptance into the group. I developed a nervous tic in my cheek during the first two weeks, something I have never experienced before or since' (1998: 19).

It can also be important to sample in terms of *context*. People's behaviour is influenced by contextual factors, so

that it is important to ensure that such behaviour is observed in a variety of locations. For example, in his study of masculinity and workplace culture in a lorry-making factory in the north-west of England, Collinson (1992*a*) draws attention to the ways in which shopfloor workers resist managerial control by spending time chatting and joking. By spending time with workers during lunch and unofficial breaks, in the toilet, the canteen, on the car park, on the works' bus, in the pub, and occasionally in people's homes, Collinson was able to explore these cultural practices in far more detail than if he had confined his study and himself to observing practices within formal workplace settings.



## Tips and skills
## Global ethnography

One of the defining features of a classic approach to ethnography is the way that the researcher concentrates on the specific social processes within one particular community. This means that there is a tendency to overlook the context within which that particular community operates. This is particularly important in organizational ethnography because the culture of a particular workgroup or company can be understood only in relation to the cultural context in which it is located. Moreover, it is often difficult to set boundaries around the particular community that is being studied, especially in cases where the organization being studied is part of a multinational corporation. Traditionally, these boundaries were determined by place—the ethnographer travelled to the place where the community was located and studied what he or she found there. However, organizations are increasingly distributed over a wide geographical area, and this too makes it difficult to determine the focus of study. However, Burawoy et al. (2000) describe the emergence of a new form of ethnographic research that departs from this convention. Global ethnography instead focuses on the way that particular cultures are affected by globalization, leading to the dissolution of traditional ways of working. The global ethnographer seeks to gain insight into the lived experience of globalization through the study of such diverse groups as job-hopping Irish software engineers or Indian nurses working in the United States. This shift in emphasis opens up significant opportunities for organizational ethnographers to study such things as the effects of advances in telecommunications and information technologies on working practices and to explore how work has become less dependent on physical location. Global ethnography thus extends the tradition of ethnographic studies of industrial and large bureaucratic organizations that was started by writers like Beynon (1975) and continued by Casey (1995), who study social settings with relatively fixed boundaries.



# Field notes

Because of the frailties of human memory, ethnographers have to take notes based on their observations. These should be fairly detailed summaries of events and behaviour and the researcher's initial reflections on them. The notes need to specify key dimensions of whatever is observed or heard. There are some general principles.

- Write down notes, however brief, as quickly as possible after seeing or hearing something interesting.
- Write up full field notes at the very latest at the end of the day and include such details as location, who is involved, what prompted the exchange, date and time of the day, etc.
- Nowadays, people may prefer to use a digital recorder to record initial notes, but this may create a problem of needing to transcribe a lot of speech.
- Notes must be vivid and clear—you should not have to ask at a later date, 'What did I mean by that?'
- You need to take copious notes, so, if in doubt, write it down. The notes may be of different types (see below).

Obviously, it can be very useful to take your notes down straight away—that is, as soon as something interesting happens. However, wandering around with a notebook and pencil in hand and scribbling notes down on a continuous basis runs the risk of making people self-conscious. It may be necessary, therefore, to develop strategies of taking small amounts of time out, though hopefully without generating the anxieties Ditton (1977) appears to have occasioned (see Research in focus 17.6).

To some extent, strategies for taking field notes will be affected by the degree to which the ethnographer enters the field with clearly delineated research questions. As noted in Chapter 16, most qualitative research adopts a general approach of beginning with general research questions (as specifically implied by Figure 16.1), but there is considerable variation in the degree to which this is the case. Obviously, when there is some specificity to a research question, ethnographers have to orient their observations to that research focus, but at the same time maintain a fairly open mind so that the element of flexibility that is such a strength of a qualitative research strategy is not eroded. Ditton (see Research in focus 17.6) provides an illustration of a very open-ended approach when he writes that his research 'was not set up to answer any empirical questions' (1977: 11).

Similarly, Kunda (1992) describes how he was swamped with information, partly because he did not seek to define his focus of study. His interest in any event that was occurring at the time led to the generation of a vast quantity of data. During his year in the field he 'generated thousands of pages of fieldnotes and interview transcripts (produced each day from the fragmented notes hastily scribbled during and between events and interviews), collections of archival material, computer output, newsletters, papers, memos, brochures, posters, textbooks, and assorted leftovers' (1992: 237). This period of open-endedness usually cannot last long, because there is the temptation to try to record the details of absolutely everything, which can be very trying. Usually the ethnographer will begin to narrow down the focus of his or her research and to match observations to the emerging research focus. Hence, M. Parker (2000: 239) describes how, as each case study progressed, he began to focus down on certain key issues and ideas that began to guide his interviews and observation. This was partly a result of feeling the need to develop a framework that could enable him to cope with the 'huge quantity of ideas' and 'incoherent impressions' that he had generated. This approach is implied by the sequence suggested by Figure 16.1.

For most ethnographers, the main equipment with which they will need to supply themselves in the course of observation will be a notepad and pen (see, e.g., Armstrong 1993: 28). A digital recorder can be another useful addition to one's hardware, but, as suggested above, it is likely to increase radically the amount of transcription and is possibly more obtrusive than writing notes. Most ethnographers report that after a period of time they become less obtrusive to participants in social settings, who become familiar with their presence (e.g. Atkinson 1981: 128). Speaking into a digital recorder may rekindle an awareness of the ethnographer's presence. Also, in shops, offices, and factories it may be difficult to use, without the availability of an interview room, because of the impact of extraneous noise.

Photography can be an additional source of data; it can help to stir the ethnographer's memory or be built into the research design in a way that accords visual images



## Telling it like it is
## Writing field notes

Like many ethnographers, Lucie found the experience of writing field notes to be a time-consuming and challenging activity that caused her to evaluate the extent to which she was participating in or observing the social situation she was part of. 'It was difficult to kind of know how to take field notes down. It was also difficult to decide on the best way of participating and observing something. I was asking myself "Do I just sit there and make notes at the end of the day or make notes during the event?" Because the days were pretty long—from 8 till 5 with only a couple of breaks in between—I thought there's just so much information I couldn't possibly remember everything, so when I could I just took a few notes here and there. So that's what I decided to do.'



*To hear more about Lucie's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

equal status to written and spoken forms of data (see Key concept 17.13). Photographs, for example, can provide a graphic illustration of the organizational architecture that can be influential in determining methods of organizational control and techniques of employee surveillance. Photography can also provide a powerful illustration of organizational symbolism, enabling representation of logos, uniforms, and other visual artefacts, which can be interpreted as aspects of the organizational culture (Pondy et al. 1983). However, it is unlikely that photography will be suitable for all kinds of research; it may be less appropriate for researching more abstract organizational issues, such as strategy or structure, which have fewer obvious physical manifestations. We will return to the issue of visual ethnography in the section towards the end of this chapter on p. 451.



## Tips and skills
## Recording field notes

Ethnographic field notes are traditionally handwritten and kept in a notebook or 'diary'. This medium for the recording of data has a number of advantages, not least that it is flexible and discreet. The diary can be taken to most places (including the toilet!), and it can be slipped out of the way into a pocket when not required. However, the main disadvantage with a handwritten diary is that at the end of the fieldwork you will be left with a huge quantity of notes (possibly not in very clear handwriting) and, if you want to analyse the data with the aid of CAQDAS (see Chapter 23) or even if you intend to quote extensively from your field notes in your dissertation, you will have to undertake the laborious and time-consuming task of typing them into word-processed form. An alternative is to consider using a palmtop computer—if you have access to one. In an organizational context, the presence of a palmtop is unlikely to make you stand out; in fact it may help you to blend into the setting and, by taking the palmtop with you into the field, you will be able to type your field notes straight into a word processor. On the down side, if you are a slow 'hunt-and-peck' typist it may be that this method of writing field notes proves too slow to be worthwhile. Also, palmtop machines are at risk of being stolen, so you will probably have either to carry the machine around with you or to find somewhere secure to keep it. In any case, the advantages and disadvantages of both methods for recording field notes should be considered carefully.



## Key concept 17.13
## What is visual ethnography?

In addition to field notes, changing technologies have opened up greater potential for the use of photography, video, and hypermedia as methods of data collection in ethnographic research. Pink (2001) distinguishes between scientific-realist approaches to the use of visual methods in ethnographic research, which suggest visual images are a way of observing and recording reality, and reflexive approaches, which involve exploring how informants and ethnographers experience their social setting. She also argues that, while visual images should be accorded higher status in the generation of ethnographic knowledge, they should not be seen as a replacement for data that rely on the written or spoken word. 'Thus visual images, objects, descriptions should be incorporated when it is appropriate, opportune or enlightening to do so' (2001: 5). Visual ethnography often involves the ethnographer taking photographs or making video recordings of research participants in their social setting. Pink suggests this has the advantage of being an activity that is more visible and comprehensible to participants, in contrast to field note writing, which is a relatively solitary activity. Analysis focuses on interpreting the meaning of these visual images within their cultural context. Photographs and video footage can also provide a basis for interviewing members of a social group about their social setting and culture in a similar way to photo elicitation described in Chapter 8. Finally, visual ethnography can also include the analysis of visual images in the form of documents containing photographs or artwork that are collected by the ethnographer during their involvement in the research setting. We will return to these issues at the end of this chapter on p. 451 and in Chapter 21.

## Types of field notes

Some writers have found it useful to classify the types of field notes that are generated in the process of conducting an ethnography. The following classification is based on the similar categories suggested by Lofland and Lofland (1995) and Sanjek (1990).

- *Mental notes*: particularly useful when it is inappropriate to be seen taking notes.
- *Jotted notes* (also called *scratch notes*): very brief notes written down on pieces of paper or in small notebooks to jog one's memory about events that should be written up later. Lofland and Lofland (1995: 90) refer to these as being made up of 'little phrases, quotes, key words, and the like'. They need to be jotted down inconspicuously, preferably out of sight, since detailed note-taking in front of people may make them self-conscious. Crang (1994) refers to his use of scratch notes in his study of waiting staff in a restaurant (see Research in focus 17.14).
- *Full field notes*: as soon as possible, make detailed notes, which will be your main data source. They should be written at the end of the day or sooner if possible. Write as promptly and as fully as possible. Write down information about events, people, conversations, etc. Write down initial ideas about interpretation. Record impressions and feelings.

It is worth adding that field notes are often to do with the ethnographer as well as the social setting being observed. It is frequently in field notes that the ethnographer's presence is evident. For example, when Holliday (1995) describes the emotions associated with her fieldwork experience, she draws attention to her prevailing fear of incompetence, her concern about being liked, and her anxiety about whether or not to disagree with or challenge people. Precisely because they record the



## Research in focus 17.14
## Writing field notes

Crang (1994) describes how, while working as a part-time waiter in a restaurant, Smoky Joe's, in the south-east of England, he decided to become a participant observer and started to take field notes about his workplace setting.

> Field notes were taken on my order pad when possible (this was not easy when very busy, so then I wrote single word 'scratch notes' and elaborated them in the break period at the end of the shift), and these were written from to produce shift-by-shift research diary entries (usually written through the morning after a shift, given that the evening rarely finished before 1.30 am). The latter included initial notes of 'factual detail' (that is, an expansion of field notes), followed by deliberately speculative reflections on these. (1994: 676)

Crang's flexible strategy for taking field notes thus combines different types of notes that result in the eventual production of a research diary. Through them he describes the social relations with customers that helped to distinguish Smoky's from its competitors. Waiting staff were encouraged to 'put on a show'; and their uniform, a waistcoat and bowler hat, according to Crang, more closely resembled a costume. In his research diary Crang relates the 'Tale of Dolly's socks', which illustrates the complex nature of the roles played by waiting staff.

> As I've often noted, socks are a big thing here. Wearing what are called 'jazzy' socks is pretty much compulsory and nearly all the competitions recently have had socks as their prizes! It's part of the 'fun atmosphere' don't you know. Dolly wears an extra pair of socks pinned to the back of her waistcoat, which she changes every night. Last night I finally asked her why. Oddly it felt silly to ask; it seems sensible in the context of Smoky's. Anyhow, she said she began when she won a pair, as a bit of a piss-take about Mark [the manager] going on about socks. But . . . Dolly always talks and laughs about them with her tables, and the socks are a talking point; she gets great tips. But Mark thinks they are a great idea; he wants her to take the piss a bit. So laughing at his idea is actually part of the fun itself, and can't escape that. It becomes part of the atmosphere, the service, to laugh at that service. Dolly tells her customers what she told me, about Mark saying to wear jazzy socks but not saying where, and so distances herself from the idea, but she also sells Smoky's as a fun, lively place by 'rebelling' and I think she wants to . . . (1994: 699).

quotidian as observed and experienced by ethnographers, it is here that they come to the surface. In the finished work—the ethnography in the sense of a written account of a group and its culture—the ethnographer is frequently written out of the picture (Van Maanen 1988). A major difference here is that field notes are invariably for personal consumption (Coffey 1999), whereas the written ethnography is for public consumption and has to be presented as a definitive account of the social setting and culture in question. To keep on allowing the ethnographer to surface in the text risks conveying a sense of the account as an artifice rather than an authoritative chronicle. This issue will be addressed in further detail in Chapter 27.



## Bringing ethnographic fieldwork to an end

Knowing when to stop is not an easy or straightforward matter in ethnography. Because of its unstructured nature and the absence of specific hypotheses to be tested (other than those that might emerge during data collection and analysis), there is a tendency for ethnographic research to lack a sense of an obvious end point. Traditions within anthropology have dictated that long-term continuous fieldwork should usually consist of a period of twelve months, so as to enable the study of a culture through a full seasonal cycle of activity (C. A. Davies 1999). These conventions apply to a lesser extent within organizational ethnography, where a 'long stay' in the field is still seen as crucial to securing 'insider' status (see Thinking deeply 17.15 for a discussion of these issues). At some point, however, ethnographic research does come to an end! In organizational research it is likely that a deadline for data collection will be negotiated at the outset. Buchanan, Boddy, and McCalman (1988) recommend that leaving the research site, or 'getting out', is handled in such a way as to leave the door open to the possibility of future research or fieldwork visits. At this stage it is useful to confirm the conclusion of the research in writing, thanking staff for their cooperation. Sometimes, the rhythms of the ethnographer's occupational career or personal and family life will necessitate withdrawal from the field, or research funding commitments will bring fieldwork to a close. Such factors include: the end of a period of sabbatical leave; the need to write up and submit a doctoral thesis by a certain date; or funding for research drawing to a close.



### Thinking deeply 17.15
### Jet-plane ethnography

A note of caution is sounded by Bate (1997), who claims that there are more people writing about organizational ethnography these days but not very many people actually doing it. This means that 'thick description' turns out to be 'quick description' within many business and management research cases. As more and more researchers adopt the label of ethnography, it becomes more likely that the distinctive practices and cultural perspective associated with its practice may be lost and ethnography may come to mean 'observer-present' research (Wolcott 1995). In what he refers to as 'jet-plane ethnography', Bate suggests that 'prolonged contact with the field' usually means a series of flying visits, rather than a long-term stay. This means, according to Bate, that organizational ethnographers rarely even take a toothbrush with them when they enter the field. The relative scarcity of organizational ethnography is partly because fieldwork is a time-consuming, personally tiresome, and stressful activity. This has led to increased interest in auto-ethnography (Hayano 1979) as an alternative strategy for doing ethnographic organizational research (see Key concept 27.13).

Moreover, ethnographic research can be highly stressful for many reasons: the nature of the topic, which places the fieldworker in stressful situations; the marginality of the researcher in the social setting and the need constantly to manage a front; and the prolonged absence from one's normal life that is often necessary. The ethnographer may feel that he or she has simply had enough. A further possibility that may start to bring about moves to bring fieldwork to a close is that the ethnographer may begin to feel that the research questions on which he

or she has decided to concentrate are answered, so that there are no new data worth generating. The ethnographer may even feel a strong sense of *déjà vu* towards the end of data collection. Altheide (1980: 310) has written that his decision to leave the various news organizations in which he had conducted ethnographic research was often motivated by 'the recurrence of familiar situations and the feeling that little worthwhile was being revealed'. In the language of grounded theory, all the researcher's categories are thoroughly *saturated*, although Glaser and Strauss's (1967) approach would invite you to be certain that there are no new questions to be asked of the area you are investigating, or no new comparisons to be made.

The reasons for bringing ethnographic research to a close can involve a wide range of factors from the personal to matters of research design. Whatever the reason, disengagement has to be *managed*. For one thing, this means that promises must be kept, so that, if you promised a report to an organization as a condition of entry, that promise should not be forgotten. It also means that ethnographers must provide good explanations for their departure. Members of a social setting always know that the researcher is a temporary fixture, but over a long period of time, and especially if there was genuine participation in activities within that setting, people may forget that the ethnographer's presence is finite. The farewells have to be managed and in an orderly fashion.

Also, the ethnographer's *ethical* commitments must not be forgotten, such as the need to ensure that persons and settings are anonymized. It is common practice within organizational ethnography to change the name of a company in order to protect the anonymity of the organization, as well as the names of individuals who participated in the study—even place names and locations may be changed. For example, Dalton (1959) protected the anonymity of his 'intimates' or informants by changing the place names and locations associated with the study. He also declined to disclose the nature of his formal work roles at Milo and Fruhling, as he felt this would endanger the exposure of 'intimates' to their superiors. Whatever happens, it is wise to reach an agreement with senior members of the organization before disclosing the identity of an organization, and it may be less threatening for senior managers and employers to offer anonymity as an explicit aspect of the access agreement.

Michael Humphreys, in his research on Credit Line, which was referred to above, went even further in his desire for organizational participants to remain anomymous (Humphreys and Watson 2009). He became aware that the gulf between the company's public position on corporate social responsibility and the private views of many staff about that position presented him with an ethical dilemma in that he clearly needed to protect their anonymity so that they would not get into trouble with the firm. On page 440, the words of 'Charity' were quoted, but Charity is not a pseudonym, the usual tactic used by researchers to preserve the identity of their informants. 'Charity' is a composite person rather than a real person. Her views and words are in fact an aggregation of those of several employees who expressed identical or similar positions.



## Can there be a feminist ethnography?

In this section we will review some of the central debates within feminist research and relate them to the ethnographic tradition. It remains relatively unusual in business and management research for ethnography to be conducted in a way that involves applying a gender perspective with the aim of promoting the interests of women. There are several examples of ethnographies done by women and of women's work (e.g. Cavendish 1982; Westwood 1984; see also Pollert 1981; Research in focus 17.16), but very few ethnographic studies that are informed by feminist tenets of the kind outlined in Chapter 16. However, it is our view that feminist research could inform innovative research in this area by helping to expose the gendered nature of management and organizations (Collinson and Hearn 1996). This would help to counterbalance the tendency for organizational ethnographers to interpret male-dominated settings from their point of view as a male researcher, using their own gender to reinforce the authenticity of their account (see Research in focus 17.17).

The title of this section is taken from a widely cited article by Judith Stacey (1988). It is a rebuttal of the view that there is and/or can be a distinctively feminist ethnography that combines the distinctive strengths of ethnography with a feminist position. Reinharz (1992) sees feminist ethnography as significant in terms of feminism, because:



## Research in focus 17.16
## An ethnography of work from a woman's perspective

In her study of women employed in unskilled, manual jobs in Britain, Pollert (1981) set out to understand the lived experience of working under modern capitalism from a woman's perspective. The study is based on informal interviews and observation on the shopfloor of a Bristol tobacco factory in 1972. 'It is a glimpse into the everyday working lives of the young girls and older women who worked there: about how they got on with their jobs, their bosses and each other—and in a background sense, their boyfriends, their husbands and their families—and how all these strands wove together into their experience and consciousness' (1981: 6).

Pollert was not employed in the factory and was open about her status as a researcher. In this sense her role was one of observer-as-participant, according to Gold's classification scheme. Being a female researcher was, according to Pollert, vitally important to the study and an important factor in breaking down barriers with women workers. However, while she was a woman among women, she was also middle-class, had a middle-class accent, and was not there to earn money—factors that clearly set her apart from the women. To begin with she was 'naturally scrutinized with a mixture of hostility, suspicion and curiosity' (1981: 7) and was called upon to answer more questions than she asked. In managing to break down some of these barriers, Pollert explains that she tried to be open with her opinions, in wanting to argue with and challenge attitudes as well as to learn, and not to set herself up as a 'reporter' who was interested in 'how the masses think'. Interestingly, unlike many male organizational ethnographers, Pollert kept a degree of social distance from her research subjects, having very little direct involvement with home, community, and social life. 'It was simply not on to suggest we meet for a drink in a pub, the normal "neutral" meeting-place for men.' Instead, what she learned about home and social life was filtered through factory experience.

Pollert's research goes some of the way towards being what could be described as a feminist ethnography (she focuses on the working lives of women and seeks to understand the women from their own perspective and in their own context). However, as Pollert managed the power relations between herself and the women mainly as a one-way process, the study does not conform to the ideals of feminist ethnography in this respect.

- it documents women's lives and activities, which were previously largely seen as marginal and subsidiary to men's;
- it understands women from their perspective, so that the tendency that 'trivializes females' activities and thoughts, or interprets them from the standpoint of men in the society or of the male researcher' (1992: 52) is militated against; and
- it understands women in context.

However, such commitments and practices go only part of the way. Of great significance to feminist researchers is the question of whether or not the research allows for a non-exploitative relationship between researcher and researched. One of the main elements of such a strategy is that the ethnographer does not treat the relationship as a one-way process of extracting information from others, but actually provides something in return. However, Stacey (1988) argues, on the basis of her fieldwork experience, that the various situations she encountered as a feminist ethnographer placed her

> in situations of inauthenticity, dissimilitude, and potential, perhaps inevitable, betrayal situations that I now believe are inherent in fieldwork method. For no matter how welcome, even enjoyable the fieldworker's presence may appear to 'natives', fieldwork represents an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships, a system of relationships that the researcher is far freer to leave. (1988: 23)

Stacey also argues that, when the research is written up, it is the feminist ethnographer's interpretations and judgements that come through and have authority.

## Research in focus 17.17
## ‘Not one of the guys’: ethnography in a male-dominated setting

In business and management research, gender and sexuality in the workplace constitute important subjects of study in their own right. However, these topics also raise particular methodological issues for the organizational ethnographer. The male-dominated nature of many typical business and management fieldwork settings such as factory shopfloors or management boardrooms means that gender and sexuality can often be important and highly visible dynamics in fieldwork encounters. Several organizational ethnographies, such as Dalton (1959), Collinson (1992*a*), and Watson (1994*a*), have focused on the masculine nature of these organizational settings—for example, Collinson (1992*a*) in writing about the collectivist, masculine practices of ‘piss taking’ and swearing on the shopfloor, and Watson drawing attention to the jokes and ‘dirty talking’ that reinforced his inclusion among managers at ZTC Ryland.

The emphasis on jokes, humour, swearing, and ‘becoming one of the lads’ could be interpreted as demonstrating that the male ethnographer has privileged ‘insider’ status to a masculine subculture and is, as a result, able to produce an ethnography that is more valid. However, E. Bell (1999) argues that it would be wrong to assume that an ethnographer’s ability to participate in masculine practices necessarily confirms their status as an insider. Moreover, even though female organizational ethnographers experience masculine organizational settings in a way that confirms their ‘difference’ and can make them feel uncomfortable, for example, through constant exposure to pornographic images on the wall (D. Fletcher 2002) or not having access to any women’s toilets (Bell 1999), it should not be assumed that this precludes them from gaining access or acceptance. Neither, argues D. Fletcher (2002), should a feminist epistemology be adopted—for example, which attributes to women a special ability to recognize and engage with emotions in the fieldwork setting. Instead, the gender can be seen as a dynamic characteristic of the researcher’s identity (C. Warren 1988) that changes over time as the role of the researcher is negotiated. Bell (1999) argues that it is necessary to challenge some of these stereotypical gendered assumptions and instead focus on the dynamic complexity of gendered fieldwork relationships.

However, Reinharz (1992: 74–5) argues that, although ethnographic fieldwork relationships may sometimes *seem* manipulative, a clear undercurrent of reciprocity often lies beneath them. The researcher, in other words, may offer help or advice to her research participants, or she may be exhibiting reciprocity by giving a public airing to normally marginalized voices (although the ethnographer is always the mouthpiece for such voices and may be imposing a particular ‘spin’ on them). Moreover, it seems extreme to abandon feminist ethnography on the grounds that the ethnographer cannot fulfil all possible obligations simultaneously. Indeed, this would be a recipe for the abandonment of all research, feminist or otherwise. What is also crucial is transparency—transparency in the feminist ethnographer’s dealings with the women she studies and transparency in the account of the research process. Nonetheless, it is clear that the question of whether there is or can be a feminist ethnography is a matter of ongoing debate.

# Visual ethnography

One of the most striking developments in qualitative research in recent years has been the growth of interest in the analysis of visual data. As several writers have noted, the analysis of visual data remains relatively uncommon in organizational research (Meyer 1991). It has been suggested that this is the result of a general mistrust of the visual in the social sciences and a perception that visual analysis is less scientific than the analysis of

numerical or linguistic data (Holliday 2001). However, in recent years, there has been a clear sense that the use of visual materials in social science research is growing, as can be discerned from the number of books that appeared at the turn of the millennium on this subject (Banks 2001; Pink 2001; Rose 2001). Even more recently, there has been evidence that this trend is beginning to have an impact on business and management research, as a growing number of researchers in the fields of accounting, marketing, tourism, and organization studies are beginning to explore the potential of visual data as a means of understanding business and management. A useful source of information about these developments is the International Network for Visual Studies in Organizations, *in*Visio, which is dedicated to bringing together researchers, practitioners, and artists to explore the visual dimensions of business, management, and organizational life. Among other things, the website contains information about studies in business and management that have used visual methods, and details of workshops and events that are related to visual organization studies. It can be found at the following Internet address:
***in-visio.org*** (accessed 5 January 2011)

A distinction can be made between the use of visual materials that are *extant* and those that are produced more or less exclusively for the purposes of research. The former will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 21 and include such artefacts as company annual reports and product advertisements. In this chapter we will be emphasizing research-driven visual images, and our main focus is on photographs. Visual images that are research driven may be taken either by the researcher or by the research participants themselves. In either case, the images may be used as a basis for what is often referred to as *photo-elicitation* (Key concept 8.11 and Research in Focus 8.12). Photo-elicitation is often employed in connection with extant images too, and this point will be addressed further in Chapter 21.

Photographs produced as part of fieldwork may be taken by the researcher and analysed alongside other types of documents containing written words, such as interview transcripts, as in the study of Business Process Re-engineering by Buchanan (2001), or organization members may be asked to take photographs for the purposes of research, as in Bolton, Pole, and Mizen's (2001) research into child employment in Britain (see Research in focus 16.13). Sometimes the use of photographs and other visual records is not built into the researcher's plans at the outset. For example, Cockburn and Ormrod (1993) did not initially intend to use photographs in their case studies of firms manufacturing and selling microwave ovens, but Cynthia Cockburn was impeded in writing by 'repetitive strain injury' from many years of typing, so she decided to return to the research sites with a camera, as a way of creating a narrative that could run parallel to their interview data (see Research in focus 17.18). By contrast, Buchanan (2001), in his study of the introduction of Business Process Re-engineering in Leicester General Hospital, included photography from the outset as part of the battery of data collection techniques he employed. As part of his focus on getting a sense of the 'patient trail', over 150 transparency slides were taken. Buchanan (2001: 151) argues that using photographs in conjunction with other methods of data collection helps the organizational researcher

- to develop a richer understanding of organizational processes;
- to capture data not disclosed in interview;
- to reveal to staff aspects of work in other sections of the organization with which they have little or no regular contact;
- to offer a novel channel for respondent validation of data; and
- to involve staff in debate concerning the implications of research findings for organization process redesign and improvement.

The distinction between extant and research-driven visual materials is not an entirely satisfactory one. For example, when research participants are asked to discuss items in their photograph collections, this is similar to asking participants to take photographs and then discuss the images that are taken, as in the study of aesthetics conducted by S. Warren (2002, 2005). Warren's study involved giving a camera to employees in a website design department of a global IT company located in a rural location in the south of England and asking them to take photographs that would 'show' how it 'felt' to work there. Plates 17.1–17.3 show three photographs taken by respondents. Plate 17.1 is a photograph of a cup of tea from a vending machine. When the respondent was asked why he had taken this particular picture, he raised issues concerning his dissatisfaction with the amount of money that had been spent on the office at the expense of other things that were more important to employees. Plate 17.2 shows a meeting room that was photographed by a respondent who found it to be an escape and a contrast from the normal work environment. However, Warren argues that in her study the use of photographs did not primarily entail analysis of their content. Instead the photographs formed part of a data-generating triangle



## Research in focus 17.18

# Photographs of the production and consumption of microwave ovens

Cockburn and Ormrod (1993) were interested in examining the processes whereby technology was developed and used, and the impact that changing technologies had on gender relationships. The researchers decided to focus on an artefact that was destined to end up in the home in domestic use. They set out to trace the whole life trajectory of the artefact as it was produced, sold, and used. In the British project, the artefact selected was a microwave oven. However, rather than the artefact being the main focus of study, they explain that 'it was no more than a device to draw us into many different places and involve us in many different activities where the technology/gender relation is enacted' (1993: 3).

The researchers used a variety of methods over a two-year period. In addition to semi-structured interviewing of eighty-nine actors and agencies with an involvement with the artefact, they analysed organizational documents, including trade reports and household magazines, conducted telephone interviews, and a mini-survey of microwave oven owners. In addition, they took a series of photographs. The photographs were intended to 'show something of the relation' (1993: 42) of people to the technology, and in particular to depict the different roles of men and women in the processes of design, production, buying, selling, and cooking using microwave ovens.

However, Cockburn and Ormrod are cautious in warning against taking the photographs at face value as a narrative, saying 'no ambitious claims are made for the photographs from a sociological point of view. They clearly do not represent some definitive "reality": they are highly subjective and selective. Nor do they set out to illustrate our findings in some straightforward way. They are offered simply as a parallel narrative, with resonance in the text. They may prompt some thought in the reader that words alone could not evoke about the relationship of women and men to artifacts and, in the context of technology, to each other' (1993: 4).

Writers like Susan Sontag (2003) have argued that journalistic and other types of photographs tend to be interpreted as a more exact or accurate depiction of events than other forms of communication, including written words, even though they involve similarly selective processes of representing a subject and therefore equal potential for bias. Through this statement, Cockburn and Ormrod are thus warning against the tendency towards objectivism that a photograph might be seen as encouraging and reasserting their own constructionist ontological position (see Chapter 1 for a discussion of objectivism and constructionism).

involving the image, respondent, and researcher, focusing on the reasons why they were taken. Plate 17.3 provides a good illustration of this, since the blurred nature of this photograph of the office space means it would be difficult to distinguish the content at all without the account provided by the respondent, who explains that they were trying to capture the 'busyness' and 'colour' that defined the atmosphere of the workplace. Warren also notes that photographs such as this one show how intangible emotional concepts that are hard to communicate through language can be conveyed through the use of images.

It is also worth observing that, although the term 'visual ethnography' is becoming increasingly popular (e.g. Peñaloza 1999; Pink 2001), it is sometimes used in a way that does not imply the kind of sustained immersion in a social setting that has been taken in this chapter to be a feature of ethnography. Sometimes the term is used to include interviews of the kind covered in Chapter 18 in which visual materials feature prominently. An example of visual ethnography is provided by Peñaloza (2000), a marketing researcher, who was interested in how the cultural meaning of the American West is produced through the activities of cattle trade shows. She suggests that the rich imagery of the American West, reflected by such examples as Marlboro cigarettes, Wrangler jeans, and Jeep Cherokees, is represented through the trade show where animals are bought and sold, but also where the culture of the American West is enacted and celebrated. In addition to participant observation and in-depth interviewing, her ethnographic study incorporated 550 photographs taken at the shows over a six-year period. These were mainly photographs of the events—including cattle sales, breed shows, and rodeos. As a visible record of people and activities, the photographs helped Peñaloza to build up a profile of the race/ethnicity

# Plate 17.1

**'Cup of tea from vending machine'**



Copyright Samantha Warren. Reproduced with thanks.

# Plate 17.2

**'Thinktank: aestheticized meeting room'**



Copyright Samantha Warren. Reproduced with thanks.

# Plate 17.3

**'Blurred view of office space'**



Copyright Samantha Warren. Reproduced with thanks.

and sex of attendees at particular events and of the type of activities that were involved in the show. A further example of Peñaloza's visual ethnographic research is given in Research in focus 17.22.

In the discussion that follows, we will emphasize photographs, mainly because they are the visual medium that has received the greatest attention. There are a number of ways in which photographs have been employed by qualitative researchers:

- as an *aide-mémoire* in the course of fieldwork, in which context the images essentially become components of the ethnographer's field notes; Cockburn and Ormrod's (1993) study of microwave oven manufacture and retail (see Research in focus 17.18) and Alan Bryman's research on Disneyization in Research in focus 17.19 provide examples;
- as a source of data in their own right and not simply as adjuncts to the ethnographer's field notes (see Research in focus 17.21 and Research in focus 17.22);
- as prompts for discussion by research participants. Sometimes the photographs may be extant, and this kind of context will be examined in Chapter 21. In other contexts, the discussions may be based on photographs taken by the ethnographer or by research participants more or less exclusively for the purposes of the investigation, such as in the study of aesthetics by S. Warren (2002, 2005). In the case of photographs that are taken by research participants that form the basis for an interview or discussion, Pink (2004: 399) writes: 'By working with informants to produce images that are meaningful for them we can gain insights into their visual cultures and into what is important for them as individuals living in particular localities.'

Pink (2001) draws attention to two different ways in which visual images have been conceptualized in social research. She calls these *realist* and *reflexive* approaches (see Thinking deeply 17.20). The latter approach to the visual is frequently collaborative, in the sense that research participants may be involved in decisions about what photographs should be taken and then how they should be interpreted. Further, there is recognition of the fluidity of the meaning of images, implying that they can never be fixed and will always be viewed by different people in different ways. For example, in Bell's study of the closure of a Jaguar car manufacturing plant (see Research in focus 17.21), attention was focused on analysing the positionality of the person who took the photograph or produced the image, as well as on the content of the photograph itself.

## Research in focus 17.19
# Researching Disneyization

In recent years, one of the authors of this book, Alan Bryman, has been interested in something that he calls 'Disneyization', which is the process by which the principles associated with Disney theme parks have permeated many aspects of modern society and economy. In his book on this subject (Bryman 2004*b*) he included several photographs that illustrated these processes. In addition, the photographs were very helpful in acting as reminders of contexts that revealed the process of Disneyization. This was especially the case with an article on the Disneyization of McDonald's (Bryman 2003). The article included a discussion of the case of a themed McDonald's in Chicago that was based on rock 'n' roll. Alan had visited Chicago a year previously to give a paper at a conference and took the opportunity to take some photographs of the restaurant. These images were very helpful in remembering the restaurant, although he did not use them for illustrative purposes in either the book or the article. Two of the images are presented here—Plate 17.4 shows the restaurant's exterior against the Chicago skyline and Plate 17.5 shows statues of three members of the Beatles, which were among the many artefacts that contributed to the musical theme.

## Plate 17.4

### Disneyization in pictures: a themed McDonald's



# Plate 17.5

## Disneyization in pictures: The Beatles in the themed McDonald's






## Thinking deeply 17.20
## Two stances on the role of visual images in ethnography

Pink (2001) draws an important distinction between two positions on visual materials. The traditional framework is a *realist* one (see Key concept 1.9 on realism) in which the photograph or video recording simply captures an event or setting that then becomes a 'fact' for the ethnographer to interpret along with his or her other data. The image and what it represents are essentially unproblematic and act as a window on reality. This has been the dominant frame within which visual resources have been produced and analysed. Researchers who employ photographic images to illustrate their work or as adjuncts to their field notes typically operate within a realist frame of reference that treats the image as relatively unproblematic (see Research in focus 17.19 for an example). In contrast, Pink draws attention to a postion that she calls *reflexive*, which entails an awareness of and sensitivity to the ways in which the researcher has had an impact on what a photograph reveals. This sensitivity requires a grasp of the way that one's age, gender, background, and academic proclivities influence what is photographed, how is the image is composed, and the role informants and others may have played in the resulting image.

## Research in focus 17.21

# Photographs of organizational death and loss

Photographs and artistic images have also been used by Emma Bell, to understand reactions to events surrounding the closure of a Jaguar car manufacturing plant in the UK city of Coventry (Bell in press). She first became aware of the role of visual images in communicating messages about the closure when an image was published in the local newspaper featuring a Jaguar E-Type vehicle with the letters 'RIP JAG' written across the front of the vehicle, accompanied by a story about the decision of the Ford Motor Company to close the Coventry manufacturing site. She studied the huge collection of extant images in Jaguar company archives, which included artworks and professional photographs that focused on the aesthetics of the product and celebrated the labour process surrounding its production.Through this she became aware of the significance of the visual in constructing organizational memory and narrating a story about the organization's past. Participant observation at the site led to the discovery and analysis of a number of other extant images that had been created by employees in response to the announcement of closure, including one that had been produced by theTransport and General Workers Union as part of its campaign against the closure, featuring Uncle Sam, wearing a hat displaying the Ford logo, murdering the Jaguar cat with a knife. She also analysed more than 600 photographs of the manufacturing plant that were taken by the organization's picture archivist in the last days before car production ceased. Plates 17.6 and Plate 17.7 are two of them. The pictures of Jaguar cars on the walls of the staff break area in Plate 17.6 confirm the significance of the visual in the work identities of employees. The lack of people or cars contained with the images communicates and commemorates the loss of what made the workplace distinctive. The findings from the case led her to conclude that the visual constitutes a vital resource in the construction of organizational memory that enables dominant organizational narratives to be contested and alternatives to be constructed.

## Plate 17.6

### 'An empty staff break area on the last day of production'




Copyright Karam Ram and Jaguar Heritage. Reproduced with thanks.

## Plate 17.7

### 'After the last car has left the track'




Copyright Karam Ram and Jaguar Heritage. Reproduced with thanks.

In addition to the use of still photographs as a visual method, there is a growing use of video-audio recording as a method of recording moving images and social interaction as it unfolds over time. For example, Llewellyn and Burrows (2008) were interested in how vendors of the *Big Issue*, a UK magazine that is sold by homeless people, approached passers-by and how they responded. Focusing on the activities of one *Big Issue* vendor in the summer of 2006, they were able to compile approximately fifty hours of video-audio recording of the vendor at work on the city streets. This enabled analysis of the body language associated with the sales interactions in addition to the verbal encounters that took place between the vendor and passers-by, thereby drawing attention to the embodied character of buying and selling activities.

These various examples of the use of visual materials give a sense that they have great potential for ethnographers and qualitative researchers more generally. However, their growing popularity should not entice readers into thinking that visual methods should necessarily be incorporated into their investigations: their use must be relevant to the research questions being asked. For her research on Niketown in Chicago, Peñaloza (1999; Research in focus 17.22) was interested in what she dubs 'spectacular consumption'—that is, turning what could otherwise be a mundane consumption event (purchasing sportswear) into a spectacle through the use of sporting images, sounds, and atmospheres. When she explored research questions to do with this topic (for example, the role of the environment in creating a sense of spectacular consumption), an approach that included photography was very appropriate, since spectacle is a visual phenomenon. A further example to illustrate the relationship between research questions and visual methods concerns the study of organizational culture and symbolism (Gagliardi 1990; see Research in focus 21.3 for an example). In Berg and Kreiner's (1990) study of corporate buildings and architecture, they suggest physical structures are an important part of building a successful organizational image. This is because managers are

increasingly conscious of the way that physical layout can influence human behaviour, so it is suggested, for example, that comfortable chairs produce less formal interaction. Corporate architecture can also be used to reinforce a particular managerial philosophy; for example, a low, flat building design can be used to suggest the absence of a status hierarchy. As this example illustrates, photography provides a highly appropriate means of exploring this research topic through enabling the visual aspects of organizational architecture and design to be represented.

As sources of data, visual research methods require an ability on the part of the researcher to 'read' images in a manner that is sensitive to: the context in which they were generated; the potential for multiple meanings that may need to be worked through with research participants; and, where the researcher is the source of the images, the significance of his or her own social position. In other words, the analyst of visual materials needs to be sceptical about the notion that a photograph provides an unproblematic depiction of reality. In addition, researchers will usually include non-visual research methods in their investigations (such as interviews). This leads to the question of the relative significance of words and images in the analysis of data and the presentation of findings. Since words are the traditional medium, it is easy to slip into seeing the visual as ancilliary.

However, at the same time, Pink (2004) reminds us that visual research methods are never purely visual. There are two aspects to this point. First, as Pink points out, visual research methods are usually accompanied by other (often traditional) research methods like interviewing and observation. Second, the visual is almost always accompanied by the non-visual—words—which is the medium of expression for both the research participants and the researchers themselves.



## Research in focus 17.22
## Visual ethnography—just do it

Peñaloza (1999) conducted what she calls a 'visual ethnographic' study of Niketown in Chicago. Niketowns are huge stores that act as showcases for Nike's products and can be found in many large ciites worldwide, including one in London on Oxford Street. She was interested in the store as a spectacle that had been designed specifically for the consumer that is meant to create a sense of awe. Peñaloza (1999: 34) argues that an approach that included photography was well suited to her research given her interest in the environment within which consumption occurred, 'particularly its architecture, furnishings, display of artifacts, images, sounds and textures in relation to consumers' behaviors'. Her corpus of data included: 148 pages of field notes; 58 pages of entries in a diary; and 357 photographs. In addition, interviews were conducted with employees and consumers. Through her data, Peñaloza shows, for example, that the display of artefacts and images of revered athletes are deployed to transfer the sense of power and awe in which these individuals are held to Nike as a corporation.

Finally, visual research methods raise expecially difficult issues of ethics, an area that is explored in Chapter 5. The Visual Sociology Group, a study group of the British Sociological Association (BSA), has produced a statement of ethical practice for researchers using visual methods:

***www.visualsociology.org.uk/about/ethical_statement.php*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

This is a useful statement, which draws on the BSA's *Statement of Ethical Practice*, which was referred to in Chapter 5. Here are some statements of ethical practice that are recommended:

> Researchers may want to discuss the status of the images with participants in order to clearly explain the dissemination strategy of the research project. In certain circumstances, the researcher(s) may want to create a written or verbal contract guaranteeing the participants ownership of the images produced. Under UK law copyright can be waived by participants and given to the researcher(s); however it is recommended that researchers read the current legislation or seek legal advice if taking this option (please note that the

date of the creation of the image affects the legal status).

In some situations access to a research setting is gained via a 'gatekeeper'. In these situations members should adhere to the principle of obtaining informed consent directly from the research participants to whom access is required, while at the same time taking account of the gatekeepers' interest. In terms of visual research methods, access into the research setting does not necessarily constitute consent from participants, therefore visual data recording should not be undertaken until consent is confirmed.

As these points reveal, there is a special sensitivity to the use of visual materials, such as photographs and video recordings, in that the subjects who appear in them may have their images widely disseminated. It is important, therefore, to ensure that permission is gained from those whose images appear and that they are fully aware of the implications of that agreement. If you are considering using visual research methods, you should consult this statement of ethical practice. A further useful source to consult is the accounts of researchers who use visual methods of how they dealt with ethical issues in their research. For example, the study of *Big Issue* vendors carried out by Llewellyn and Burrows (2008) provides a detailed account of the ethical issues that they encountered in their study and how they went about addressing them.

We approached the vendor as he was working and arranged a time later that week to talk with him about the project in a local cafe. He was shown illustrative examples of prior studies, which included photographic plates and transcripts. We talked through our plans for the data, including publication. He was told that clips would be played to students in classrooms and to academics during conferences. Practicalities concerning filming, including the requirement for him to wear a microphone, were discussed. He was positive from the start, but we waited until the following week to begin filming, giving him the opportunity to reconsider his involvement. On the day we began recording, the vendor signed a form consenting to the research. We had gained clearance from our university and from the local police. The researchers made themselves publicly visible as University of Warwick representatives and issued written overviews of the study to those who expressed an interest. (Llewellyn and Burrows 2008: 565)

As this example illustrates, a carefully considered approach to the ethical issues surrounding visual methods can enable research to be carried out, even when there are multiple sensitivities involved.



## Tips and skills
## Copyright and photographs

Pink (2001) emphasizes the importance of checking the legal position regarding publishing photographs that you have produced yourself for research purposes. Under UK law, researchers usually own the copyright of photographs they have produced themselves. However, if you are taking photographs of other people, you should gain at least their verbal, and possibly their written, permission before publishing or displaying the photograph in a public forum. In addition, if you are using photographs that have been produced by someone else, you need to check who owns the copyright and seek their permission to reproduce it, for which a fee may be payable. S. Warren (2009) points out that for visual researchers conducting organizational research care is needed to ensure that rights associated with copyright images such as logos are not infringed. What is and is not a copyright image is not always obvious. Alan Bryman (1995, 2004*b*) was unable to use any photographs taken in Disney theme parks, because it is not just the characters whose images are covered by copyright (for example, Donald Duck) but also the buildings, which are often just as iconic and memorable.

More information on the legal position regarding copyright of photographs in the UK can be found at the following websites, where links to other national copyright sites can also be found:
***www.dacs.co.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)
***www.copyrightservice.co.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)



## Key points

- Ethnography is a term that refers to both a method and the written product of research based on that method.
- The ethnographer is typically a participant observer who also uses non-observational methods and sources such as interviewing and documents.
- The ethnographer may adopt an overt or a covert role, but the latter carries ethical difficulties.
- The negotiation of access to a social setting can be a lengthy process. It may depend on establishing an exchange relationship.
- Key informants frequently play an important role for the ethnographer, but care is needed to ensure that their impact on the direction of research is not excessive.
- There are several different ways of classifying the kinds of role that the ethnographer may assume. These are not necessarily mutually exclusive.
- Sampling considerations differ from those addressed in the context of quantitative research, in that issues of representativeness are emphasized less.
- Field notes are important for prompting the ethnographer's memory.
- Feminist ethnography is relatively unusual in business research, and there is some debate about whether there can be a feminist ethnography.
- Visual materials, such as photographs and video, are attracting considerable interest among qualitative business researchers in recent years, not just as adjuncts to data collection but as objects of interest in their own right.



## Questions for review

- Is it possible to distinguish ethnography and participant observation?
- How does participant observation differ from structured observation?

### *Organizational ethnography*

- To what extent do participant observation and ethnography rely solely on observation?
- What distinguishes organizational ethnography from other forms of ethnography?

### *Access*

- 'Covert ethnography obviates the need to gain access to inaccessible settings and therefore has much to recommend it.' Discuss.
- Examine some articles in business and management journals in which ethnography and participant observation figure strongly. Was the researcher in an overt or a covert role? How was access achieved?
- Does the problem of access finish once access to a chosen setting has been achieved?
- What might be the role of key informants in ethnographic research? Is there anything to be concerned about when using them?

### *Roles for ethnographers*

- Compare Gold's and Gans's schemes for classifying participant observer roles.
- What is meant by 'going native'?
- Should ethnographers be active or passive in the settings in which they conduct research?

### *Sampling*

- What is snowball sampling?
- What is theoretical sampling?
- How crucial is the idea of theoretical saturation to theoretical sampling?

### *Field notes*

- Why are field notes important for ethnographers?
- Why is it useful to distinguish between different types of field notes?

### *Bringing ethnographic fieldwork to an end*

- How do you decide when to complete the data collection phase in ethnographic research?

### *Can there be a feminist ethnography?*

- What are the main ingredients of feminist ethnography?

### *Visual ethnography*

- What kinds of roles can visual materials play in ethnography?
- What distinguishes visual ethnography from other research methods that focus on visual data?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Ethnography and Participant Observation.*

# 18

# Interviewing in qualitative research

## Chapter outline


**Introduction** 465

**Differences between the structured interview and the qualitative interview** 466

**Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing** 467

- Preparing an interview guide 473
- Kinds of questions 477
- Using an interview guide: an example 480
- Recording and transcription 482
- Telephone interviewing 488

**Sampling** 489

**Feminist research and interviewing in qualitative research** 493

**Qualitative interviewing versus participant observation** 494

- Advantages of participant observation in comparison to qualitative interviewing 495
- Advantages of qualitative interviewing in comparison to participant observation 496
- Overview 498

***Checklist*** 498
***Key points*** 499
***Questions for review*** 499



## Chapter outline

This chapter is concerned with the interview in qualitative research. The term *qualitative interview* is often used to capture the different types of interview that are used in qualitative research. Such interviews tend to be far less structured than the kind of interview associated with survey research, which was discussed in Chapter 8 in terms of structured interviewing. This chapter is concerned with individual interviews in qualitative research; the focus group method, which is a form of interview but with several people, is discussed in the next chapter. The two forms of qualitative interviewing discussed in this chapter are unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. The chapter explores:

- the differences between structured interviewing and qualitative interviewing;
- the main characteristics of and differences between unstructured and semi-structured interviewing; this entails a recognition that the two terms refer to extremes and that in practice a wide range of interviews with differing degrees of structure lie between the extremes;
- how to devise and use an interview guide for semi-structured interviewing;
- the different kinds of question that can be asked in an interview guide;
- the importance of tape recording and transcribing qualitative interviews;
- approaches to sampling in studies using qualitative interviews;
- the significance of qualitative interviewing in feminist research;
- the advantages and disadvantages of qualitative interviewing relative to participant observation.

# Introduction

The interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research. Of course, as we have seen in Chapter 17, ethnography usually involves a substantial amount of interviewing, and this factor undoubtedly contributes to the widespread use of the interview by qualitative researchers. However, it is the flexibility of the interview that makes it so attractive. Since ethnography entails an extended period of participant observation, which is very disruptive for researchers because of the sustained absence(s) required from work and/or family life, research based more or less exclusively on interviews is a highly attractive alternative for the collection of qualitative data. Interviewing, the transcription of interviews, and the analysis of transcripts are all very time-consuming, but they can be more readily accommodated into researchers' personal lives.

In Key concept 8.2 several types of interview were briefly outlined. The bulk of the types outlined there—other than the structured interview and the standardized interview—are ones associated with qualitative research. *Focus groups* and *group interviewing* will be examined in the next chapter and the remaining forms of interview associated with qualitative research will be explored at various points in this chapter. However, in spite of the apparent proliferation of terms describing types of interview in qualitative research, the two main types are the *unstructured interview* and the *semi-structured interview*. Researchers sometimes employ the term *qualitative interview* to encapsulate these two types of interview. There is clearly the potential for considerable confusion here, but the types and definitions offered in Key concept 8.2 are meant to inject a degree of consistency of terminology. One final point to note at the outset is that, in qualitative research, no single interview stands alone. 'It has meaning to the researcher only in terms of other interviews and observations' (Whyte 1953: 22).



## Telling it like it is
## Intensive interviewing

Sometimes the conditions of research access combined with other university commitments mean that students have to adopt an intensive approach to interviewing. For Angharad and Chris this meant they carried out all of their interviews over a short time period of just one day. For Angharad this was a matter of making the most of the opportunity that she had been granted, although she conceded: 'I was very tired by the end of the day, trying to take all that information in and stay on the ball.' Although these practical constraints sometimes just have to be worked with, it is important to recognize that interviewing can be quite a stressful and tiring activity, and doing a large number of interviews in one day particularly so. This makes it even more important to have considered the issues covered in this chapter before doing your interviews.

In Chris's case, practical constraints also affected the time in which he conducted the interviews. 'I did all the interviews on the same day, which was a matter of convenience because I was coming from Birmingham to London so I didn't really have the budget to make several journeys but looking back on it, it might have been a good idea to say, "Right. Well, I did the first one. These are the questions I asked. These are the responses. That's an interesting response," or, "I didn't get quite what I'd expect there. Let me tailor the question or maybe the questions. Go and change it slightly." ' Chris acknowledges that, if he had piloted and pre-tested his questions (see Chapter 10), this might have enhanced the overall quality of his data. However, although he carried out the interviews in a short time period, Chris had already built up relationships with his interviewees beforehand as a result of his internship. As he explained, 'I'd known all of them for at least eight weeks so I suppose that would have obviously had an effect on the style of conversation that I had with them in the interviews as opposed to somebody I'd interviewed without knowing them beforehand. I'm sure that did have an effect and it meant that some of the questions I asked were more personal because I had background about what they'd done, families, that kind of thing. And they brought that kind of thing into the interviews. Whether somebody who didn't know me would have been so happy to do that, I don't know.'



*To hear more about Angharad's and Chris's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# Differences between the structured interview and the qualitative interview

Qualitative interviewing is usually very different from interviewing in quantitative research in a number of ways.

- The approach tends to be much less structured in qualitative research. In quantitative research, the approach is structured to maximize the reliability and validity of measurement of key concepts. It is also more structured because the researcher has a clearly specified set of research questions that are to be investigated. The structured interview is designed to answer these questions. Instead, in qualitative research, there is an emphasis on greater generality in the formulation of initial research ideas and on interviewees' own perspectives.
- In qualitative interviewing, there is much greater interest in the interviewee's point of view; in quantitative research, the interview reflects the researcher's concerns. This contrast is a direct outcome of the previous one. For example, Ram (1994) describes his qualitative interviewing style as owing little to the 'textbook' approach, which 'exhorts the interviewer to remain aloof while seeking to extract information from the respondent' (1994: 32), as it would have been 'absurd and counter-productive' to assume this degree of social distance from family and friends whom he had known for years.
- In qualitative interviewing, 'rambling' or going off at tangents is often encouraged—it gives insight into

what the interviewee sees as relevant and important; in quantitative research, it is usually regarded as a nuisance and discouraged.

- In qualitative interviewing, interviewers can depart significantly from any schedule or guide that is being used. They can ask new questions that follow up interviewees' replies and can vary the order of questions and even the wording of questions. In quantitative research, none of these things should be done, because they will compromise the standardization of the interview process and hence the reliability and validity of measurement.
- As a result, qualitative interviewing tends to be flexible (see Research in focus 18.3 for an example), responding to the direction in which interviewees take the interview and perhaps adjusting the emphases in the research as a result of significant issues that emerge in the course of interviews. By contrast, structured interviews are typically inflexible, because of the need to standardize the way in which each interviewee is dealt with.
- In qualitative interviewing, the researcher wants rich, detailed answers; in quantitative research, the interview is supposed to generate answers that can be coded and processed quickly.
- In qualitative interviewing, the interviewee may be interviewed on more than one and sometimes even several occasions. In quantitative research, unless the research is longitudinal in character, the person will be interviewed on one occasion only.



## Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing

However, qualitative interviewing varies a great deal in the approach taken by the interviewer. The two major types were mentioned at the beginning of the chapter.

- The almost totally *unstructured interview*. Here the researcher uses at most an *aide-mémoire* as a brief set of prompts to him or herself to deal with a certain range of topics. There may be just a single question that the interviewer asks, and the interviewee is then allowed to respond freely, with the interviewer simply responding to points that seem worthy of being followed up. Unstructured interviewing tends to be very similar in character to a conversation (Burgess 1984). See Research in focus 18.1 for an illustration of an unstructured interview style.
- A *semi-structured interview*. The researcher has a list of questions on fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an *interview guide*, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway in how to reply. Questions may not follow on exactly in the way outlined on the schedule. Questions that are not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things said by interviewees. But, by and large, all the questions will be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewee to interviewee. For example, Willman et al. (2002) carried out semi-structured interviews with traders in financial markets in London. The interviews covered a range of issues, including motivations, emotions, trading strategies, and questions about organizational culture. They also included questions about control incentives and management style. In this analysis, the researchers focused on sections of the interview that dealt with the aversion to and seeking of risk; this formed the basis for their conclusion that traders focus on avoiding losses rather than making gains. Research in focus 18.2 and Research in focus 18.3 provide further examples of these features.

In both cases, the interview process is *flexible*. Also, the emphasis must be on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events—that is, what the interviewee views as important in explaining and understanding events, patterns, and forms of behaviour. Thus, Leidner (1993) describes the interviewing she carried out in a McDonald's restaurant as involving a degree of structure, but adds that the interviews also 'allowed room to pursue topics of particular interest to the workers' (1993: 238). Milkman (1997), in her study of auto workers at General Motors, describes how in the second stage of her research she interviewed a total of thirty buyout takers and workers, using a 'very general interview guide', trying to be as casual as she could, and never discouraging anyone from going off on tangents. Most interviews were with individuals. However, in a few cases workers invited their friends from the plant as well. Milkman claims that 'these turned out to be among the best interviews, since they developed a group dynamic in which my presence often became marginal' (1997: 198). In an interview study of secretarial work involving almost 500 office workers, Pringle (1988) followed an oral history format. She explains:



## Research in focus 18.1
## An example of unstructured interviewing

Whyte (1953) presents an example of a 'non-directive', or unstructured, interview conducted in 1952 during a one-day visit to the Chicago plant of the Inland Steel Container Company. The aim of this interview was to catch up with developments in union–management relations that had taken place since his previous visit to the plant and since Whyte's publication of a book on this subject. Whyte suggests that the book had been received favourably at the plant, as it showed management and union officials in a positive light. Publication was marked by a public meeting, and every worker in the plant had been presented with a copy. This, in Whyte's view, helped to ensure positive rapport with the respondent on the day in question.

The interview was with Columbus Gary, vice-president of the union and chairman of its grievance committee. It was held in the management conference room of the plant. Whyte explains: 'Gary was neither a complete stranger to me nor a close acquaintance.' He goes on to suggest that he had no problem in establishing rapport with Gary, stating that Gary 'was willing to tell me anything I wanted to know' (1953: 16). Then follows a section of the verbatim interview with Gary, for which Whyte provides a commentary that involves analysing his own interviewing technique, including such 'mistakes' as presenting a leading question.

Although Whyte suggests that he was following the 'rules' of non-directive interviewing (by concentrating on listening, not interrupting or arguing with the informant, and periodically restating what had been said), he also suggests that in certain important respects he was not. In particular, Whyte attempted to direct Gary towards an account of the social process. Specifically, how did the problem come to the attention of the person concerned, and what were the steps involved in the action taken?

> Right at the outset I sought to move him from a statement of sentiments to an account of interpersonal events. I was interested not only in what happened at a particular time, but in how that event related to others that took place before or afterwards. For all these events I wanted answers to the question: Who did what, with whom, and where? (1953: 21–2)

Whyte concludes that the interviewer must learn to recognize the difference between a statement of substance and an account of process in order to be able to guide an informant from one to the other. This enables the reconstruction of events by asking interviewees to consider how a sequence of events evolved. Therefore, we can see that, although Whyte describes his approach to organizational interviewing as non-directive, it is not as unstructured as it at first seems.



## Research in focus 18.2
## An example of semi-structured interviewing

Spender (1989) carried out research investigating 'industry recipes'—the knowledge base that those socialized into an industry take to be professional common sense. His interviews were with managers in firms within three industries; they included iron founders, dairies, and fork-lift truck rental companies. After identifying a sample of firms using trade publications, buyers' guides, and the *Yellow Pages*, Spender set up all the interviews over the telephone.

There were three steps involved in this process. The first step in getting an interview involved asking for the senior manager by name, increasing the chance of being put straight through by the secretary. The second step was to stress the legitimacy of the research by drawing on the association with an academic institution, and the non-commercial, confidential nature of the research. The third step was to make the research sound unthreatening and simple, by using questions such as, 'I am looking into the problems of running firms in this industry and wonder if I could come and talk to you about it for half an hour?' (1989: 79) Once he had set up the

interview, Spender's approach is 'focused' or semi-structured, as 'it combines unstructured interviews with a loose pattern of agreement with the interviewee about the context of enquiry' (1989: 79).

The interviews are focused in several ways before they start. First by introducing the interview as 'about the problems of running the firm'; secondly, by insisting on meeting senior managers with strategic responsibilites, and, thirdly, by interviewing the managers at their workplaces, keeping them in the physical context of their organizational role.



## Research in focus 18.3
## Flexibility in semi-structured interviewing

Between February and April 1990, Prasad (1993) interviewed thirty-four employees as part of her study of computerization at the Paragon Corporation. Interviews focused on understanding employees' experiences of computerized work. Each one lasted between forty-five minutes and one-and-a-half hours and was 'semi-structured'. Prasad explains that in some cases the interviews corroborated her own assessment of the situation, while in others they offered a different interpretation that helped her to rethink her analysis. This meant that 'there was no one set of questions administered to all interviewees and no specific sequencing of the issues raised' (1993: 1408). She writes that the interviews were informed by the idea of 'grand tour' and 'mini tour' questions (Spradley and McCurdy 1972).

> The somewhat broad and exploratory grand tour questions gave the interviews focus and were developed keeping my research interests in mind. For the most part, grand tour questions got interviewees talking about aspects of computerization and related organizational issues. If the interviewee touched on something that was closely connected with the symbolism of computers or seemed particularly concerned about certain aspects of computerization, I pursued those areas through the use of more specific and detailed mini tour questions. (Prasad 1993: 1409)



## Telling it like it is
## Semi-structured interviewing

Lucie carried out informal interviews with fifteen other students who were on the entrepreneurship courses she attended. She did not tape-record these interviews but took notes on what interviewees said. She then interviewed four of the staff at the institute. Lucie tape-recorded and later transcribed these interviews. She explained that her approach to interviewing as semi-structured. 'I knew kind of what I wanted to find out. I wanted to know what types of enterprise they were trying to encourage because part way through my research it was clear that there wasn't really a good definition of enterprise and no one really knew what enterprise was. Even the students attending didn't really know what it was. So I wanted to kind of clarify this, I suppose, through the students and through the institute, what they thought enterprise was and what they were hoping to gain out of that. It wasn't really like a structured interview. It was kind of a semi-structured interview so they could kind of talk about what they were experiencing and what they wanted out of the course and things. So it wasn't really like I had structured questions, but I just knew the areas I wanted them to talk about.'



*To hear more about Lucie's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

> We did not restrict the subject matter to work. Initially people were asked to start by talking about a typical day... Over time, our interests shifted or became more focused on the relation between different parts of their lives, on home and family, and their views on a range of political and social issues, and on their notions of a 'good boss' and 'good secretary'. (1988: 270)

Once again, we must remember that qualitative research is *not* quantitative research with the numbers missing. The kinds of interviewing carried out in qualitative research are typical also of *life history* and *oral history* interviewing (see Key concept 18.4).

The two different types of interview in qualitative research are extremes, and there is quite a lot of variability between them, but most qualitative interviews are close to one type or the other. In neither case does the interviewer slavishly follow a schedule, as is done in quantitative



## Tips and skills
## Learning how to interview by watching films

If you have never done any qualitative interviewing before, a useful way of familiarizing yourself with the method and the techniques involved is by watching films that sensitize you to some of the issues involved in naturalistic inquiry. Saldaña (2009) recommends several popular films that he suggests simulate the kinds of real-world dilemmas and human interaction that researchers commonly face in their practice. For qualitiative interviewing, his recommendations include *Kinsey* (2004), a film about the controversial biologist Dr Alfred Kinsey, who studied sexual behaviour in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. Kinsey used a combination of structured and semi-structured interviews, observation, and participational methods. The film provides insight into the issues involved in researching a highly sensitive topic and the influence of the researcher's personal values (see Chapter 1) on his choice of research subject. Saldaña also recommends *The Matrix* (1999) to gain insight into the concepts of epistemology and ontology and *The Truman Show* (1998) to illustrate the principles of participant observation (see Chapter 17) and the ethical issues (see Chapter 5) entailed in acting without having obtained someone's informed consent.



## Key concept 18.4
## Life history and oral history interviews

Two special forms of the kind of interview associated with qualitative research are the *life history* and *oral history* interviews.

The life history interview is generally associated with the **life history method**, where it is often combined with various kinds of personal documents such as diaries, photographs, and letters. This method is often referred to alternatively as the **biographical method**. A life history interview invites the subject to look back in detail across his or her entire life course. It has been depicted as documenting 'the inner experience of individuals, how they interpret, understand, and define the world around them' (Faraday and Plummer 1979: 776). However, the method is very much associated with the life history interview, which is a kind of unstructured interview covering the totality of an individual's life.

Life history methodology is suggested to be particularly useful in situations when the researcher is attempting to understand the complex processes whereby people make sense of their organizational reality. Musson (1998) suggests that it can help to provide answers to such research questions as: How does socialization take place in organizations? How are organizational careers created and maintained? How do certain managerial styles come to be accepted as natural? What influence do leaders and founders have on organizational culture?

However, despite the suggested relevance of life history interviews to organizational research, there has been only a trickle of empirical studies that have used this approach over the years. Bowen and Hisrich (1986) suggest that a very 'uneven picture' emerges of the female entrepreneur owing to a lack of published research. The few studies that exist tend to employ 'very small samples' and 'seldom attempt to be representative' (1986: 404). They suggest that longitudinal studies following the careers of entrepreneurs over time would enable development of a life cycle conception of the careers of female entrepreneurs and they recommend the use of a life history approach.

The life history method has tended to suffer because of an erroneous treatment of the life in question as a sample of one and hence of limited generalizability. However, it has certain clear strengths from the point of view of the qualitative researcher: its unambiguous emphasis on the point of view of the life in question and a clear commitment to the processual aspects of social life, showing how events unfold and interrelate in people's lives. The terms *life history* and *life story* are sometimes employed interchangeably, but R. L. Miller (2000: 19) suggests that the latter is an account someone gives about his or her life and that a life history dovetails a life story with other sources, such as diaries and letters (of the kind discussed in Chapter 21).

An example of the life history interview approach in organizational research is provided by Musson in the context of her doctoral research on how general medical practitioners in the UK experienced and understood the 1990 health-care reforms. As the research progressed, it became increasingly apparent to Musson that life histories of key actors were significant in the way that changes were understood and experienced.

> I directed the storytelling process to a large extent by asking individuals to tell me about when and how their understanding of the purpose of the organization shifted . . . These stories differed from focusing on the history of an individual's marital difficulties, to telling me a story about an individual patient and the way she was treated by the GPs in the practice . . . Likewise, I asked people to tell me about their lives in previous organizations and how they had experienced these; what they had found rewarding, constraining or difficult to make sense of, and how this differed in their current organization. Again, the open ended structure of the narratives allowed people to introduce subjects of major importance to them. (Musson 1998: 16)

R. L. Miller (2000) distinguishes between certain aspects of life history interviews. One distinction has to do with age and life course effects. The former relates to the ageing process, in the sense of biological ageing and its effects and manifestations; life course effects are the patterned features associated with the stages of the life course. He also points to the need to distinguish cohort effects, which are the unique clusters of experiences associated with a specific generation.

Miller suggests there has been a resurgence of interest in recent years, and Chamberlayne, Bornat, and Wengraf (2000) argue that there has been a recent 'turn to biographical methods'. To a large extent, the revival of the approach derives from a growth of interest in the role and significance of agency in social life. The revival is largely associated with the growing use of life story interviews and especially those that are often referred to in association with *narrative analysis* (see Chapter 22). Moreover, the growing use of such interviews has come to be associated less and less with the study of a single life (or indeed just one or two lives) and increasingly with the study of several lives.

Plummer (2001) draws a useful distinction between three types of life story:

1. *Naturalistic life stories*. These are life stories that occur whenever people reminisce or write autobiographies, or when job applicants write out letters of application and are interviewed.
2. *Researched life stories*. These are life stories that are solicited by researchers with a social scientific purpose in mind. Most research based on life history/story interviews are of this kind.
3. *Reflexive and recursive life stories*. Such life stories recognize that the life story is always a construction in which the interviewer is implicated. An *oral history* interview is usually somewhat more specific in tone in that the subject is asked to reflect upon specific events or periods in the past. It too is sometimes combined with other sources, such as documents. The chief problem with the oral history interview (which it shares with the life history interview) is the possibility of bias introduced by memory lapses and distortions (Grele 1998). On the other hand, oral history testimonies have allowed the voices to come through of groups that are typically marginalized in historical research (a point that also applies to life history interviews), either because of their lack of power or because they are typically regarded as unexceptional (Samuel 1976).

research interviewing; but in semi-structured interviews the interviewer does follow a script to a certain extent. The choice of whether to veer towards one type rather than the other is likely to be affected by a variety of factors.

- If it is important to the researcher to gain a genuine understanding of the world views of members of a social setting or of people sharing common attributes, an unstructured interviewing approach may be preferable. With a more unstructured approach, the researcher is less likely to come at participants' world views with presuppositions or expectations and is more likely to see things as the participants see them.
- If the researcher is beginning the investigation with a fairly clear focus, rather than a very general notion of wanting to do research on a topic, it is likely that the interviews will be semi-structured ones, so that the more specific issues can be addressed. More structure is also likely to be imposed when the researcher has a clear idea of how the data will be analysed. In the case of using interviews to generate data about critical incidents (see Research in focus 18.5), a set of subject themes can be used to guide respondents who are asked to recall examples of specific events that illustrate each theme.



## Research in focus 18.5
## An example of critical incident technique

Curran and Blackburn (1994) used a critical incident approach to examine the relationships between small and large businesses and their local economies. This involved focusing on particular events as a means of exploring how small business owner-managers related to their social and economic community. Forty-five owner-managers from a diverse range of businesses, including computer services, employment, secretarial and training agencies, and garages and vehicle repairers, were interviewed about a range of critical incidents that they had experienced over the previous two years. Five themes were selected as a basis for exploring how owners articulate with their environments: customers and the market; investment and finance; co-directors and partners; family and kinship; and local authority connections and involvements. Respondents were sent the list of potential themes for discussion prior to the interview. This was a way of encouraging more detailed narratives than would have been possible if the subjects were first raised in the interview. Each theme was introduced by the interviewer, who gave a general preamble. For example, in the case of gaining or losing a major customer the interviewer would say:

> The success of any business greatly depends on its customers. Most businesses lose or gain a major customer from time to time and this can create problems—especially losing an important customer. We would like you to highlight any people who were involved, consulted or who helped you in this situation. (1994: 107)

If the respondent had experienced an event like this in the previous two years, he or she was asked to talk through what happened, how he or she had coped, and with whom he or she had discussed the event. Curran and Blackburn found that losing a major customer sometimes led owner-managers to seek outside help to resolve the problem; on other occasions they chose to deal with the problem themselves without any outside help. Critical incidents also revealed the conflicting pressures, particularly for female owner-managers, in managing business and family life. One explained how she had worked up to the last possible moment before she went into labour for the birth of one of her children:

> I was doing someone's wages when I went into labour and this poor man kept looking at me and saying 'Don't you think you'd better go now?' and I said 'No it's all right, I'll just finish the wages . . . Oh dear! Hang on a minute' [indicating a response to a pain contraction]. (Owner-manager, employment agency, Suffolk; Curran and Blackburn 1994: 112)

The researchers suggest that critical incident analysis enables increased understanding of the reasons why owner-managers use links outside the business. They conclude that owner-managers tend to have relatively small networks and few external contacts such as accountants and bank managers. In addition, owner-managers rarely use non-economic contacts based on family, kinship, or social groupings for business information or advice. This example is illustrative of a more qualitative application of the critical incident technique than was used in the classic study of job satisfaction by Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959) discussed in Chapter 8.

- If more than one person is to carry out the fieldwork, in order to ensure a modicum of comparability of interviewing style, it is likely that semi-structured interviewing will be preferred. See Research in focus 18.2 and Research in focus 18.3 for examples.
- If you are doing multiple case study research, you are likely to find that you will need some structure in order to ensure cross-case comparability. Certainly, all Bryman's qualitative research on different kinds of organization has entailed semi-structured interviewing, and it is not a coincidence that this is because most of it has been multiple case study research (e.g. Bryman, Haslam, and Webb 1994; see Research in focus 16.11—Bryman, Gillingwater, and McGuinness 1996).

In business and management research there are some additional considerations that relate to qualitative interviewing. Interviewing managers often raises specific issues; the status and power held, particularly at a senior level, mean that gaining access to this group of people can be extremely difficult, and arranging a mutually convenient time in which to conduct an interview, which may last several hours, even more so. Given the number of outside requests for information and assistance that most managers receive, it is particularly important to structure a request for interview in a way that is most likely to lead to a favourable response. A request for interview may be made either by letter or by telephone. Healey and Rawlinson (1993) recommend a dual approach: first make a telephone call, 'fishing' for a named person who is most likely to be appropriate for the interview, then follow this up with an introductory letter. In the letter, it may be appropriate to enclose a short outline of the nature and purpose of the project and an indication of how the findings might be useful to the respondent. If the research is supported by a high-profile sponsoring organization (for example, a company or university business school), it may be worth enclosing a letter from a senior person within this organization endorsing the aims of the research. Finally, a telephone call made a few days after receipt of the letter can provide an opportunity for the researcher to deal with any queries the manager may have. The most important thing to remember, however, is that 'polite persistence' is often crucial (Healey and Rawlinson 1993).

Interviewing within organizations also involves encroaching on an individual's work time, and in some cases it may not be possible to take people away from their work during the hours of their employment. Managers may be unwilling to grant lower-level employees the time away from productive activity that is needed to conduct an interview, or there may simply be no one available to cover their duties. When employees are paid on an hourly basis, this becomes a particularly important issue. For example, in her research into work roles in restaurants, Elaine Hall (1993) wanted to interview a sample of the servers (waiters and waitresses) who worked in the five selected restaurants. To do this, she had to approach servers on duty to schedule individual interviews for off-duty times, usually before or after their work shift. This relied on servers' willingness to devote an hour of their unpaid time to this task.

However, sometimes managers demonstrate a willingness to enable the interview process despite the cost implications. For example, Freeman (2000) describes how one of the companies involved in the research provided release time for managers and workers so that she could interview them on company premises. Similarly, Bell, Taylor, and Thorpe (2001) were able to conduct a group interview with employees in one plant because the section manager and his team agreed to cease production for a period of time, in order to allow the interview to take place. However, this is not to suggest that it is only the interviewer who benefits from the interview process. Some interviewees, particularly senior managers, may welcome the opportunity to offload issues and concerns or think through a problem in a structured way, particularly if they are able to see a copy of the transcript afterwards. In these instances the interview is very much a two-way process, with both parties gaining something beneficial from it.

## Preparing an interview guide

The idea of an interview guide is much less specific than the notion of a structured interview schedule. In fact, the term can be employed to refer to the brief list of memory prompts of areas to be covered that is often employed in unstructured interviewing or to the somewhat more structured list of issues to be addressed or questions to be asked in semi-structured interviewing. Moreover, an interview guide does not necessarily have to comprise written words; instead it can take the form of a series of visual prompts related to a subject (see Research in focus 18.6). Researchers may offer to provide a copy of the interview guide or schedule to interested readers on request. This can help to strengthen the dependability of the research (see Chapter 16). What is crucial is that the questioning allows interviewers to glean the ways in which research participants view their social world and that there is flexibility in the conduct of the interviews. The latter is as much if not more to do with the conduct of the interview than with the nature of the interview guide as such.



## Tips and skills
## Where to conduct an interview?

Finding a quiet, private space in which to conduct an interview uninterrupted can be one of the most difficult tasks for the qualitative researcher. Many organizations will struggle to find you a spare room that is not being used and is even remotely suitable. Think carefully before agreeing to interview someone in his or her own office; are there likely to be frequent telephone calls or interruptions that make the interview difficult? Also, traffic, aircraft, or machinery can contribute to background noise that can make the audio-recorded speech inaudible. It is a good idea to spend some time in the room prior to the interview; do a speech recording to test the acoustics of the room and carefully position the furniture; if there is noise from outside the room, think about closing doors or windows. Similarly, you may wish to turn off a noisy heater. Position the microphone as near to your interviewees as possible and make sure that they are unlikely to knock it. You will, of course, need to balance these issues against the comfort and convenience of your interviewee (it would not be feasible to insist on having all the windows closed in a hot factory in the middle of summer!). But do not be afraid to explain what you need in order to conduct the interview, even though you may have to be prepared to compromise when it comes to actually getting it.



## Tips and skills
## Multiple interviewers

Bechhofer, Elliott, and McCrone (1984) claim there are certain advantages to having more than one interviewer to interview each respondent. In their study, this nearly always meant having two interviewers, but in one instance three interviewers were involved. They explain: 'After the customary introductory pleasantries and opening remarks, one person would take up the interview, making only brief notes as it went on. The other would take extensive notes, carefully observe the reactions of the respondent and the other interviewer, nod sagely from time to time, or grunt in the way of interviewers. The "passive" interviewer could thus assess the overall development of the interview, keep an eye on topics to be covered, and await the appropriate moment to take over' (Bechhofer, Elliott, and McCrone 1984: 97). The passive interviewer could intervene at any point at which he or she felt an issue needed to be probed further or felt the questioning needed a change of direction. It was also possible for the two interviewers to debate a point between themselves, as a means of drawing the interviewee into the discussion, but with less risk of antagonizing him or her than if he or she was the focus of the debate. Finally, the use of two interviewers enables the incorporation of different styles of questioning, as one interviewer can play the 'hard' role in asking difficult questions while the other can play a softer, more supportive one.

The use of multiple interviewers also contributed to a more informal atmosphere, akin to a discussion between three people rather than an exchange between two persons. However, they acknowledge that some respondents might find talking to two interviewers intimidating and that it might be inappropriate for some social groups. They claim it works best 'in what one might call "collegial" situations; a small group carrying out an investigation, doing the interviewing themselves and in constant touch with each other' (1984: 98). There are also disadvantages in terms of the time cost involved in having two interviewers attending each interview. They further highlight the importance of sensitivity; both interviewers need to be sensitive to each other, and to be able to read each others' conversational cues and respond to them.

In preparing for qualitative interviews, Lofland and Lofland (1995: 78) suggest asking yourself the question 'Just what about this thing is puzzling me?' This can be applied to each of the research questions you have generated or it may be a mechanism for generating some research questions. They suggest that your puzzlement can be stimulated by various activities: random thoughts in different contexts, which are then written down as



## Research in focus 18.6
## Photo-interviewing in a study of consumer behaviour

Hurworth (2003) suggests some ways that photographs can be integrated into the interviewing process (see also discussion of photo-elicitation in Chapter 8). Showing an interviewee a photo can help him or her recall events from the past, articulate abstract concepts, or express complex emotions. Photographs also have advantages in overcoming interviewees' discomfort in being interviewed and can simply help encourage them to discuss issues in more detail.

Heisley and Levy (1991) used photo-interviewing in a study of consumer behaviour related to family meals. They met each family and took photographs of them preparing and consuming dinner as a family. The researchers edited the photographs into a chronological set that represented the main events of the evening and the family members involved. Next, the informants were interviewed and asked to 'tell me whatever you think about when you look at [these photographs]' (Heisley and Levy 1991: 263). Finally, informants were shown the photographs again, accompanied by an audio recording of the first interview, and asked to comment on the data generated. One of the findings from the study related to how interviewees commented on the consumer products in the photograph, such as furnishings and table utensils, their responses highlighting how these objects are embedded in social relationships—for example, fondue sets as wedding gifts. They conclude: 'A photograph motivates people to provide a perspective of action, to explain what lies behind the pictures, and to relate how the frozen moment relates to the reality as they see it' (Heisley and Levy 1991: 269).

quickly as possible; discussions with colleagues, friends, and relatives; and, of course, the existing literature on the topic. The formulation of the research question(s) should not be so specific that alternative avenues of enquiry that might arise during the collection of fieldwork data are closed off. Such premature closure of your research focus would be inconsistent with the process of qualitative research (see Figure 16.1), with the emphasis on the world view of the people you will be interviewing, and with the approaches to qualitative data analysis like grounded theory that emphasize the importance of not starting out with too many preconceptions (see Chapter 22). Gradually, an order and structure will begin to emerge in your meanderings around your research question(s) and will form the basis for your interview guide.

You should also consider 'What do I need to know in order to answer each of the research questions I am interested in?' This means trying to get an appreciation of what the interviewee sees as significant and important in relation to each of your topic areas. Thus, your questioning will need to cover the areas that you need but from the perspective of your interviewees. This means that, even though qualitative research is predominantly unstructured, it is rarely so unstructured that the researcher cannot at least specify a research focus.

Some basic elements in the preparation of your interview guide will be:

- create a certain amount of order on the topic areas, so that your questions about them flow reasonably well, but be prepared to alter the order of questions during the actual interview;
- formulate interview questions or topics in a way that will help you to answer your research questions (but try not to make them too specific);
- try to use a language that is comprehensible and relevant to the people you are interviewing;
- just as in interviewing in quantitative research, do not ask leading questions;
- remember to ensure that you ask or record 'facesheet' information of a general kind (name, age, gender, etc.) and a specific kind (position in company, number of years employed, number of years involved in a group, etc.), because such information is useful for contextualizing people's answers.

There are some practical details to attend to before the interview.

- Make sure you are familiar with the setting in which the interviewee works, lives, or engages in the behaviour

of interest to you. This will help you to understand what he or she is saying in the interviewee's own terms.

- Get hold of a good tape recorder and microphone. Qualitative researchers nearly always tape-record and then transcribe their interviews. This procedure is important for the detailed analysis required in qualitative research and to ensure that the interviewees' answers are captured in their own terms. If you are taking notes, it is easy to lose the phrases and language used. Also, because the interviewer is supposed not to be following a strictly formulated schedule of questions of the kind used in structured interviewing, he or she will need to be responsive to the interviewee's answers so that it is possible to follow them up. A good microphone is highly desirable, because many interviews are let down by poor recording.
- Make sure as far as possible that the interview takes place in a setting that is quiet (so there is little or no outside noise that might affect the quality of the tape recording) and private (so the interviewee does not have to worry about being overheard).
- Prepare yourself for the interview by cultivating as many of the criteria of a quality interviewer suggested by Kvale (see Tips and skills 'Criteria of a successful interviewer') as possible.



## Tips and skills
## Criteria of a successful interviewer

Kvale (1996) has proposed a very useful list of ten criteria of a successful interviewer.

1. *Knowledgeable*: is thoroughly familiar with the focus of the interview; pilot interviews of the kind used in survey interviewing can be useful here.
2. *Structuring*: gives purpose for interview; rounds it off; asks whether interviewee has questions.
3. *Clear*: asks simple, easy, short questions; no jargon.
4. *Gentle*: lets people finish; gives them time to think; tolerates pauses.
5. *Sensitive*: listens attentively to what is said and how it is said; is empathetic in dealing with the interviewee.
6. *Open*: responds to what is important to interviewee and is flexible.
7. *Steering*: knows what he or she wants to find out.
8. *Critical*: is prepared to challenge what is said—for example, dealing with inconsistencies in interviewees' replies.
9. *Remembering*: relates what is said to what has previously been said.
10. *Interpreting*: clarifies and extends meanings of interviewees' statements, but without imposing meaning on them.

To Kvale's list we would add the following.

- *Balanced*: does not talk too much, which may make the interviewee passive, and does not talk too little, which may result in the interviewee feeling he or she is not talking along the right lines.
- *Ethically sensitive*: is sensitive to the ethical dimension of interviewing, ensuring the interviewee appreciates what the research is about, its purposes, and that his or her answers will be treated confidentially.

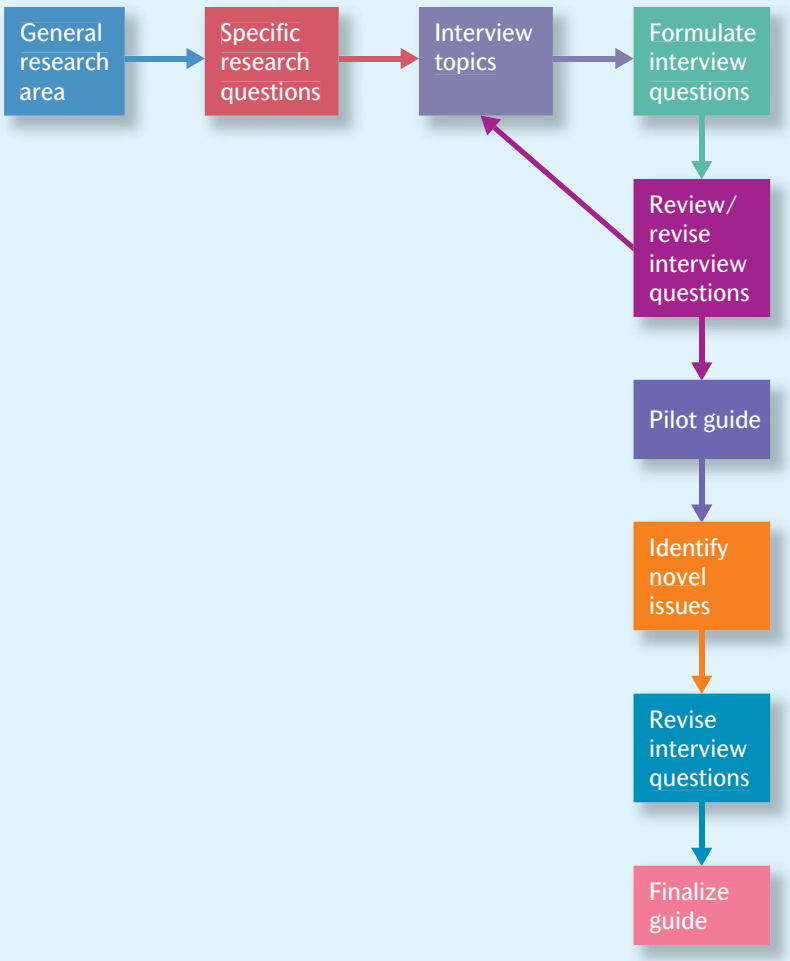
After the interview, make notes about:

- how the interview went (was interviewee talkative, cooperative, nervous, well dressed/scruffy, etc.?);
- where the interview took place;
- any other feelings about the interview (did it open up new avenues of interest?);
- the setting (busy/quiet, many/few other people in the vicinity, new/old buildings, use of computers).

These various guidelines suggest the series of steps in formulating questions for an interview guide in qualitative research presented in Figure 18.1.

# Figure 18.1

**Formulating questions for an interview guide**




## Kinds of questions

The kinds of question asked in qualitative interviews are highly variable. Kvale (1996) has suggested nine different kinds of question. Most interviews will contain virtually all of them, although interviews that rely on lists of topics are likely to follow a somewhat looser format. Kvale's nine types of question are as follows.

1. *Introducing questions*: 'Please tell me about when your interest in *X* first began'; 'Have you ever . . . ?'; 'Why did you go to . . . ?'
2. *Follow-up questions*: getting the interviewee to elaborate his or her answer, such as 'Could you say some more about that?'; 'What do you mean by that . . . ?'; 'Can you give me an example . . . ?'; even 'Yeeees?'
3. *Probing questions*: following up what has been said through direct questioning.
4. *Specifying questions*: 'What did you do then?'; 'How did *X* react to what you said?'
5. *Direct questions*: 'Do you find it easy to keep smiling when serving customers?'; 'Are you happy with the amount of on-the-job training you have received?' Such questions are perhaps best left until towards the end of the interview, in order not to influence the direction of the interview too much.



## Tips and skills
## Interviewing for the first time

The prospect of doing your first interview can be daunting. Also, it is easy to make some fundamental mistakes when you begin interviewing. An American study of postgraduates' experiences of a lengthy interview training course showed that novice interviewers were easily thrown out by a number of events or experiences in the course of the interview (Roulston, DeMarrais, and Lewis 2003). The researchers' findings suggest five challenges that are worth bearing in mind when approaching your first interview(s).

1. *Unexpected interviewee behaviour or environmental problems.* These inexperienced interviewers were easily discomforted by responses or behaviour on the part of the interviewees or by problems like noise in the vicinity of the interview. When you go into the interview, bear in mind that things may not go according to plan. Interviewees may say things that you find surprising or shocking. Equally, there can be many distractions close to where the interview takes place. You clearly cannot plan for or control these things, but you can bear in mind that they might happen and try to limit their impact on you and on the course of the interview.
2. *Intrusion of own biases and expectations.* Roulston et al. report that some of the trainees were surprised when they read their own transcripts at how their own biases and expectations were evident in the ways they asked questions and followed up on replies.
3. *Maintaining focus in asking questions*. Students reported that they sometimes had difficulty probing answers, asking follow-up questions, and clarifying questions in a way that did not lose sight of the research topic and what the questions were getting at.
4. *Dealing with sensitive issues*. Some students asked questions that caused interviewees to become upset, and this response could have an adverse effect on the conduct of the interview. However, most students felt that they coped reasonably well with such emotionally charged situations.
5. *Transcription*. Many reported finding transcription difficult and time-consuming—more so than they had imagined.

There are, of course, many other possible issues that impinge on first-time interviewees. Many do not go away either, no matter how experienced you are. It is very difficult to know how to deal with some of these contingencies. However, it is worth bearing in mind that they do arise and that their impact may be greatest when you have less interviewing experience.

6. *Indirect questions*: 'What do most people round here think of the ways that management treats its staff?', perhaps followed up by 'Is that the way you feel too?', in order to get at the individual's own view.
7. *Structuring questions*: 'I would now like to move on to a different topic.'
8. *Silence*: allow pauses to signal that you want to give the interviewee the opportunity to reflect and amplify an answer.
9. *Interpreting questions*: 'Do you mean that your leadership role has had to change from one of encouraging others to a more directive one?'; 'Is it fair to say that you don't mind being friendly towards customers most of the time, but when they are unpleasant or demanding you find it more difficult?'

As this list suggests, one of the main ingredients of the interview is listening—being very attentive to what the interviewee is saying or even not saying. It means that the interviewer is active without being too intrusive—a difficult balance. But it also means that, just because the interview is being audio-recorded (the generally recommended practice whenever it is feasible), the interviewer cannot take things easy. In fact, an interviewer must be very attuned and responsive to what the interviewee is saying and doing. This is also important because something like body language may indicate that the interviewee is becoming uneasy or anxious about a line of questioning. An ethically sensitive interviewer will not want to place undue pressure on the person he or she is talking to and will need to be prepared to cut short that line of questioning if it is clearly a source of concern.



## Tips and skills
## Interviewees and distance

Sometimes you may need to contact interviewees who are a long way from you—perhaps even abroad. While interviewing in qualitative research is usually of the face-to-face kind, time and money restrictions may mean that you will need to interview such people in a less personal context. There are two possibilities. One is telephone interviewing. The cost of a telephone interview is much less than the cost involved in travelling long distances. Such interviewing is touched on in the context of the structured interview in Chapter 8. Another possibility is the online interview, in which the interview is conducted by email. This method is described in Chapter 26.

Remember as well that in interviews you are going to ask about different kinds of things, such as:

- values: of interviewee, of group, of organization;
- beliefs: of interviewee, of others, of group;
- behaviour: of interviewee, of others;
- formal and informal roles: of interviewee, of others;
- relationships: of interviewee, of others;
- places and locales;
- emotions: particularly of the interviewee, but also possibly of others;
- encounters;
- stories.

Try to vary the questioning in terms of types of question (as suggested by Kvale's nine types, which were outlined above) *and* the types of phenomena you ask about. Finally, you must think about how to end interviews satisfactorily, making sure that your interviewees have had a chance to comment fully on the topic concerned and giving them the opportunity to raise any issues that they think you have overlooked in your questions. The closing moments of an interview also provide an opportunity to include a final 'catch-all' question. Journalists sometimes refer to this as the 'doorknob question', since it is asked at the end, when rapport has been established and the interviewee has relaxed into the situation. This type of closing question tends to be directive—for example, 'If you were advising the organization on this subject, what are the main changes or improvements that you would recommend?' or 'From your experience in this area, what advice would you offer to other managers facing similar problems?' This encourages the interviewee to comment on specific issues and to put forward a personal opinion.



## Telling it like it is
## Learning how to interview

Karen found that through the experience of doing a research project involving qualitative interviewing she had acquired a new and potentially transferable skill. 'I learned a lot through the interviews that I did about how to probe and to get what you want out of it. You can so easily just go into an interview and just sit there and listen to what they're saying and then you go out and think, "Actually they didn't give me anything that I wanted. They just talked at me." But you need to balance that with not actually telling them what you want to know, but just sort of guiding them towards it so that you can achieve the objectives that you've got. That's another skill that I wouldn't say I've managed to learn completely, but I think it's something that you pick up and you can get better at through doing this sort of research. Since then I've done quite a lot of sort of client-based consultancy projects and I think this is definitely one of the main skills I applied there. Having it clear in your own mind what you want to get and asking the questions in a way that can get what you want without leading people to tell you what you want to hear.'

*To hear more about Karen's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

## Using an interview guide: an example

Research in focus 18.7 is taken from an interview from Bryman's (1999) study of visitors to Disney theme parks. The study was briefly mentioned in Chapter 7 as an example of a snowball sampling procedure. The interviews were concerned to elicit visitors' interpretations of the parks that had been visited. The interview is with a man who was in his sixties and his wife who was two years younger. They had visited Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida, and were very enthusiastic about their visit.



### Research in focus 18.7
### Part of the transcript of a semi-structured interview

| | |
|---|---|
| *Interviewer* | OK. What were your views or feelings about the presentation of different cultures, as shown in, for example, Jungle Cruise or It's a Small World at the Magic Kingdom or in World Showcase at Epcot? |
| *Wife* | Well, I thought the different countries at Epcot were wonderful, but I need to say more than that, don't I? |
| *Husband* | They were very good and some were better than others, but that was down to the host countries themselves really, as I suppose each of the countries represented would have been responsible for their own part, so that's nothing to do with Disney, I wouldn't have thought. I mean some of the landmarks were hard to recognize for what they were supposed to be, but some were very well done. Britain was OK, but there was only a pub and a Welsh shop there really, whereas some of the other pavilions, as I think they were called, were good ambassadors for the countries they represented. China, for example, had an excellent 360 degree film showing parts of China and I found that very interesting. |
| *Interviewer* | Did you think there was anything lacking about the content? |
| *Husband* | Well I did notice that there weren't many black people at World Showcase, particularly the American Adventure. Now whether we were there on an unusual day in that respect I don't know, but we saw plenty of black Americans in the Magic Kingdom and other places, but very few if any in that World Showcase. And there was certainly little mention of black history in the American Adventure presentation, so maybe they felt alienated by that, I don't know, but they were noticeable by their absence. |
| *Interviewer* | So did you think there were any special emphases? |
| *Husband* | Well thinking about it now, because I hadn't really given this any consideration before you started asking about it, but thinking about it now, it was only really representative of the developed world, you know, Britain, America, Japan, world leaders many of them in technology, and there was nothing of the Third World there. Maybe that's their own fault, maybe they were asked to participate and didn't, but now that I think about it, that does come to me. What do you think, love? |
| *Wife* | Well, like you, I hadn't thought of it like that before, but I agree with you. |

The sequence begins with the interviewer asking what would be considered a 'direct question' in terms of the list of nine question types suggested by Kvale (1996) and outlined above. The replies are very bland and do little more than reflect the interviewees' positive feelings about their visit to Disney World. The wife acknowledges this when she says 'but I need to say more than that, don't I?' Interviewees frequently know that they are expected to

be expansive in their answers. This sequence occurred around halfway through the interview, so the interviewees were primed by then into realizing that more details were expected. There is almost a tinge of embarrassment that the answer has been so brief and unilluminating. The husband's answer is more expansive but not particularly enlightening.

There then follows the first of two important prompts by the interviewer. The husband's reponse is more interesting in that he now begins to answer in terms of the possibility that black people were under-represented in attractions like the American Adventure, which tells the story of America through tableaux and films via a debate between two audio-animatronic figures—Mark Twain and Benjamin Franklin. The second prompt yields further useful reflection, this time carrying the implication that Third World countries are under-represented in the World Showcase in the Epcot Centre. The couple are clearly aware that it is the prompting that has made them provide these reflections when they say: 'Well thinking about it now, because I hadn't really given this any consideration before you started asking about it' and 'Well, like you, I hadn't thought of it like that before'. This is the whole point of prompting—to get the interviewee to think more about the topic and to provide the opportunity for a more detailed response. It is not a leading question, since the interviewees were not being asked, 'Do you think that the Disney company fails to recognize the significance of Black history (or ignores the Third World) in its presentation of different cultures?' There is no doubt that it is the prompts that elicit the more interesting replies, but that is precisely their role.



## Tips and skills
## Why you should record and transcribe interviews

With approaches that entail detailed attention to language, such as conversation analysis and discourse analysis (see Chapter 20), the recording of conversations and interviews is to all intents and purposes mandatory. However, researchers who use qualitative interviews and focus groups (see Chapter 19) also tend to record and then transcribe interviews. Heritage (1984: 238) suggests that the procedure of recording and transcribing interviews has the following advantages.

- It helps to correct the natural limitations of our memories and of the intuitive glosses that we might place on what people say in interviews.
- It allows more thorough examination of what people say.
- It permits repeated examinations of the interviewees' answers.
- It opens up the data to public scrutiny by other researchers, who can evaluate the analysis that is carried out by the original researchers of the data (that is, a secondary analysis).
- It therefore helps to counter accusations that an analysis might have been influenced by a researcher's values or biases.
- It allows the data to be reused in other ways from those intended by the original researcher—for example, in the light of new theoretical ideas or analytic strategies.

However, it has to be recognized that the procedure is very time-consuming. It also requires good equipment, usually in the form of a good-quality tape recorder and microphone, but also, if possible, a transcription machine. Transcription also very quickly results in a daunting pile of paper. Also, recording equipment may be offputting for interviewees.

It is also worth bearing in mind that, in our experience, focus group research, which is the subject of Chapter 19, can be difficult to transcribe. This is because people in the discussions often talk over each other, in spite of warnings by the **moderator** not to do so. Even a high-quality microphone will not readily deal with this issue. One possibility is to video-record, as well as audio-record. However, this is likely to be beyond the means of most students and also requires a very suitable environment for the focus group. The possible problems of transcription should be borne in mind if you are considering using a focus group.

## Recording and transcription

We have already made the point on several occasions that, in qualitative research, the interview is usually audio-recorded and transcribed whenever possible (see Tips and skills 'Why you should record and transcribe interviews'). Qualitative researchers are frequently interested not just in *what* people say but also in the *way* that they say it. If this aspect is to be fully woven into an analysis, it is necessary for a complete account of the series of exchanges in an interview to be available. Also, because the interviewer is supposed to be highly alert to what is being said—following up interesting points made, prompting and probing where necessary, drawing attention to any inconsistencies in the interviewee's answers—it is best if he or she is not distracted by having to concentrate on getting down notes on what is said.

As with just about everything in conducting business research, there is a cost (other than the financial cost of tape recorders and tapes), in that the use of a tape recorder may disconcert respondents, who become self-conscious or alarmed at the prospect of their words being preserved. Most people accede to the request for the interview to be audio-recorded, though it is not uncommon for a small number to refuse (see Research in focus 18.8). When faced with refusal, you should still go ahead with the interview, as it is highly likely that useful information will still be forthcoming. For example, Prasad (1993; see Chapter 16) recounts that, in the few instances where employees at Paragon indicated discomfort with being recorded, she took notes during the interview and wrote these up after the session. The summary notes were then shown to the interviewee, who evaluated their accuracy. This advice also applies to cases of recorder malfunction (again see Research in focus 18.8). Among those who do agree to be audio-recorded, there will be some who will not get over their alarm at being confronted with a microphone. As a result, some interviews may not be as interesting as you might have hoped. In qualitative research, there is often quite a large amount of variation in the amount of time that interviews take. For example, in Milkman's (1997) study of technological change at General Motors, the length of the interviews ranged between forty-five minutes and four hours. Similarly, Marshall's (1995; see Key concept 16.5) research into women managers involved interviews with women managers that lasted between one-and-a-half and two hours. It should not be assumed that shorter interviews are necessarily inferior to longer ones, but very short ones that are a product of interviewee non-cooperation or anxiety about being audio-recorded are likely to be less useful. In the extreme, when an interview has produced very little of significance, it may not be worth the time and cost of transcription. Thankfully, such occasions are relatively unusual. If people do agree to be interviewed, they usually do so in a cooperative way and loosen up after initial anxiety about the microphone. As a result, even short interviews are often quite revealing.



### Research in focus 18.8
### Getting it recorded and transcribed: an illustration of two problems

Rafaeli et al. (1997) conducted semi-structured interviews with twenty female administrators in a university business school in order to study the significance of dress at the workplace. They write:

> Everyone we contacted agreed to participate. Interviews took place in participants' offices or in a school lounge and lasted between 45 minutes and three hours. We recorded and transcribed all but two interviews: 1 participant refused to be taped, and the tape recorder malfunctioned during another interview. For interviews not taped, we recorded detailed notes. We assured all participants that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous and hired an outside contractor to transcribe the interviews. (1997: 14)

Even though overall this interview study was highly successful, generating eighteen interviews that were recorded and transcribed, it does show two kinds of problems qualitative interviewers can face—namely, hardware malfunctions and refusals to be recorded.



## Tips and skills
## Transcribing interviews

If you are doing research for a project or dissertation, you may not have the resources to pay for professional transcription, and, unless you are an accurate touch typist, it may take you a lot longer than the suggested five to six hours per hour of speech. If you have access to a transcription machine with a foot-operated stop–start mechanism, this will make the task of transcription somewhat easier. However, the important thing to bear in mind is that you must allow sufficient time for transcription and be realistic about how many interviews you are going to be able to transcribe in the time available.

The problem with transcribing interviews is that it is very time-consuming. Pettigrew (1985) notes that his interviews at Imperial Chemical Industries (ICI) produced around 500 hours of audio-recorded information for analysis, which were either completely transcribed or coded onto 8 × 5 inch cards according to predetermined and emergent categories. Similarly, in their study of traders and managers in four investment banks, Willman et al. (2002) interviewed 118 traders and tradermanagers and 10 senior managers. Interviews averaged one hour in duration, and they were all recorded and transcripts were produced. It is best to allow around five to six hours for transcription for every hour of speech. Also, transcription yields vast amounts of paper, which you will need to wade through when analysing the data. Prasad (1993) reports that her 34 interviews on computerization (see Chapter 16) generated nearly 800 pages of interview transcripts that needed to be analysed, in addition to over 1,800 pages of field notes from observations. It is clear, therefore, that, while transcription has the advantage of keeping intact the interviewee's (and interviewer's) words, it does so by piling up the amount of text to be analysed. It is no wonder that writers like Lofland and Lofland (1995) advise that the analysis of qualitative data is not left until all the interviews have been completed and transcribed. To procrastinate may give the researcher the impression that he or she faces a monumental task. Also, there are good grounds for making analysis an ongoing activity, because it allows the researcher to be more aware of emerging themes that he or she may want to ask about in a more direct way in later interviews. The preference for ongoing analysis is also very much recommended by proponents of approaches to qualitative data analysis like grounded theory (see Chapter 22).



## Tips and skills
## Conventions when using direct quotations from an interview

When you are transcribing an interview, it is important that the written text reproduces exactly what the interviewee said, word for word. For this reason, if there are parts of the interview that you cannot hear properly on the recording, do not be tempted to guess or make them up. Instead indicate in your transcript that there is a missing word or phrase, for example by using the convention {???}. This helps to give the reader confidence in your data collection process. However, people rarely speak in fully formed sentences. They often repeat themselves and they may have verbal 'tics' in the form of a common word or phrase that is repeated either through habit or just because they like it! So when it comes to writing up your research, when you will probably wish to quote directly from the interview transcripts, you may want to edit out some of these digressions for the sake of length and ease of understanding. However, you must make sure that you do not paraphrase the words of the speaker and then claim these as the actual words that were spoken because this is misleading, and there is always the possibility that someone reading your work might suspect that people did not really speak in such a fluent way. The use of certain conventions when quoting from an interview transcript helps to overcome these problems.

- Use quotation marks to indicate that this is a direct quotation or indicate this by consistently setting quotes so they stand out from the main body text—for example, by indenting them or by using a different font, in a similar way to how you would quote at length from a book. This makes it immediately apparent to the reader that this is a direct quotation, and it enables you to differentiate between your presentation of the data and your analysis of it.
- If it is appropriate in relation to ethical considerations (see Chapter 5), indicate who is speaking in the quotation, either introducing the speaker before the quotation by saying something like 'As John put it,' or 'Anne explained her reasons for this', or attribute the quotation to the interviewee immediately afterwards, for example by writing his or her pseudonym or [Interviewee 1] in square brackets.
- If you wish to quote the first sentence from a section of speech and then a sentence or two further on from the transcript, use the convention of three consecutive dots to indicate the break point.
- If an interviewee omits a word from a sentence that is a grammatical omission or if the interviewee refers to a subject in a way that does not make its meaning clear and you need to provide readers with more contextual information so that they can understand the quote, use the convention of parentheses or square brackets in which you insert the words you have added.
- Finally, one of the most difficult things about presenting interview data as part of your analysis is that it can take some effort and perseverance to create a smooth flow to the text because of the switches between your 'voice', as the researcher, and the 'voices' of the interviewees, which can make the text seem quite fragmented. For this reason it is important to introduce direct quotes before you present them and then take a sentence or two of your analysis to explain in your own words how you have interpreted them. In this way you construct a narrative that guides the reader through your data and shows why you have chosen the particular quotations you have as illustrative of particular themes or concepts.

These conventions are applied in the example that follows, which is taken from an article that reports the findings from an interview study of Irish women entering the labour force (Collins and Wickham 2004; see Research in focus 2.20). As this study involved interviewing the women on more than one occasion, the authors also included specification of whether this was the first or second interview at the end of each quotation.

> Grace still hopes to move out of retail work and plans to start a bed and breakfast business:
>
> > I am aiming (to) leave the retailing industry completely . . . and I work in (an area of Dublin) which is logistically quite far from where I live and people say to me 'would you not get a transfer' . . . and I say why would I transfer from the devil to the deep blue sea. I'd want to move into something completely different . . . I'd hate to think that was my only ambition to get the company to move me to a different store. (First interview)

It is easy to take the view that transcription is a relatively unproblematic translation of the spoken into the written word. However, given the reliance on transcripts in qualitative research based on interviews, the issue should not be taken lightly. The first question to consider is whether to do the transcription yourself, or to use secretarial assistance. Transcribers need to be trained in much the same way that interviewers do. Moreover, even among experienced transcribers, errors can creep in. For example, Spender (1989) describes how, of the thirty-four interviews in his sample, twenty-five were transcribed. During the exploratory stages of the research this was done by assistants. However, this proved unsatisfactory, as 'there are important data in the respondent's intonations, hesitations, etc. which need to be available'. He concluded that 'the recording can help to recapture the actual data, which is neither the recording, nor the transcript, but the researcher's experience of the interview in its own context' (1989: 82). Poland (1995) has provided some fascinating examples of mistakes in transcription that can be the result of many different factors (mishearing, fatigue, carelessness). For example, one transcript contained the following passage:

```
I think unless we want to become like
other countries, where people have, you
know, democratic freedoms . . .
```

But the actual words on the audio-recording were:

> I think unless we want to become like other countries, where people have no democratic freedoms... (Poland 1995: 294)

Steps clearly need to be taken to check on the quality of transcription.

### Flexibility in the interview

One further point to bear in mind is that you need to be generally flexible in your approach to interviewing in qualitative research. This advice is not just to do with needing to be responsive to what interviewees say to you and following up interesting points that they make. Such flexibility *is* important and is an important reminder that, with semi-structured interviewing, you should not turn



## Tips and skills
## Transcribing sections of an interview

Some interviews or at least large portions of them are sometimes not very useful, perhaps because interviewees are reticent or their answers are not as relevant to your research topic as you had hoped. There seems little point in transcribing material that you know is unlikely to be fruitful. It may be that, for many of your interviews, it would be better to listen to them closely first, at least once or more usually twice, and then transcribe only those portions that you think are useful or relevant. However, this may mean that you miss certain things or that you have to go back to the recordings at a later stage in your analysis to try to find something that emerges as significant only later on.



## Telling it like it is
## To transcribe or not to transcribe?

Angharad decided to transcribe all ten of her interviews in their entirety, as she explains in this extract from our interview with her.

*Emma*: Uh-huh. And did you record the interviews or take notes? How did you deal with it?

*Angharad*: I took notes, but I recorded all the interviews as well and transcribed all of those.

*Emma*: Right.

*Angharad*: I only took notes just in case it didn't work.

*Emma*: Yes, that's always a good idea. And in terms of the transcription, that's quite a big job. How did you find that?

*Angharad*: Horrible! It was horrible! It was a mission, but I was so glad that I did it actually because it made actually writing up the analysis and the research and thinking about it so much easier when you've got it in front of you rather than if I'd had to sit there and listen to the tapes over and over again. I think it would have been a lot more difficult.

*Emma*: Hmmm. I mean it is a time-consuming business as well. How long did it take you?

*Angharad*: I did it over Christmas—not actually on Christmas Day! [*chuckles*]—but I'd say it probably took me a week pretty much solidly to write them all up.

Lucie also found the process of transcribing her interviews to be very time-consuming, but she did also see benefits in the process: 'It was quite tedious because you have to write down everything that they say, even the kind of things that you know you won't be using. And I'm not a touch-typist or anything, so I had to like go back

and listen over again. It took a long time. It would take three times the amount of time of the interview to transcribe it. Even longer actually! But it was quite useful because listening over again you pick up on things that you didn't pick up initially, but I didn't know if it was me reading into it too much because I'd heard it so many times. I was like "Oh, that's interesting!" and "What did she mean by that?" So I thought it was useful in that sense, but it was quite a long process'.

Karen, on the other hand, did not transcribe any of her fifteen interviews. Instead she took detailed notes that included some direct quotes from her interviewees. She explained: 'I think, looking back on it, I would have liked to have either had somebody else sitting in on the interview with me or to have an audio-recorder, but at the time it just wasn't possible. You just sort of grabbed a bit of time when you had it. I did some over the lunch hour and some sort of, you know, early in the morning when people had just got into work. It was just when I could actually get hold of people, but I think, looking back when I went back to some of my scripts I was sort of like you know, "What exactly did I mean there?" But I'd written down quotes, which I think was the most important thing because I'd captured exactly what some people said.'

Our final example is Tom, who transcribed the majority of his interviews but did not transcribe sections that he judged were unlikely to be useful: 'I didn't actually transcribe everything that was said to me because sometimes people would go off on a big explanation of technical procedures in the call centre, which I knew wasn't going to answer any of my research questions because I wasn't interested in making any technical recommendations about the organization of the work and so when people started going on into kind of procedures and how they prioritized calls I thought "There's no point in me transcribing this because it's not going to help me in any way." So I was a bit selective although I still had to transcribe most of it.'



*To hear more about these students' research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



## Tips and skills
## Digital audio recording

It is increasingly common for researchers to use digital equipment to record interviews. Digital voice recorders have a number of potential advantages. One of the main ones is the quality of the recording. Conventional cassette tape produces a background hiss that can interfere with the speaker's voice, particularly if he or she is softly spoken. Digital voice recording can, therefore, improve the accuracy of transcription. It can also be played back over and over again (for example, to try to catch a word that is difficult to hear) without the quality of the recording deteriorating, as it does on conventional tape. A further advantage is that you do not need to purchase audio tapes, which are becoming more difficult to obtain; instead the files are transferred from the recorder to a computer following the interview. The recordings can also be played back—for example, on an MP3 player like an iPod, as well as through speakers connected to a computer. Digital recorders are also extremely small, easy to use, light, and portable, making them unobtrusive in a research interview and easy to carry.

Digital recording also enables the use of digital editing programmes to adjust recording levels, adjust volume between different speakers, reduce background noise, extract information to protect anonymity, or cut out unwanted sections of recording (Stockdale 2002). There is also transcription software available that allows you to insert tags that show up in the transcribed text. When reading the transcript, you can click the tag and listen to the appropriate section of the audio recording. Finally, there are a number of voice-to-text software packages emerging, which claim to enable automatic transcription. Given the time-consuming nature of manual transcription, this superficially might seem very attractive, although they require a great deal of perseverance so that the software becomes accustomed to the speaker's voice.

However, there are certain disadvantages to consider if you are thinking of using this technology. First, there is the cost of the digital recorder, and you will probably also need an external microphone, because the internal

microphones are often of insufficient quality. Secondly, the files take up a considerable amount of computer memory—for example, a one-hour interview, recorded in mono format, can consume around 6MB of memory. This can be partly overcome by using a compression scheme that reduces the size of the file. Third, there is the risk of inadvertently deleting the file, which is arguably easier to do than losing a cassette. Fourth, whereas you can use a transcription machine with a pedal for controlling stopping, starting, and rewinding of a tape, there is no such equipment for digital recordings, although software has been developed that allows the equivalent of these tasks to be done on a computer. Finally, the technology is still quite new and rapidly changing, so there are various systems on the market and choosing which one to commit to can be difficult.

One intermediate solution to issues surrounding digital recordings of interviews is to record them directly onto cassette tapes. This might be regarded as defeating the object, but there is no background hiss, and the recordings are far superior to those generated from a microphone onto a tape. An interesting area of potential future development relates to the development of speech-recognition or voice-to-text software. Harlow et al. (2003) describe how this was used to assist older participants in telling their life stories. The researchers used a small digital audio recorder and headset microphone to interface with a personal computer on which a speech-recognition software program had been installed. The use of speech-recognition software requires the interviewee to complete an initial speech training. This provides the computer with a sample of his or her speech, which it uses to recognize the rest of the interview. This took twenty-five minutes at the start of each interview and involved the interviewee reading sixteen pages of written text into the recorder. The main challenge arose from having to correct the machine-generated text so that it matched the audio recording. This involved having to retype words or whole phrases that the software program had misinterpreted. The researchers note 'almost always the software program would get confused if people talked in asides. This was problematic as most if not all interviewees had occasions when they would start a sentence and then diverge and start talking in an aside' (Harlow et al. 2003: 399). The editing process averaged a staggering seven minutes per one minute of audio. As Harlow notes, 'someone with good typing skills could actually have transcribed the stories in less time than it took me to correct them' (Harlow et al. 2003: 404). To an extent, these difficulties can be overcome by 'vocabulary building', gradually correcting words that the computer gets wrong, but this has to be done using the voice of the original speaker, which is problematic in an interview study. Speech-recognition software thus might seem very attractive, but its effectiveness is limited in translating naturally occurring speech, with all its quick asides and lack of punctuation, into written text. However, the technology is developing fast, and it is reported that later versions of the software may require less voice training time. Some researchers have adapted to the use of speech-recognition software and the difficulty of getting interviewees voice-trained for the software by using their own voices to speak back all of the recording into the microphone so that their speech alone is processed by the software. They use a headset to listen to the recording and simultaneously speak what is said into the microphone, though it is necessary to keep on stopping and starting the recording that is being listened to.

the interview into a kind of structured interview but with open questions. Flexibility is important in such areas as varying the order of questions, following up leads, and clearing up inconsistencies in answers. Flexibility is important in other respects, such as coping with audio-recording equipment breakdown and refusals by interviewees to allow a recording to take place (see Research in focus 18.8). A further element is that interviewers often find that, as soon as they switch off their tape recorders, the interviewee continues to ruminate on the topic of interest and frequently will say more interesting things than in the interview. It is usually not feasible to switch the machine back on again, so try to take some notes, either while the person is talking or as soon as possible after the interview. Such 'unsolicited accounts' can often be the source of revealing information or views (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995). This is certainly what M. Parker (2000) found in connection with his research on three British organizations—a National Health Service District Health Authority, a building society, and a manufacturing company—which was based primarily on semi-structured interviews: 'Indeed, some of the most valuable parts of the interview took place after the tape had been switched off, the closing intimacies of the conversation being prefixed with a silent or explicit "Well, if you want to know what I really think . . .". Needless to say, a visit to the toilet to write up as much as I could remember followed almost immediately' (2000: 236).



## Tips and skills
## Translating interview data

As more and more business and management research is conducted from international or cross-cultural perspectives, this raises potential language and translation problems associated with collecting data in a language other than English and then translating it into English for the purposes of reporting it in a journal article or writing a dissertation. Xian (2008) argues that much of the discussion about this issue to date has been positivistic in orientation, seeing translation purely as a technical exercise rather than an interpretative process. Instead she argues that interview translation is based on the negotiation of cultural differences between the interviewer and the interviewee. Drawing on her study of Chinese women's narratives, she suggests that 'the translation process constitutes a (re)construction of the social reality of a culture in a different language, in which the translator interacts with the data, actively interpreting social concepts and meanings' (2008: 233). Xian identifies three types of problem associated with translating interview data:

1. *Linguistic.* This includes situations where interviewees use words for which there is no equivalent in English, or grammatical structures that cannot be translated easily.
2. *Sociocultural.* This includes difficulties associated with translating idioms or proverbs from one language to another that rely on socio-historical knowledge for their meaning. Xian recommends the use of footnotes to provide the contextual understanding through which the translation can be made meaningful. However, Xian is cautious about back-translating the transcript into the primary language and asking interviewees to verify the back-translation because of concern that they would just not be able to recognize their own accounts.
3. *Methodological*. Taking a postmodern perspective (see Chapter 27), Xian argues that translation is a process that involves the translator imposing his or her authority on the foreign culture. Instead she recommends a more reflexive approach that involves acknowledging and working with the difficulties associated with translation and not allowing silences to be overlooked.

Translation, she concludes, is therefore a sense-making process that involves the translator's knowledge, social background, and personal experience.



## Tips and skills
## Keeping the recorder going

Since interviewees sometimes 'open up' at the end of the interview, perhaps just when the tape recorder has been switched off, there are good grounds for suggesting that you should keep it switched on for as long as possible. So, when you are winding the interview down, don't switch off the tape recorder immediately.

## Telephone interviewing

Telephone interviewing is quite common in survey research, as was noted in Chapter 8. However, it has not been used a great deal in qualitative research. It is likely to have certain benefits when compared to face-to-face qualitative interviewing. One of these inevitably is cost, since it will be much cheaper to conduct qualitative interviews by telephone, just as it is with survey interviewing. It is likely to be especially useful for hard-to-reach

groups and when interviewer safety is a consideration. Further, it may be that asking sensitive questions by telephone will be more effective, since interviewees may be less distressed about answering when the interviewer is not physically present. It may also be that in organizations where the telephone is a core means of service delivery, such as call centres, or in organizations located overseas, the use of telephone interviewing as a research method may be more appropriate and more practical. For example, Patwardhan, Noble, and Nishihara (2009) were interested in the use of strategic deception by call centre operators to develop relationships with consumers, through such tactics as giving a Western 'pseudo name' (2009: 321), or pretenting that the call centre was in a location in the USA or UK rather than in India. They carried out twelve face-to-face and nine telephone interviews with call centre operators who worked for a healthcare financial service company in India in order qualitatively to explore the types of deception used with Western consumers. The authors state that the decision to carry out face-to-face versus telephone interviews was made purely for practical reasons; international telephone interviews made from the USA where the researchers worked were the second choice in cases where it was not possible to meet the interviewee face to face. However, it may be argued that, because call centre workers use the telephone as their main medium of communication with consumers, they might be more comfortable participating in a telephone interview study than other groups of employees. Furthermore, since this study focused on ethically sensitive practices—that is, call centre workers lying to consumers, and the training given by the company to support these deceptive practices—it could be that the lack of physical proximity between the researcher and the participants enabled by telephone interviewing increased the employees' sense of anonymity and encouraged them to participate in the study.

Certain issues about the use of telephone interviewing in qualitative research need to be borne in mind. Most obviously, it will not be appropriate to some groups of interviewees, such as those with no or limited access to telephones. Secondly, it is unlikely to work well with very long interviews. It is much easier for the interviewee to terminate a telephone interview than one conducted in person. This is especially significant for qualitative interviews, which are often time-consuming for intervieweees. Thirdly, it is not possible to observe body language to see how interviewees respond in a physical sense to questions. Body language may be important, because through it the interviewer may be able to discern such things as discomfort, puzzlement, or confusion. It should also be borne in mind that there can be technical difficulties with recording telephone interviews. Special equipment may be needed, and there is always the possibility that the line will be poor.



## Sampling

Many, if not most, of the issues raised in connection with sampling in ethnographic research apply more or less equally to sampling in qualitative interviewing. Very often, the lack of transparency that is sometimes a feature of qualitative research (referred to in Chapter 16) is particularly apparent in relation to sampling. It is sometimes more or less impossible to discern from researchers' accounts of their methods either *how* their interviewees were selected or *how many* there were of them. Often, qualitative researchers are clear that their samples are convenience or opportunistic ones, and, on other occasions, the reader suspects that this is the case. This may be due to a belief that, because it aims to generate an in-depth analysis, issues of representativeness are less important in qualitative research than they are in quantitative research. For her study of women managers, Marshall (1984) made a number of decisions to limit certain potential influencing factors. First, to interview only in and around London, to reduce the significance of whether or not managers were geographically mobile; secondly, to impose an upper age limit of 45 years, to reduce the potential differences between generations; thirdly, to contact several people in each company to provide a guide to the influence of the company; and, fourthly, to restrict the number of personnel managers in the sample, to avoid weighting her sample towards this 'traditional stronghold of female employment' (1984: 115). Sometimes, convenience samples may be the result of restrictions placed on the researcher—for example, when members of an organization select interviewees rather than give the researcher a free rein to do so.



## Telling it like it is
## How many interviews in a student research project?

One of the questions that we are often asked by students at postgraduate as well as undergraduate level is how many interviews they should do for their research project. As Tom explained: 'I think this is one of the key questions that people ask. You say "What's the minimum number of interviews I have to do to make this project viable?" [*chuckles*] and my tutor did say that because I'd decided to cut myself free from the bounds of positivism I could just do one interview if I wanted to and that would be quite legitimate. I didn't quite feel up to doing that. I think there were about 40 people [who] worked in this call centre, so I kind of felt I needed to get a reasonable feel for what life was like there so I did eight interviews but it wasn't very scientific.'

This is also an area where practice varies from one university business school to another, depending on the word limit set for the dissertation, time available, credit weighting of the dissertation within the degree course as a whole, the attitudes of those people who are running the course, and the expectations of your supervisor. So you should definitely refer to the advice given by your own university on this. However, it is useful to compare the experiences of some of the undergraduate students we interviewed.

Chris did four interviews with three female managers and the head of diversity who was also a woman. He audio-recorded them and then listened to the tape a number of times, looking for patterns in what each interviewee was saying and writing down 'bits and pieces of it'.

Angharad did ten interviews each lasting about half an hour with women managers in one department of a public-sector organization. She took notes and audio-recorded them and transcribed them afterwards.

Nirwanthi carried out seven interviews with managers in one company. She audio-recorded them and took notes as well. She had to conduct two of the interviews in the Sri Lankan language of Sinhala, 'because it was easier for the employees to speak to me in Sinhala rather than in English', later translating these into English. She then listened to each interview once or twice, making more notes and summarizing them.

Karen did fifteen interviews with managers in one organization, each lasting one hour, taking notes throughout.

As the above summaries illustrate, there is quite a difference in the number of interviews carried out by each of these students. However, it is important not to place too much emphasis on our sample, which is not statistically representative of the entire population of business school students in the UK. It is also important to note that the expectations for postgraduate student dissertations may be higher than those for undergraduates.



*To hear more about these students' research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

Another example of opportunistic sampling is provided by Jackall (1988), who went into several large organizations in order to study how bureaucracy shapes moral consciousness. Analysis of the occupational ethics of corporate managers was based on core data of 143 intensive, semi-structured interviews with managers at every level of the organization. This formed the basis for selection of a smaller stratified group of twelve managers, who were reinterviewed several times and asked to interpret materials that Jackall was collecting. However, as the study progressed Jackall realized that an investigation of organizational morality should also explore managerial dissenters, or 'whistleblowers'—individuals who had taken stands against their organizations on grounds that they defined as moral. Between 1982 and 1988, Jackall conducted case studies of these dissenters, interviewing eighteen 'whistleblowers' and reviewing large amounts of documentary evidence. In order to explore managerial morality further, he then presented these cases to the stratified group of twelve managers, and asked them 'to assess the dissenters' actions and motives by their own standards' (1988: 206).



## Telling it like it is
## Stratified sampling in a student's research project

Lucie's interview sampling strategy within the institute was based on stratified sampling to gain an impression of views of enterprise at different levels of the organization. 'There aren't that many staff in the institute and the main people basically oversee everything, so they knew everything. So I interviewed the Director and the Administrator, because they were the people that I was dealing with, so they were the easiest to access for an interview I suppose. And . . . then I interviewed a few people who worked as temps just to get their perspective, because obviously the Director and the Administrator, they'd be very positive about their institute. So I wanted to get a smaller person's—if that's the right word—perspective on the institute as well, to see whether that was how it was really run.'



*To hear more about Lucie's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

Snowball sampling is sometimes used to contact groups of people for whom there is no sampling frame. This approach was employed in Bryman's study of visitors to Disney theme parks and by Marshall (1984), who asked women managers to suggest other potential interviewees. Pettigrew and McNulty (1995) also describe their in-depth interview research into part-time board members of top UK firms as based on a 'snowball effect'. Pilot-study interviews with twenty board members were used to get access to other prominent directors in the overall population. Pettigrew and McNulty's research approach is guided by the assumption that access to elites is best achieved through other elite members.

Sometimes, a probability sampling approach is employed. The research on organizational dress by Rafaeli et al. (1997; see Research in focus 18.8) employed such an approach. The authors write: 'First, we identified a stratified random sample of 20 people from the population of full-time, permanent administrative employees in the organization' (1997: 13–14). The stratifying criteria were administrative section and hierarchical level. A similar kind of sampling strategy occurs when a sample of interviewees is taken (sometimes randomly, sometimes by ensuring a 'spread' in terms of stratifying criteria) from a much larger sample generated for social survey purposes. This approach allows the researcher to sample purposively (if not randomly) and so ensure a wide range of characteristics of interviewees. Pringle (1988) also used this approach in a study of power relations and secretarial work. This study involved interviews with secretarial students and with a range of workers, both secretarial and non-secretarial, in a variety of Australian workplaces. The first stage of this process involved groups of three secretarial students who were interviewed for 20–30 minutes about their course. A smaller sample ($n$ = 30) were interviewed again near the end of their course and then followed into the workforce. Fifteen were interviewed a third time individually at home and asked to reflect on the value of their course. The second stage of interviews was carried out in a representative range of workplaces. 'Of 244 interviews 72 were with employees in the public sector, 32 with unions, 92 with large corporations and 44 with small companies, agencies and partnerships' (Pringle 1988: 268). A breakdown of interviewees by occupation is given in Table 18.1.

In addition, a theoretical sampling approach might be employed (see Key concept 17.11 and Figure 17.2). This

## Table 18.1

**A stratified interview sample**

| Interviewees by occupation | Number | % |
|---|---|---|
| Top and middle management | 54 | 22 |
| Lower management | 22 | 9 |
| Administrative | 18 | 7.5 |
| Supervisory | 9 | 3.5 |
| Personal assistant | 3 | 1.5 |
| Secretary (1 boss) | 67 | 27.5 |
| Secretary (2+ bosses) | 29 | 12 |
| Word processor/typist | 22 | 9 |
| Clerical assistant | 20 | 8 |
| Total | 244 | 100 |

*Source*: adapted from Pringle (1988).

approach entails sampling interviewees until your categories achieve theoretical saturation (see Key concept 17.12) and selecting further interviewees on the basis of your emerging theoretical focus. The approach is supposed to be an iterative one—that is, one in which there is a movement backwards and forwards between sampling and theoretical reflection—but it may be that the researcher feels that his or her categories achieve theoretical saturation at a relatively early stage. For example, for their research on organization dress, which was referred to in Research in focus 18.8, Rafaeli et al. (1997) initially employed a stratified random sampling approach (see above), but then evaluated their data 'after completing interviews with the 20 individuals selected and concluded that, because we had reached theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967), no additional interviews were necessary' (1997: 14). A sampling approach that is more in tune with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) idea of theoretical sampling is provided by Gephart (1993) in his account of a study of disaster sense-making (see Research in focus 18.9).

The chief virtue of theoretical sampling is that the emphasis is upon using theoretical reflection on data as the guide to whether or not more data are needed. It therefore places a premium on theorizing rather than on the statistical adequacy of a sample, which may be a limited guide to sample selection in many instances.



## Research in focus 18.9
## An example of theoretical sampling

Gephart (1993) developed a theoretical sample in his study of disaster sense-making, by deciding on analytic grounds which data to collect and analyse based on his emerging theory (see Research in focus 21.4 for a more detailed account of this study). Sampling was determined by three main considerations.

- *Persons and documents*. Gephart chose to focus on the testimony and remarks of (1) the assistant district manager and district manager from the company; (2) a pipeline crew member; and (3) the government energy board members and its attorneys. This analytic choice was made because these three parties represented the main cultural groups involved in the enquiry.
- *Key issues*. Ethnographic observation sensitized Gephart to the actors' concern with making sense of the disaster and determining who was responsible for the fire and related events. He then worked with the literature to review the theory of sense-making and used this concept to develop further his analysis.
- *Limits*. Sampling was also partly determined by Gephart's inability to gain access to publicly inaccessible settings. This meant that certain issues such as power and politics could not be addressed.



## Telling it like it is
## Purposive sampling in a student's research project

Karen's experience of semi-structured interviewing shows how interviewees may be selected purposively on the basis of their likely ability to contribute to theoretical understanding of a subject. As she explained: 'I wanted people who knew something about person–culture fit. I wanted people who were involved in the recruitment process and so I used my own contacts from within the organization, which then obviously brings up a possible element of bias, I suppose, because I didn't choose them by any random means. I chose them because I knew that they were already involved in it. The reason for that was that I wanted people who had opinions on it, whichever they were, so that I could really explore the ideas with them'.

*To hear more about Karen's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# Feminist research and interviewing in qualitative research

Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing have become extremely prominent methods of data gathering within a feminist research framework. In part, this is a reflection of the preference for qualitative research among feminist researchers, but it also reflects a view that the kind of interview with which qualitative research is associated allows many of the goals of feminist research to be realized. Indeed, the view has been expressed that, 'Whilst several brave women in the 1980s defended quantitative methods, it is nonetheless still the case that not just qualitative methods, but the in-depth face-to-face interview has become the paradigmatic "feminist method" ' (Kelly, Burton, and Regan 1994: 34). This comment is enlightening because it implies that it is not simply that qualitative research is seen by many writers and researchers as more consistent with a feminist position than quantitative research, but that specifically qualitative interviewing is seen as especially appropriate. The point that is being made here is not necessarily that such interviewing is somehow more in tune with feminist values than, say, ethnography (especially since it is often an ingredient of ethnographic research). Instead, it could be that the intensive and time-consuming nature of ethnography means that, although it has great potential as an approach to feminist research (see Chapter 17), qualitative interviewing is often preferred because it is usually less invasive in these respects.

However, it is specifically interviewing of the kind conducted in qualitative research that is seen as having potential for a feminist approach, not the structured interview with which survey research is associated. Why might one type of interview be consistent with a sensitivity to feminism and the other not? In a frequently cited article, Oakley outlines the following points about the standard survey interview.

- It is a one-way process—the interviewer extracts information or views from the interviewee.
- The interviewer offers nothing in return for the extraction of information. For example, interviewers using a structured interview do not offer information or their own views if asked. Indeed, they are typically advised not to do such things because of worries about contaminating their respondents' answers.
- The interviewer–interviewee relationship is a form of hierarchical or power relationship. Interviewers arrogate to themselves the right to ask questions, implicitly placing their interviewees in a position of subservience or inferiority.
- The element of power is also revealed by the fact that the structured interview seeks out information from the perspective of the researcher.
- Because of these points, the standard survey interview is inconsistent with feminism when women interview other women. This view arises because it is seen as indefensible for women to 'use' other women in these ways.

Instead of this framework for conducting interviews, feminist researchers advocate one that establishes:

- a high level of rapport between interviewer and interviewee;
- a high degree of reciprocity on the part of the interviewer;
- the perspective of the women being interviewed;
- a non-hierarchical relationship.

In connection with the reciprocity that she advocates, Oakley noted, for example, that, in her research on the transition to motherhood, she was frequently asked questions by her respondents. She argues that it was ethically indefensible for a feminist not to answer when confronted with questions of a certain kind. For Oakley, therefore, the qualitative interview was viewed as a means of resolving the dilemmas that she encountered as a feminist interviewing other women. However, as noted in previous chapters, while this broad adherence to a set of principles for interviewing in feminist research continues, it has been tempered by a greater recognition of the possible value of quantitative research.

An interesting dilemma that is perhaps not so easily resolved is the question of what feminist researchers should do when their own 'understandings and interpretations of women's accounts would either not be shared by some of them [i.e. the research participants], and/or represent a form of challenge or threat to their perceptions, choices and coping strategies' (Kelly, Burton, and Regan 1994: 37). It is the first type of situation that will be examined, at least in part, because, while it is of particular significance to feminist researchers, its implications are somewhat broader. It raises the tricky question

of how far the commitment of seeing through the eyes of the people you study can and/or should be stretched. Two examples are relevant here. Reinharz (1992: 28–9) cites the case of an American study by M. Andersen (1981), who interviewed twenty 'corporate wives', who came across as happy with their lot and were supportive of feminism only in relation to employment discrimination. Andersen interpreted their responses to her questions as indicative of 'false consciousness'—in other words, she did not really believe her interviewees. When Andersen wrote an article on her findings, the women wrote a letter rejecting her account, affirming that women can be fulfilled as wives and mothers. A similar situation confronted Millen (1997) when she interviewed thirty-two British female scientists using 'semi-structured, in-depth individual interviewing' (1997: 4.6). As Millen puts it:

> There was a tension between my interpretation of their reported experience as sex-based, and the meaning the participants themselves tended to attribute to their experience, since the majority of respondents did not analyse these experiences in terms of patriarchy or sex–gender systems, but considered them to be individualised, or as 'just something that had to be coped with' . . . From my external, academically privileged vantage point, it is clear that sexism pervades these professions, and that men are assumed from the start by other scientists to be competent scientists of status whilst women have to prove themselves, overcome the barrier of their difference before they are accepted. These women, on the other hand, did not generally view their interactions in terms of gendered social systems. There is therefore a tension between their characterisation of their experience and my interpretation of it . . . (1997: 5.6, 5.9)

Three interesting issues are thrown up by these two accounts. First, how can such a situation arise? This is an issue that pervades qualitative research that makes claims to reveal social reality as viewed by members of the setting in question. If researchers are genuinely seeing through others' eyes, the 'tension' to which Millen refers should not arise. However, it clearly can and does, and this strongly suggests that qualitative researchers are more affected by their own perspectives and research questions when collecting and analysing data than might be expected from textbook accounts of the research process. Secondly, there is the question of how to handle such a 'tension'—that is, how do you reconcile the two accounts? M. Andersen's (1981) solution to the tension she encountered was to reinterpret her findings in terms of the conditions that engender the contentment she uncovered. Thirdly, given that feminist research is often concerned with wider political goals of emancipation, a tension between participants' world views and the researcher's position raises moral questions about the appropriateness of imposing an interpretation that is not shared by research participants themselves. Such an imposition could hardly be regarded as consistent with the principle of a non-hierarchical relationship in the interview situation.

Therefore, while qualitative interviewing has become a highly popular research method for feminist researchers because of its malleability into a form that can support the principles of feminism, interesting questions are raised in terms of the relationship between researchers' and participants' accounts. Such questions have a significance generally for the conduct of qualitative research.



## Qualitative interviewing versus participant observation

The aim of this section is to compare the merits and limitations of interviewing in qualitative research with those of participant observation. These are probably the two most prominent methods of data collection in qualitative research, so there is some virtue in assessing their strengths, a debate that was first begun many years ago (Becker and Geer 1957*a*, *b*; Trow 1957). In this section, interviewing is being compared to participant observation rather than ethnography, because the latter invariably entails a significant amount of interviewing. So too does participant observation, but in this discussion we will be following the principle that we outlined in Key

concept 17.1—namely, that the term will be employed to refer to the specifically observational activities in which the participant observer engages. As noted in Key concept 17.1, the term 'ethnography' is being reserved for the wide range of data collection activities in which ethnographers engage—one of which is participant observation—along with the written account that is a product of those activities.

## Advantages of participant observation in comparison to qualitative interviewing

### Seeing through others' eyes

As noted in Chapters 1 and 16, this is one of the main tenets of qualitative research, but, on the face of it, the participant observer would seem to be better placed for gaining a foothold on social reality in this way. The researcher's prolonged immersion in a social setting would seem to make him or her better equipped to see as others see. The participant observer is in much closer contact with people for a longer period of time; also, he or she participates in many of the same kinds of activity as the members of the social setting being studied. Research that relies on interviewing alone is likely to entail much more fleeting contacts, though in qualitative research interviews can last many hours and reinterviewing is not unusual.

### Learning the native language

Becker and Geer (1957*a*) argued that the participant observer is in the same position as a social anthropologist visiting a distant land, in that, in order to understand a culture, the language must be learned. However, it is not simply the formal language that must be understood in the case of the kinds of business research in which a participant observer in a complex organization engages. It is also very often the 'argot'—the special uses of words and slang that are important to penetrate that culture. Such an understanding is arrived at through the observation of language use.

### The taken for granted

Although much important information can be obtained through interviews, some kinds of data cannot be captured through this particular research method. The interview relies primarily on verbal behaviour and as such matters that interviewees take for granted are less likely to surface than in participant observation, where implicit features in social life are more likely to be revealed as a result of the observer's continued presence and because of the ability to observe behaviour rather than just to rely on what is said. For example, few interviewees will be able accurately to recollect the dynamics of a meeting involving several people—they may remember parts of what was said, and the nature of the problem under discussion, but are unlikely to recollect how decisions evolved as part of a social process (Whyte 1953), so for this researchers must continue to rely on observation.

### Deviant and hidden activities

Much of what we know about patterns of resistance at work, industrial sabotage, and other criminal or deviant activity within organizations has been gleaned from participant observation. For example, Linstead's (1985) account of the practical jokes, general kidding, and games played by bakery workers was obtained through participant observation. Similarly, Collinson's (1988) analysis of humour in the context of a male-dominated workplace (see also Chapter 17) relied partly on non-participant observation to obtain data about the daily jibes, socialization rituals, and initiation ceremonies that characterized daily life on the shopfloor at Slavs. These are areas that insiders are likely to be reluctant to talk about in an interview context alone. Understanding is again likely to come through prolonged interaction. Ethnographers conducting participant observation are more likely to place themselves in situations in which their continued involvement allows them gradually to infiltrate such social worlds and to insinuate themselves into the lives of people who might be sensitive to outsiders.

### Sensitivity to context

The participant observer's extensive contact with a social setting allows the context of people's behaviour to be mapped out fully. The participant observer interacts with people in a variety of situations and possibly roles, so that the links between behaviour and context can be forged.

### Encountering the unexpected and flexibility

It may be that, because of the unstructured nature of participant observation, it is more likely to uncover unexpected topics or issues. Except with the most unstructured forms of interview, the interview process is likely to entail some degree of closure as the interview guide is put together, which may blinker the researcher slightly. Also, participant observation may be more flexible because of the tendency for interviewers to instil an element of comparability (and hence a modicum of structure) in their questioning of different people. Ditton's (1977) decision at a very late stage in the data collection process to focus

on pilferage in the bakery in which he was a participant observer is an example of this feature.

### Naturalistic emphasis

Participant observation has the potential to come closer to a naturalistic emphasis, because the qualitative researcher confronts members of a social setting in their natural environments. Interviewing, because of its nature as a disruption of members' normal flow of events, even when it is at its most informal, is less amenable to this feature. It is unsurprising, therefore, that, when referring to naturalism as a tradition in qualitative research, Gubrium and Holstein (1997; see Key concept 16.1) largely refer to studies in which participant observation was a prominent component (e.g. Whyte 1955).

## Advantages of qualitative interviewing in comparison to participant observation

### Issues resistant to observation

It is likely that there is a wide range of issues that are simply not amenable to observation, so that asking people about them represents the only viable means of finding out about them within a qualitative research strategy. For example, in Emma Bell's (2001) research on payment systems in the chemical industry, it was not really possible to explore the systems and rules whereby payments were made by observing shopfloor practices, although the latter was very useful in gaining an understanding of the cultural context in which payment systems were located. For most workers, payment is an issue that surfaces through consideration of issues that relate to the 'effort-bargain', and this understanding was more readily accessed through interviews.

### Reconstruction of events

Qualitative research frequently entails the reconstruction of events by asking interviewees to think back over how a certain series of events unfolded in relation to a current situation. An example is Pettigrew's (1985) research on ICI, which entailed interviewing about contemporaneous events but also included 'retrospective interviewing', as Pettigrew defines it (see Research in focus 2.16). This reconstruction of events is something that cannot be accomplished through participant observation alone.

### Ethical considerations

There are certain areas that could be observed—albeit indirectly through hidden hardware like a microphone—but to do so would raise ethical considerations. For example, Ditton (1977) never disclosed to his fellow workers in the bakery that he was interested in pilferage, although he did seek to protect their anonymity, by omitting names and changing other irrelevant facts in the published study. He goes on to claim that he could not have disclosed his interest in pilferage, partly because he did not decide to concentrate on this subject until some time after the conclusion of the study. However, in this case, participant observation does raise ethical issues relating to the observation of criminal activity and the extent to which the researcher actively participates in it.

### Reactive effects

The question of reactive effects is by no means a straightforward matter. As with structured observation (see Chapter 11), it might be anticipated that the presence of a participant observer would result in reactive effects (see Key concept 11.8). People's knowledge of the fact that they are being observed may make them behave less naturally. However, participant observers, like researchers using structured observation, typically find that people become accustomed to their presence and begin to behave more naturally the longer they are around. Indeed, members of social settings sometimes express surprise when participant observers announce their imminent departure when they are on the verge of disengagement. Interviewers clearly do not suffer from the same kind of problem, but it could be argued that the unnatural character of the interview encounter can also be regarded as a context within which reactive effects may emerge. Participant observation also suffers from the related problem of observers disturbing the very situation being studied, because conversations and interactions will occur in conjunction with the observer that otherwise would not happen. This is by no means an easy issue to resolve. and it seems likely that both participant observation and qualitative interviewing set in motion reactive effects but of different kinds.

### Less intrusive in people's lives

Participant observation can be very intrusive in people's lives in that the observer is likely to take up a lot more of their time than in an interview. Interviews in qualitative research can sometimes be very long and reinterviewing is not uncommon, but the impact on people's time will probably be less than having to take observers into account on a regular basis, though it is likely that this feature will vary from situation to situation. Participant observation is likely to be especially intrusive in terms

of the amount of people's time taken up when it is in organizational settings. In work organizations, there is a risk that the rhythms of work lives will be disrupted.

### Longitudinal research easier

One of the advantages of participant observation is that it is inherently longitudinal in character, because the observer is present in a social setting for a period of time. As a result, change and connections between events can be observed. However, there are limits to the amount of time that participant observers can devote to being away from their normal routines. Consequently, participant observation does not usually extend much beyond two to three years in duration. When participant observation is being conducted into an area of research that is episodic rather than requiring continued observation, a longer time period may be feasible. Pettigrew's (1985) research at ICI combined interviewing in late 1975, 1976, and early 1977, the latter parts of 1980 and early 1981, and again in 1982, with his interventions into the company as a consultant. During that period 134 people were interviewed from the ICI corporate headquarters and the four divisions under study. Several of these individuals were interviewed more than once, and the total number of research interviews amounted to 175. Kanter (1977) employed a similar strategy combining consultant activity with research over a five-year period. Research in focus 18.10 gives an example of a longitudinal telephone interview study that, although it took place over a shorter six-month time period, traced a period of dramatic change following the closure of a car plant that marked the loss of the last remaining British-owned car manufacturer. In summary, interviewing can be carried out within a longitudinal research design somewhat more easily, because repeat interviews may be easier to organize than repeat visits to participant observers' research settings, though the latter is not impossible. Following up interviewees on several occasions is likely to be easier than returning to research sites on a regular basis.

### Greater breadth of coverage

In participant observation, the researcher is invariably constrained in his or her interactions and observations to a fairly restricted range of people, incidents, and localities. Participant observation in a large organization, for example, is likely to mean that knowledge of that organization beyond the confines of the department or section in which the observation is carried out is not likely to be very extensive. Interviewing can allow access to a wider variety of people and situations.



## Research in focus 18.10
## A longitudinal interview study

Following the closure of the MG Rover car plant at Longbridge in the UK Midlands in April 2005, the Work Foundation embarked on a study commissioned by BBC Radio 4 to explore what happened to the workers following the job losses. The interview study was also the basis for a series of three radio programmes broadcast in 2006 to mark the first anniversary of the closure. The aims of the research were to find out if former MG Rover workers had found 'good' jobs or whether they had been forced to accept 'bad' jobs in an already economically disadvantaged region. The researchers also wanted to trace the effects of unemployment on those who had been unable to find jobs, on the workers themselves, their families, and their communities. Letters were sent to all ex-MG Rover workers inviting them to participate in the study, which would involve being interviewed by telephone. There were two waves of data collection: the first was in July 2005, when 273 telephone interviews were conducted with ex-MG Rover workers; the second, in December 2005, involved 232 telephone interviews with the same group (consisting of 83 per cent of the original sample). Although by the second wave of study nearly two-thirds of the sample had been re-employed, many of them were in 'bad' jobs. The researchers conclude that 'as a nation we must learn to proactively and effectively support those affected by structural change in the economy' (Armstrong 2006: 37).

The three radio programmes can be heard via the Radio 4 website at:
***www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/lifeafterrover/pip/dwshn*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

The 2006 Work Foundation report by Kathy Armstrong can be downloaded at:
***www.theworkfoundation.com/research/publications/publicationdetail.aspx?oItemId=59***
(accessed 23 July 2010)

### Specific focus

As noted in Chapter 16, qualitative research sometimes begins with a specific focus, and indeed Silverman (1993) has been critical of the notion that it should be regarded as an open-ended form of research. Qualitative interviewing would seem to be better suited to such a situation, since the interview can be directed at that focus and its associated research questions. Thus, the research by Bryman and his colleagues on the police had a very specific research focus in line with its Home Office funding—namely, conceptions of leadership among police officers (Bryman, Stephens, and A Campo 1996). The bulk of the data gathering was in two police forces and entailed the interviewing of police officers at all levels using a semi-structured interview guide. As it had such a clear focus, it was more appropriate to conduct the research by interview rather than participant observation, since issues to do with leadership notions may not crop up on a regular basis, which would make observation a very extravagant method of data collection.

## Overview

When Becker and Geer (1957*a*: 28) proclaimed over fifty years ago that the 'most complete form of the sociological datum . . . is the form in which the participant observer gathers it', Trow (1957: 33) reprimanded them for making such a universal claim and argued that 'the problem under investigation properly dictates the methods of investigation'. The latter view is very much the one taken in this book. Research methods are appropriate to researching some issues and areas but not others. The discussion of the merits and limitations of participant observation and qualitative interviews is meant simply to draw attention to some of the considerations that might be taken into account if there is a genuine opportunity to use one or the other in a study.

Equally, and to repeat an earlier point, the comparison is a somewhat artificial exercise, because participant observation is usually carried out as part of ethnographic research and as such it is usually accompanied by interviewing as well as other methods. In other words, participant observers frequently buttress their observations with methods of data collection that allow them access to important areas that are not amenable to observation. However, the aim of the comparison was to provide a kind of balance sheet in considering the strengths and limitations of a reliance on either participant observation or qualitative interview alone. Its aim is to draw attention to some of the factors that might be taken into account in deciding how to plan a study and even how to evaluate existing research.



## *Checklist*

### Issues to consider for your qualitative interview

- ◯ Have you devised a clear and comprehensive/informative way of introducing the research to interviewees?
- ◯ Does your interview guide clearly relate to your research questions?
- ◯ Have you piloted the guide with some appropriate respondents?
- ◯ Have you thought about what you will do if your interviewee does not turn up for the interview?
- ◯ Does the guide contain a good mixture of different kinds of questions, such as probing, specifying, and direct questions?
- ◯ Have you ensured that interviews will allow novel or unexpected themes and issues to arise?
- ◯ Is your language in the questions clear, comprehensible, and free of unnecessary jargon?
- ◯ Are your questions relevant to the people you are proposing to interview?
- ◯ Does your interview guide include requests for information about the interviewee, such as his or her age, work experience, position in the firm?

- ◯ Have your questions been designed to elicit reflective discussions, so that interviewees are not tempted to answer in 'yes' or 'no' terms?
- ◯ Do your questions offer a real prospect of seeing the world from your interviewees' point of view rather than imposing your own frame of reference on them?
- ◯ Are you familiar with the setting(s) in which the interviews will take place?
- ◯ Are you thoroughly familiar with and have you tested your recording equipment?
- ◯ Have you thought about how you will present yourself in the interview, such as how you will be dressed?
- ◯ Have you thought about how you will go about putting into operation the skills that make a good interviewer (see Tips and skills 'Criteria of a successful interivewer')?



## Key points

- Interviewing in qualitative research is typically of the unstructured or semi-structured kind.
- In qualitative research, interviewing may be the sole method in an investigation or may be used as part of an ethnographic study, or indeed in tandem with another qualitative method.
- Qualitative interviewing is meant to be flexible and to seek out the world views of research participants.
- If an interview guide is employed, it should not be too structured in its application and should allow some flexibility in the asking of questions.
- The qualitative interview should be audio-recorded and then transcribed.
- As with ethnographic research, investigations using qualitative interviews tend not to employ random sampling to select participants.
- The qualitative interview has become an extremely popular method of data collection in feminist studies.
- Whether to use participant observation or qualitative interviews depends in large part on their relative suitability to the research questions being addressed. However, it must also be borne in mind that participant observers invariably conduct some interviews in the course of their investigations.



## Questions for review

### *Differences between the structured interview and the qualitative interview*

- How does qualitative interviewing differ from structured interviewing?

### *Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing*

- What are the differences between unstructured and semi-structured interviewing?
- Could semi-structured interviewing stand in the way of flexibility in qualitative research?
- What are the differences between life history and oral history interviews?
- What kinds of consideration need to be borne in mind when preparing an interview guide?
- What kinds of question might be asked in an interview guide?

- What kinds of skill does the interviewer need to develop in qualitative interviewing?
- Why is it important to tape-record and transcribe qualitative interviews?

### *Sampling*

- Compare theoretical sampling and snowball sampling.

### *Feminist research and interviewing in qualitative research*

- Why has the qualitative interview become such a prominent research method for feminist researchers?
- What dilemmas might be posed for feminist researchers using qualitative interviewing?

### *Qualitative interviewing versus participant observation*

- Outline the relative advantages and disadvantages of qualitative interviewing and participant observation.
- Does one method seem more in tune with the preoccupations of qualitative researchers than the other?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Interviewing in Qualitative Research.*

# 19

# Focus groups

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 502

**Uses of focus groups** 503

**Conducting focus groups** 505

- Recording and transcription 505
- How many groups? 507
- Size of groups 508
- Level of moderator involvement 510
- Selecting participants 511
- Asking questions 511
- Beginning and finishing 513

**Group interaction in focus group sessions** 513

**The focus group as a feminist method** 514

**Limitations of focus groups** 515

***Checklist*** 517

***Key points*** 517

***Questions for review*** 518






## Chapter outline

The focus group method is an interview with several people on a specific topic or issue. This chapter explores:

- the possible reasons for preferring focus group interviews to individual interviews of the kind discussed in the previous chapter;
- the role of focus groups in market research;
- how focus groups should be conducted in terms of such features as the need for recording, the number and size of groups, how participants can be selected, and how direct the questioning should be;
- the significance of interaction between participants in focus group discussions;
- the suggestion that the focus group method fits particularly well with a feminist research approach;
- some practical difficulties with focus group sessions, such as the possible loss of control over proceedings and the potential for unwanted group effects.

# Introduction

We are used to thinking of the interview as something that involves an interviewer and one interviewee. Most textbooks reinforce this perception by concentrating on individual interviews. The focus group technique is a method of interviewing that involves more than one, usually at least four, interviewees. Essentially it is a group interview. Some authors draw a distinction between the focus group and the group interview techniques. Three reasons are sometimes put forward to suggest a distinction.

- Focus groups typically emphasize a specific theme or topic that is explored in depth, whereas group interviews often span very widely.
- Sometimes group interviews are carried out so that the researcher is able to save time and money by carrying out interviews with a number of individuals simultaneously. However, focus groups are not carried out for this reason.
- The focus group practitioner is invariably interested in the ways in which individuals discuss a certain issue *as members of a group*, rather than simply as individuals. In other words, with a focus group the researcher will be interested in such things as how people respond to each other's views and build up a view out of the interaction that takes place within the group.

However, the distinction between the focus group method and the group interview is by no means clear-cut, and the two terms are frequently employed interchangeably. Nonetheless, the definition proposed in Key concept 19.1 provides a starting point.

Most focus group researchers undertake their work within the traditions of qualitative research. This means that they are explicitly concerned to reveal how the group participants view the issues with which they are confronted; therefore the researcher will aim to provide a fairly unstructured setting for the extraction of their views and perspectives. The person who runs the focus group session is usually called the *moderator* or **facilitator** and he or she will be expected to guide the session but not to be too intrusive.

Another general point about the focus group method is that, although it has been used for many years in market research to test reactions to products and to advertising initiatives, it has more recently been developed for a wider variety of purposes. Hence focus groups are now used by politicians, not only quantitatively to predict the outcome of an election, but also qualitatively to shape their policies and images. Cowley (2000) reports that one politician used focus group research to determine that he should be filmed only from one side of his face, and he should be made to look older in order to increase



## Key concept 19.1
## What is the focus group method?

The focus group method is a form of group interview in which: there are several participants (in addition to the moderator/facilitator); there is an emphasis in the questioning on a particular fairly tightly defined topic; and the accent is upon interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning. As such, the focus group contains elements of two methods: the group interview, in which several people discuss a number of topics; and what has been called a *focused interview*, in which interviewees are selected because they 'are known to have been involved in a particular situation' (Merton, Fiske, and Kendall 1956: 3) and are asked about that involvement. The focused interview may be administered to individuals or to groups. Thus, the focus group method appends to the focused interview the element of interaction within groups as an area of interest and is more focused than the group interview.

voter support. Focus groups are used by film-makers to determine the end of a major film run, by art entrepreneurs to determine what paintings will sell, and by CEOs to test corporate communications. However, the popularization of the focus group method may have disadvantages for business and management researchers. For example, Blackburn and Stokes (2000) in their study of small businesses suggest that it was more difficult to convince research audiences of the significance of their focus group research, partly because of the proliferation of the use of focus groups by political parties. Similarly, Cowley (2000) suggests that, in order to distinguish research based on 'strategic qualitative market research focus groups' from research that is done by those who simply decide 'they can run' focus groups, despite their lack of experience, a professional code of conduct is needed. However, it must be remembered that, while the use of focus groups is becoming more widespread, it is by no means a new technique, as it has a long-established use in various forms of research.

One final point to make is that there is growing interest in the use of online focus groups, which will be covered in the context of Internet-based research methods in Chapter 26. There is evidence that, although they tend to be shorter than comparable face-to-face focus groups, they can generate a considerable amount of relevant data for the researcher (Reid and Reid 2005). When this is viewed in relation to the saving in travel time and cost for both researchers and participants, it is clear that this is a variation on the method that is likely to be used more in the future.



## Uses of focus groups

What are the uses of the focus group method? In many ways its uses are bound up with the uses of qualitative research in general, but, over and above these, the following points can be registered:

- The original idea for the focus group—the focused interview—was that people who were known to have had a certain experience could be interviewed in a relatively unstructured way about that experience. The bulk of the discussion by Merton, Fiske, and Kendall (1956) of the notion of the focused interview was in terms of individual interviews, but their book also considered the extension of the method into group interview contexts. Subsequently, the focus group has become a popular method for researchers examining the ways in which people in conjunction with one another construe the general topics in which the researcher is interested. In management and business, early use of the focus group technique was also seen as a way of helping individuals to define problems and work together to identify potential solutions (Hutt 1979). The dynamics of group discussion could lead individuals to define business problems in new and innovative ways and to stimulate creative ideas for their solution.
- The technique allows the researcher to develop an understanding about *why* people feel the way they do.

In a normal individual interview the interviewee is often asked about his or her reasons for holding a particular view, but the focus group approach offers the opportunity of allowing people to probe each other's reasons for holding a certain view. This can be more interesting than the sometimes predictable question-followed-by-answer approach of normal interviews. For one thing, an individual may answer in a certain way during a focus group, but, as he or she listens to others' answers, he or she may want to qualify or modify a view; or alternatively may want to voice agreement to something that he or she probably would not have thought of without the opportunity of hearing the views of others. These possibilities mean that focus groups may also be very helpful in the elicitation of a wide variety of views in relation to a particular issue.

- In focus groups, participants are able to bring to the fore issues in relation to a topic that they deem to be important and significant. This is clearly an aim of individual interviews too, but, because the moderator has to relinquish a certain amount of control to the participants, the issues that concern them can surface. This is clearly an important consideration in the context of qualitative research, since the viewpoints of the people being studied are an important point of departure.
- In conventional one-to-one interviewing, interviewees are rarely challenged; they might say things that are inconsistent with earlier replies or that patently could not be true, but we are often reluctant to point out such deficiencies. In the context of a focus group, individuals will often argue with each other and challenge each other's views. This process of arguing means that the researcher may stand a chance of ending up with more realistic accounts of what people think, because they are forced to think about and possibly revise their views.
- The focus group offers the researcher the opportunity to study the ways in which individuals collectively make sense of a phenomenon and construct meanings around it. It is a central tenet of theoretical positions like symbolic interactionism that the process of coming to terms with (that is, understanding) social phenomena is not undertaken by individuals in isolation from each other. Instead, it is something that occurs in interaction and discussion with others. In this sense, therefore, focus groups reflect the processes through which meaning is constructed in everyday life and to that extent can be regarded as more naturalistic (see Key concept 2.4 on the idea of naturalism) than individual interviews (Wilkinson 1998).



## Thinking deeply 19.2
## The real and the unreal thing: focus groups and market research

On 23 April 1985 a product was launched that proved to be one of the greatest marketing blunders in business history. On that day, the Coca-Cola company not only launched what it called its New Coke but it removed from sale the old one, on which the massive corporation had been built. New Coke was a flop, and the public clamoured for the return of its predecessor, in spite of assurances from the company that people would get used to the new formula and get to like it better. Yet close attention to data drawn from focus group research that the company had commissioned in the lead-up to the launch of New Coke might have prevented the disaster from happening. In 1982 and 1983, focus group research was conducted across the USA. At one point in each session, local consumers were presented with a scenario in which they were told that a new formula for a certain product had been introduced and that the response to it was very favourable. The participants were then asked how *they* would feel when it came to their town. The response to the prospect of new, improved Budweiser beer and of Hershey chocolate bars being replaced was met with a positive response. However, when the replacement of Coke was being considered, the consumers became vehemently antagonistic to the idea. Taste tests had shown that consumers liked New Coke, but they had not been asked how they would feel if traditional Coke was taken off supermarket shelves. The focus groups made it clear how they would feel, but Coca-Cola's chief executive officer was determined to plough ahead, and his assistant, who liaised with the firm conducting the focus groups, chose to follow his boss's lead.

*Sources*: M. Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola: The Unauthorized History of the World's Most Popular Soft Drink* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993); D. Greising, *I'd Like the World to Buy a Coke: The Life and Leadership of Robert Goizueta* (New York: Wiley, 1998).

As we mentioned in the Introduction, focus groups have been used extensively in market research for many years, where the method is employed for such purposes as testing responses to new products and advertising initiatives (see Thinking deeply 19.2). According to the UK Association of Qualitative Market Research Practitioners, focus groups represent the most commonly used research method in market research; see the Association for Qualitative Research for more on this:
***www.aqrp.co.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

Focus groups typically involve groups of six–twelve consumers, who are brought together to discuss their reactions to new products, packaging, advertisements, or promotions. In fact there is a large literature within market research to do with the practices that are associated with focus group research and their implementation (e.g. Calder 1977).

However, the use of focus group methods in market research has attracted its fair share of controversy. Some researchers have suggested that it is a weaker method than, say, experiments or surveys (to name two research approaches that are common in market research). The most frequently mentioned problem is the perceived lack of generalizability—results are not always a reliable indicator of the reactions of the wider population. Criticism is also made of the unsystematic nature of the sample, which is not as rigorous as probability sampling (see Chapter 7). For example, Sudman and Blair (1999: 272) have suggested that, although the focus group method is an excellent tool for gaining insight about markets, 'it should be evident that a group of 10 or so people chosen haphazardly at a single location cannot be expected to reflect the total population of consumers'. A further difficulty stems from the lack of realism associated with focus groups. Participants may be given written or verbal descriptions of a product, or an artist's sketch, but this bears little relation to the real-life experience of choosing a product in a competitive context. Criticisms also stem from problems of reliability. This relates to the role of the moderator and the suggestion that there can be variation in the interpretation of transcripts. Fern (2001) has provided a rebuttal of these criticisms by arguing that the generalizability of focus group findings, as with other research methods, depends on the scale of the sample—a two-group study may have limited generalizability but a 32-group study is another matter. He also defends the reliability of focus groups, suggesting that representativeness can be achieved by stratifying the population and drawing random samples from each stratum. Fern suggests that greater reliability can be gained by using different moderators with different backgrounds (for example, male and female) to conduct group discussions on a relevant topic (for example, gender). The results from each group can then be compared for consistency of interpretation. Overall, however, what seems puzzling is that market researchers are attempting to defend their use of focus group methods in terms of quantitative rather than qualitative criteria; this is mainly because they are being criticized in terms of quantitative research criteria.



# Conducting focus groups

There are a number of practical aspects of the conduct of focus group research that require some discussion.

## Recording and transcription

As with interviewing for qualitative research, the focus group session will work best if it is recorded and subsequently transcribed. The following reasons are often used to explain this preference:

- One reason is the simple difficulty of writing down not only exactly what people say but also who says it. In an individual interview you might be able to ask the respondent to hold on while you write something down, but to do this in the context of an interview involving several people would be extremely disruptive.
- The researcher will be interested in who expresses views within the group, such as whether certain individuals seem to act as opinion leaders or dominate the discussion. This also means that there is an interest in ranges of opinions within groups; for example, in a session, does most of the range of opinion derive from just one or two people or from most of the people in the group?
- A major reason for conducting focus group research is the fact that it is possible to study the processes whereby meaning is collectively constructed within each session (see above). It would be very difficult to do this by taking notes, because of the need to keep track of *who says* what (see also previous point). If this element is lost, the dynamics of the focus group session would also be lost, and a major rationale for

doing focus group interviews rather than individual ones would be undermined.

- Like all qualitative researchers, the focus group practitioner will be interested in not just what people say but *how* they say it—for example, the particular language that they employ. There is every chance that the nuances of language will be lost if the researcher has to rely on notes.

It should be borne in mind that transcribing focus group sessions is more complicated and hence more time-consuming than transcribing traditional interview recordings. This is because you need to take account of *who* is talking in the session, as well as what is said. This is sometimes difficult, since people's voices are not always easy to distinguish. Also, people sometimes talk over each other, which can make transcription even more difficult. In addition, it is extremely important to ensure that you equip yourself with a very high-quality microphone, which is capable of picking up voices, some of which may be quite faint, from many directions. Focus group transcripts always seem to have more missing bits owing to lack of audibility than transcripts from conventional interviews.

A recent development in market research has involved the introduction of virtual focus groups (see Research in focus 19.3), who interact with each other via computer. This overcomes some of the problems associated with recording what goes on in focus groups, but it also raises difficulties.



## Research in focus 19.3
## Virtual focus groups

Recent developments in market research have enabled the computerization of focus group interaction, whereby group members interact with each other using specially designed software rather than using a moderator. Kiely (1998) describes this process as typically involving participants assembled in a room where there are networked computers. They type in their ideas about a given subject onto their own screen, where they see only the ideas that they type. A large screen at the front of the room then displays all the participants' comments simultaneously and anonymously. Kiely (1998) suggests that this process makes it easier for each group member to have an equal voice and more difficult for one person to dominate the discussion. The technology also makes it possible to reduce the time it takes to run a focus group, as all members of the group are able to express their ideas simultaneously rather than serially. As they see the ideas of others on the main screen, individuals are able to build on the ideas already expressed. However, focus group members do report feeling more anonymous within the encounter and therefore that it is less satisfactory. Recent advances in computer graphics have also enabled innovations like virtual shopping, which is used within market research focus groups to simulate the atmosphere of an actual retail store on a computer screen (Burke 1996). Within this virtual environment, focus group members are able to view shelves stocked with a range of products, examine the packaging, and decide whether or not they would purchase them.

The Internet has opened up opportunities for focus groups to be held entirely virtually—group members need not be in the same room with one another, or even in the same country. The main features of online focus groups will be discussed in depth in Chapter 26. One of the main differences between online and in-person focus groups is that in online groups the questions are usually more structured, since they are written in full-sentence form in advance so they can be displayed on-screen (Sweet 2001). This just leaves the moderator to interject additional probes into the dialogue as it develops. Sweet recommends that between forty and forty-five questions are used within a typical ninety-minute group discussion. He also notes that one of the advantages of online focus groups is that participants do not have to travel to a venue in order to attend the meeting. This can be helpful in reducing the number of no-shows due to things like traffic problems and bad weather. He also recommends that moderators have fast and accurate keyboard skills, so they are able to keep up with the discussion. Moderators should also be familiar with the social conventions associated with online venues such as chatrooms.

Reid and Reid (2005) conducted an experimental study comparing the effectiveness of in-person focus groups with those that relied on computer-mediated discussion. They found that, although a greater number of contributions were made by the in-person focus group participants (this is explained by the time it takes to type being longer than the time it takes to talk), proportionally more ideas and answers were generated within the computer-mediated groups. However, participants were more satisfied with the face-to-face method of communication, more appreciative of other participants' feelings, and found it easier to follow the discussion in the in-person groups.

## How many groups?

How many groups do you need? Table 19.1 provides an example detailing the composition of a sequence of focus groups that was designed to reflect the impact of the local socio-economic context on small business owner-managers. This was a longitudinal focus group study, so the groups met on several occasions during an eighteen-month period (see Research in focus 19.4). However, there is a good deal of variation in the numbers of focus groups that are used in any particular study, with the norm being somewhere between twelve and fifteen.



### Tips and skills
### Transcribing focus group interviews

In Chapter 18, we provided the practical tip that it may not always be desirable or feasible to transcribe the whole of the interview. The same applies to focus group research, which is often more difficult and time-consuming to transcribe than personal interview recordings because of the number of speakers who are involved. The suggestions we made in Chapter 18 in relation to transcribing sections of an interview therefore apply equally well to focus group recordings.

Clearly, it is unlikely that just one group will suffice the needs of the researcher, since there is always the possibility that the responses are particular to that one group. Obviously, time and resources will be a factor, but there are strong arguments for saying that too many groups will be a waste of time. Calder (1977) proposes that, when the moderator reaches the point that he or she is able to anticipate fairly accurately what the next group is going to say, then there are probably enough groups already. This notion is very similar to the *theoretical saturation* criterion that was briefly introduced in Key concept 17.12. In other words, once your major analytic categories have been saturated, there seems little point in continuing, and so it would be appropriate to bring data collection to a halt. For their study of audience discussion programmes, Livingstone and Lunt (1994: 181) used this criterion: 'The number of focus groups was determined by continuing until comments and patterns began to repeat and little new material was generated.' When this point of theoretical saturation is reached, as an alternative to terminating data collection, there may be a case for moving on to an extension of the issues that have been raised in the focus group sessions that have been carried out.

One factor that may affect the number of groups is whether the researcher feels that the kinds and range of views are likely to be affected by socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, class, and so on. Many focus group researchers like to use stratifying criteria like these to ensure that groups with a wide range of features will be included. If so, a larger number of groups may be required to reflect the criteria. In connection with the research described in Research in focus 19.4, Blackburn and Stokes (2000) explain that the composition of the groups was stratified according to business and personal criteria, including gender. A range of business sectors was represented within the focus groups, including manufacturing, construction, and services. Small businesses were defined quite broadly in terms of certain turnover parameters—from a minimum of £50,000 to a maximum of £3,000,000. However, it may be that high levels of diversity are not anticipated in connection with some topics, in which case a large number of groups could represent an unnecessary expense.



### Tips and skills
### Number of focus groups

Focus groups take a long time to arrange, and it takes a long time to transcribe the recordings that are made. It is likely that students will not be able to include as many focus group sessions for projects or dissertations as the studies cited in this chapter. You will, therefore, need to make do with a smaller number of groups in most instances. Make sure you are able to justify the number of groups you have chosen and why your data are still significant.

One further point to bear in mind when considering the number of groups is that more groups will increase the complexity of your analysis. For example, Schlesinger et al. (1992: 29) report that the fourteen tape-recorded sessions they organized produced over 1,400 pages of transcription. This pile of paper was accumulated from discussions in each group of an average of one hour for each of the four screenings that session participants were shown. Although this means that the sessions were longer than is normally the case, it does demonstrate that the amount of data to analyse can be very large, even though a total of fourteen sessions may not sound a lot to someone unfamiliar with the workings of the method.

## Size of groups

How large should groups be? Morgan (1998*a*) suggests that the typical group size is six to ten members, although in their study of small business owner-managers Blackburn and Stokes (2000) found that discussion in groups of more than eight was difficult to manage, so, as the research progressed, they scaled down the number of participants who were invited on each occasion. One major problem faced by focus group practitioners is people who agree to participate but who do not turn up on the day. It is almost impossible to control for 'no-shows' other than consciously over-recruiting, a strategy that is sometimes recommended (e.g. Wilkinson 1999*a*: 188).

In their research into small businesses, Blackburn and Stokes (2000) found that recruiting business-owners to attend a group discussion at a pre-set date and venue away from their business context proved to be a time-consuming process (see Research in focus 19.4). The acceptance rate to invitations was as low as one to ten, and the exercise of ensuring attendance involved a great number of telephone calls to ensure a broad spread of participants. However, after participants had attended one focus group and had got to know each other and exchanged business cards, they were more likely to attend a second time, as they were keen to hear how each other's businesses were developing. Overall the researchers found it very difficult to predict the 'no-show' rate. This meant that the size of their focus groups varied considerably, from three to ten (see Table 19.1). Blackburn and Stokes acknowledge that there were likely to be quite different dynamics in the different-sized groups; in particular, in the smaller groups greater demands were made on each participant to contribute more.

Almost the opposite problem was faced by Milkman (1997) in her study of auto factory workers at the General Motors plant in New Jersey. Milkman and a colleague conducted three focus group discussions at the plant—two with production workers and one with skilled trades workers. Each discussion was held in a conference room inside the plant during regular working hours, lasted around two hours, and was tape-recorded and transcribed. Workers were selected randomly from the plant roster and they were paid their normal wage for the time spent in discussion. This, according to Milkman, 'ensured perfect attendance', but it also 'underscored the project's official status' (1997: 195). She suspects that this made some participants suspicious and less inclined to speak freely.

Morgan (1998*a*) recommends smaller groups when participants are likely to have a lot to say on the research topic. This is likely to occur when participants are very involved in or emotionally preoccupied with the topic. He also suggests smaller groups when topics are

# Table 19.1

**Location and attendees from five focus groups**

| Location | Number of participants in each focus group | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sept. 1997 | Mar. 1998 | Nov. 1998 | Mar. 1999 |
| Reading | 10 | 5 | 6 | 6 |
| London | 8 | 3 | 6 | 5 |
| Kidderminster | 7 | 7 | 3 | 6 |
| Manchester | 5 | 5 | 5 | 7 |
| Glasgow/Hartlepool | 6 | 6 | – | – |
| TOTAL | 36 | 26 | 26 | 30 |

*Source*: adapted from Blackburn and Stokes (2000).

controversial or complex and when gleaning participants' personal accounts is a major goal. Morgan recommends larger groups when involvement with a topic is likely to be low or when the researcher wants 'to hear numerous brief suggestions' (1998*a*: 75). However, we are not convinced that larger groups are necessarily superior for topics in which participants have little involvement, since it may be more difficult to stimulate discussion in such a context. Larger groups may make it even more difficult if people are rather diffident about talking about a topic



## Research in focus 19.4
## Focus groups in small business research

Blackburn and Stokes (2000) used focus groups in their research into UK small firms across a range of sectors. Their decision was partly driven by a concern that much research into small firms has revealed little about the motivations, rationales, and experiences of business owner-managers. For this, more qualitative research is required, and focus groups were seen as a means through which the culturally different world of the owner-manager can be encountered on a more equal basis.

One of the aims of the focus groups was to capture the immediate reactions of business owners to government statements and the launch of new initiatives. Focus groups were held on four occasions at six-monthly intervals (see Table 19.1) in order to compare their initial reactions with later, more considered views.

Each focus group had three main objectives:

- to generate data on owner-managers' experiences of and reasons for running a business;
- to seek their views about the current business environment, including government policy;
- to explore how they see their world as business owner-managers and how they approach issues such as succession planning and finding new customers.

Focus groups were held in locations across the UK, based on the assumption that experiences would be different in particular local environments and socio-economic contexts. 'Whilst it is accepted that these focus groups cannot aim to be truly *representative* of the small business population as a whole, it was important to ensure that the results could be *illustrative* of the possible regional and sectoral variations and therefore provide a limited level of generalizability for the results' (2000: 51). Potential participants were identified using local business directories. The incentive they were offered was primarily social—participants would get the chance to meet other business owners and exchange experiences. The researchers also offered to pay for participants' expenses.

The meetings were held in the offices of a sponsor, a chartered accountancy practice. Blackburn and Stokes acknowledge that this location might have been a deterrent for business owners, presumably as it may be associated with taxation, but they argue that the impact of this possibility was minimized by informing business owners of the location only once they had agreed to participate!

Each moderator was accompanied by an assistant, who organized the layout of the room, took responsibility for audio-recording the event, and took notes to capture non-verbal signals and nuances. Room size constraints meant that the researchers decided against video recording.

Prior to the study, one of the concerns that the researchers had was about the extent to which business owners would be prepared to share the detail of their specific cases in a group setting. As the extract in Tips and skills 'Extract from a focus group discussion showing no moderator involvement' suggests, this proved not to be a problem: 'any reservations we had that business owners would be reluctant to open up in front of their peers . . . were not borne out' (2000: 60).

The study also raised some ethical issues. In particular, although the researchers changed the names of participants in order to ensure their confidentiality, when the research was published, the research unit that had commissioned the research was approached by the media, seeking names and telephone numbers of the participants, to speak to them directly. Blackburn and Stokes contacted the focus group participants and asked them if they were willing to talk to the press. Only if they were willing were their details passed on to the journalist.

about which they know little or have little experience. This was a potential problem in Blackburn and Stokes's (2000) study, where external information, such as government proposals on late-payment legislation, formed the basis for discussion. However, in these instances, the researchers found that participants relied more heavily on their own personal experiences and provided detailed accounts of payment practices in their industry.

## Level of moderator involvement

How involved should the moderator/facilitator be? In qualitative research, the aim is to get at the perspectives of those being studied. Consequently, the approach should not be intrusive and structured. Therefore, there is a tendency for researchers to use a fairly small number of very general questions to guide the focus group session. Moreover, there is a further tendency for moderators to allow quite a lot of latitude to participants, so that the discussion can range fairly widely. Tips and skills 'Extract from a focus group discussion showing no moderator involvement' provides an example of this. In this instance, three quite different opinions emerge in relation to the issue of succession planning without any moderator prompting. Obviously, if the discussion goes off at a total tangent, it may be necessary to refocus the participants' attention, but even then it may be necessary to be careful, because what may appear to be digressions may in fact reveal something of interest to the group participants. The advantage of allowing a fairly free rein to the discussion is that the researcher stands a better chance of getting access to what individuals see as important or interesting. On the other hand, too much totally irrelevant discussion may prove too unproductive, especially in the commercial environment of market research. It is not surprising, therefore, that, as Wilkinson (1999*a*) observes, some writers on focus groups perceive the possibility that participants come to take over the running of a session from the moderator as a problem and offer advice on how to reassert control (e.g. Krueger 1988).



Tips and skills

### Extract from a focus group discussion showing no moderator involvement

*Michael* . . .—talking about your family taking over the business—that's something I wouldn't do with my family because I don't think they've got the fire. I just don't think my daughters have got the same fire as I've got.

*Mike* You're forcing them down a particular channel—there are so many things they can do . . . I think that they may or may not have the right qualities to do that—they may wish to go out and do other things . . . plus you might think that in giving them a thriving business you're spoiling them so I just think this whole family business thing is an absolute can of worms.

*Gary* If they're in it already though it's a different situation.

*Mike* . . . Well I accept that . . . my exit strategy is that at some point I've got to sell the business and I think the management team realise that. So they know when we're discussing share options there's only one point—you know we were discussing what's the point in owning shares in a private business—there is only one point when it is worth it and that's when the business is sold. So what it is, is when the business is sold they get a share of the benefit—so that's the sort of logic there. (Blackburn and Stokes 2000: 60)

One way in which the moderator may need to be involved is in responding to specific points that are of potential interest to the research questions but that are not picked up by other participants. In Tips and skills 'Extract from a focus group discussion showing some moderator involvement', which is also taken from the study of small business owner-managers (Blackburn and Stokes 2000), the moderator provides a prompt to guide the discussion of planned business succession to find out if any of the participants have taken advice on this issue. This encourages the group to share their experiences.



## Tips and skills

## Extract from a focus group discussion showing some moderator involvement

*Moderator* Has anyone other than Gary taken advice on exit routes?

*Lilian* We took advice when we made our plan in the first place about moving ourselves away from the front end of the business. How we geared our pension schemes . . .

*Mike* I've taken advice and their advice was you need to be bigger . . . to make the amount of money you need to actually walk away from it . . . I'm in the process of doing that . . .

*Marina* We started this actually about two years ago and we have taken advice and put plans into place. I do believe it is very important to have those plans and the correct ones. They always advise you to get bigger and you have to be a certain size . . . (Blackburn and Stokes 2000: 59)

Clearly, the moderator has to straddle two positions: allowing the discussion to flow freely and intervening to bring out especially salient issues, particularly when group participants do not do so. This is not an easy conundrum to resolve and each tactic—intervention and non-intervention—carries risks. The best advice is to err on the side of minimal intervention—other than to start the group on a fresh set of issues—but to intervene when the group is struggling in its discussions or when it has not alighted on something that is said in the course of the session that appears significant for the research topic.

## Selecting participants

So who should participate in a focus group? This depends on who will find the topic relevant and who can represent specific occupational or organizational groupings that have an interest in the topic concerned. Usually, a wide range of organizational members or stakeholders from different organizations is required, but they are organized into separate groups in terms of stratifying criteria, such as age, gender, occupation, profession, hierarchical position within the organization, or length of service. Participants for each group can then be selected randomly or through some kind of snowball sampling method. The aim is to establish whether or not there is any systematic variation in the ways in which different groups discuss a matter.

A further issue in relation to the selection of group participants is whether to select people who are unknown to each other (for example, members of the same professional association or employees from different divisions within the same organization) or to use natural groupings (for example, co-workers or students on the same course). Some researchers prefer to exclude people who know each other on the grounds that pre-existing styles of interaction or status differences may contaminate the session. Not all writers accept this rule of thumb. Some prefer to select natural groups whenever possible. For example, in marketing research, companies like Procter & Gamble tend to go back repeatedly to the same pool from which they draw focus groups (Kiely 1998).

However, opting for a strategy of recruiting people entirely from natural groups is not always feasible, because of difficulties of securing participation. For example, it is not always feasible to remove a number of employees from work activity at the same time; in such cases other strategies of selection may have to be used. Morgan (1998*a*) suggests that one problem with using natural groups is that people who know each other well are likely to operate with taken-for-granted assumptions that they feel do not need to be brought to the fore. He suggests that, if it is important for the researcher to bring out such assumptions, groups of strangers are likely to work better. On the other hand, if the focus group is intended to explore collective understandings or shared meanings held within a work group, this can be achieved more readily by using participants who are all members of the same group.

## Asking questions

An issue that is close to the question of the degree of involvement on the part of the moderator is the matter of how far there should be a set of questions that must be addressed. This issue is very similar to the considerations about how unstructured an interview should be in qualitative interviewing (see Chapter 18). Some researchers prefer to use just one or two very general questions to

# Figure 19.1

**An example of a topic agenda for a small business owner-manager focus group**

**Topic Agenda**

1. **Introduction (15 mins.)**
   Introduce the research team and roles
   Aim and format of the focus group
   **Conventions** (confidentiality, speak one at a time, recordings, everybody's **views, open debate, report of proceedings**)
   Personal introduction of participants and their businesses
2. **Discussion Topics**
   (i) *Current trading climate* (15 mins.)
   (e.g. comparative order levels)
   (ii) *Main challenges in the business environment* (20 mins.)
   (e.g. exchange rates, recruitment, raising money)
   (iii) *Government policies and small firms* (20 mins.)
   (e.g. the minimum wage, entry into the Euro)
   (iv) *Topical issues* (20 mins.)
   (e.g. business succession and exit strategies)
3. **Summing Up**
   Thanks for participation and report back
   Invite back to next event in six months
   Reimburse expenses
4. **Lunch**
   Sandwiches and drinks
   Close

stimulate discussion, with the moderator intervening as necessary along the lines outlined above. However, other researchers prefer to inject somewhat more structure into the organization of the focus group sessions. A clear example of this is the research on small business owner-managers, in which moderators worked with a topic agenda with times allocated to the discussion of each topic (see Figure 19.1). Opening questions were designed to generate initial reactions in a relatively open-ended way, to put the owner-managers at ease, and to get them talking as soon as possible in an informal manner. Then the moderator moved the discussion on to the substantive issues of trading climate, challenges in the business environment, government policies, and business succession and exit strategies. Such a general approach to questioning, which is fairly common in focus group research, allows the researcher to navigate the channel between, on the one side, addressing the research questions and ensuring comparability between sessions, and, on the other side, allowing participants to raise issues they see as significant and in their own terms.

Clearly, there are different questioning strategies and approaches to moderating focus group sessions. Most seem to lie somewhere in between the rather open-ended approach employed by Cunha and Cunha (2004) (see Research in focus 19.5) and the somewhat more structured one used by Blackburn and Stokes (2000) (see Research in focus 19.4). There is probably no one best way, and the style of questioning and moderating is likely to be affected by various factors, such as the nature of the research topic (for example, is it one that the researcher already knows a lot about, in which case a modicum of structure is feasible?) and levels of interest and/or knowledge among participants in the research (for example, a low level of participant interest may require a somewhat more structured approach). Whichever strategy of questioning is employed, the focus group researcher should generally be prepared to allow at least some discussion that departs from the interview guide, since such debate may provide new and unexpected insights. A more structured approach to questioning might inhibit such spontaneity, but it is unlikely to remove it altogether.

## Beginning and finishing

It is recommended that focus group sessions begin with an introduction, whereby the moderators thank people for coming and introduce themselves, the goals of the research are briefly outlined, the reasons for recording the session are given, and the format of the focus group session is sketched out. It is also important to present some of the conventions of focus group participation, such as only one person should speak at a time (perhaps explaining the problems that occur with recordings when people speak over each other); that all data will be treated confidentially and anonymized; that the session is open and everyone's views are important; and the amount of time that will be taken up. During the introduction phase, focus group researchers also often ask participants to fill in forms providing basic socio-demographic information about themselves, such as age, gender, and occupation. Participants should then be encouraged to introduce themselves and to write out their first names on a badge or card placed in front of them, so that everyone's name is known.

At the end the moderators should thank the group members for their participation and explain briefly what will happen to the data they have supplied. If a further session is to be arranged, steps should be taken to coordinate this.



### Research in focus 19.5

### A less structured approach to focus groups interviewing

In a study of HRM in Cuba, Cunha and Cunha (2004) used focus groups to explore how market-based management practices have been adopted in a country that is struggling to protect its communist ideology. The main data collection technique was a series of eight focus groups conducted with 106 Cuban managers and management professors. The number of participants in each group ranged from twelve to fifteen, somewhat higher than the usual number recommended in this chapter. Each meeting lasted approximately one-and-a-half hours. Although a discussion script was used, the researchers sought to develop a relatively unstructured approach to asking questions that was in keeping with the broad nature of the discussion focusing on societal changes facing Cuba. Furthermore, rather than keeping the themes for discussion consistent between the groups, they deliberately fed the conclusions from previous groups into the discussion in subsequent ones. This emergent approach was based on the idea that the focus groups entailed a process of collective sense-making between participants. The discussion was conducted in Spanish, and notes were taken by the researchers, who later converted the notes into a 'codebook' summarizing the main topics discussed and participants' views.



## Group interaction in focus group sessions

Kitzinger (1994) has observed that reports of focus group research frequently do not take into account interaction within the group. This is surprising, because it is precisely the operation of social interaction and its forms and impact that would seem to distinguish the focus group session from the individual interview. Yet, as Kitzinger observes, very few publications based on focus group research cite or draw inferences from patterns of interaction within the group. Wilkinson (1998) reviewed over 200 studies based on focus groups published between 1946 and 1996. She concluded: 'Focus group data is most commonly presented as if it were one-to-one interview data, with interactions between group participants rarely reported, let alone analysed' (1998: 112).

Interactions between focus group participants may be either complementary or argumentative (Kitzinger 1994). The former brings out the elements of the social world that provide participants' own frameworks of understanding, so that agreement emerges in people's minds. In the example in Tips and skills 'Extract from a focus group discussion showing some moderator involvement', the first part of the discussion demonstrates broad

agreement between Michael and Mike about the issues involved in handing over the business to a family member, with Mike building on the preceding remarks made by Michael. This complementary interaction is then interrupted by Gary, who suggests that this depends on whether or not the family member is actively involved in the day-to-day running of the business. This more argumentative interaction leads Mike to revert to an alternative exit strategy—one that relies ultimately on selling the business.

However, as Kitzinger suggests, arguments in focus groups can be equally revealing. She suggests that moderators can play an important role in identifying differences of opinion and exploring with participants the factors that may lie behind them. Disagreement can provide participants with the opportunity to revise their opinions or to think more about the reasons why they hold the view that they do. As Kitzinger argues, drawing attention to patterns of interaction within focus groups allows the researcher to determine how group participants view the issues with which they are confronted in their own terms. The posing of questions by, and agreement and disagreement among, participants helps to bring out their own stances on these issues. The resolution of disagreements also helps to force participants to express the grounds on which they hold particular views.



## The focus group as a feminist method

The use of focus groups by feminist researchers has grown considerably in recent years, and Wilkinson (1998, 1999*b*) has argued that it has great potential in this regard. Three aspects of the method stand out in terms of their compatibility with the ethics and politics of feminism:

- Focus group research is less artificial than many other methods, because, in emphasizing group interaction, which is a normal part of social life, it does not suffer from the problem of gleaning information in an unnatural situation. Moreover, the tendency of many focus group researchers to recruit participants from naturally occurring groups underpins the lower level of artificiality of the method, since people are able to discuss in situations that are quite normal for them. As a result, there is greater opportunity to derive understandings that chime with the 'lived experience' of women. However, not all writers accept the contention that focus groups are more naturalistic than individual interviews. Even when natural groups are used, gathering people to discuss a certain topic (such as a television advertisement) is not inherently naturalistic, because the social setting is to a significant extent contrived (Morrison 1998: 154–5). Indeed, completing questionnaires or being interviewed may appear more natural, because such instruments are fairly commonplace, whereas being asked to discuss in a group an issue not necessarily of one's choosing is less so.
- Feminist researchers have expressed a preference for methods that avoid *decontextualization*—that is, that successfully study the individual within a social context. The tendency for most methods to treat the individual as a separate entity devoid of a social context is disliked by many feminist researchers, who prefer to analyse 'the self as relational or as socially constructed' (Wilkinson 1999*b*: 229–30). Because the individual is very much part of a group in the focus group method, this tendency towards decontextualization is avoided.
- As we have seen in previous chapters, feminist researchers are suspicious of research methods that are exploitative and create a power relationship between the female researcher and the female respondent. Wilkinson observes that the risk of this occurring is greatly reduced, because focus group participants are able to take over much of the direction of the session from the moderator. Indeed, they may even subvert the goals of the session in ways that could be of considerable interest to the moderator. As a result, participants' points of view are much more likely to be revealed than in a traditional interview.

Wilkinson does not argue that focus groups or indeed any method can be described as inherently feminist. Instead, she argues that, because of these three features and when employed with a sensitivity towards feminist concerns, the focus group method has considerable potential as a tool of feminist research.

The kinds of argument put forward regarding the fit between the focus group method and feminist research have been extended to suggest they may have a further role in allowing the voices of highly marginalized groups of women to surface. Madriz (2000: 843) argues that, for a group like lower-socio-economic-class women of colour, focus groups constitute a relatively rare opportunity for them to 'empower themselves by making sense

of their experience of vulnerability and subjugation'. Research in focus 19.6 provides an example of some research that uses focus groups to study women, although this study does not claim to be feminist research, and it involves studying women who are relatively powerful (running successful businesses and employing other staff) rather than powerless. However, Buttner's (2001) use of focus group methods could be seen as supportive of the feminist emphasis on methods that seek to avoid decontextualizing research subjects, since her study is interested in developing understanding of women entrepreneurs in a relational context, based on earlier research into gender that suggests women's identities are based on an ability to make and maintain relationships with others. Focus groups could therefore be seen as a way for female entrepreneurs to make sense of their relationships with employees, suppliers, and clients through talking to other women who had similar experiences.



## Research in focus 19.6
## Using focus groups in a study of female entrepreneurs

In a qualitative analysis of female entrepreneurs' accounts of their role, Buttner (2001) used the focus group method to explore the leadership and management style of women entrepreneurs in their own organizations. Although the study was exploratory, 'designed to capture the women's "voice" as they spoke about their role in their businesses' (2001: 258), a structured interview protocol was used. One hundred and twenty-nine women entrepreneurs from twelve research sites across the United States participated in the focus groups, and the results were video-taped and transcribed. One of the interesting things about the way that the data in this study were analysed and presented is that the frequency of comments was recorded in addition to the content. This was achieved with the aid of a qualitative analysis software package of the kind discussed in Chapter 23. In reporting the results of the focus groups, in addition to using direct quotes of the focus group participants, Buttner (2001) also records the number or proportion of the women in her sample who made comments about a particular issue. This helps to add strength to her argument and is an example of how qualitative researchers sometimes undertake a limited amount of quantification of their data (an issue that we will discuss in more depth in Chapter 24).



# Limitations of focus groups

Focus groups clearly have considerable potential for research questions in which the processes through which meaning is jointly constructed is likely to be of particular interest. Indeed, it may be that, even when this is not a prominent emphasis, the use of the focus group method may be appropriate and even advantageous, since it allows participants' perspectives—an important feature of much qualitative research (see Chapter 16)—to be revealed in ways that are different from individual interviews (for example, through discussion, participants' questions, arguments, and so on). It also offers considerable potential for feminist researchers. What, then, might be its chief limitations?

- The researcher probably has less control over proceedings than with the individual interview. As we have seen, by no means all writers on focus groups perceive this as a disadvantage, and indeed feminist researchers often see it as an advantage. However, the question of control raises issues for researchers of how far they can allow a focus group to 'take over' the running of proceedings. There is clearly a delicate balance to be taken into account over how involved moderators should be and how far a set of prompts or questions should influence the conduct of a focus group, as some of the earlier discussions have suggested. What is not clear is the degree to which it is appropriate to surrender control of a focus group to its participants, especially when there is a reasonably explicit set of research questions to be answered, as is commonly the case, for example, in funded research.

- The data are difficult to analyse. A huge amount of data can be very quickly produced. Developing a strategy of analysis that incorporates both themes in what people say and patterns of interaction is not easy. Also, as previously pointed out, focus group recordings are particularly prone to inaudible elements, which affects transcription.
- They are difficult to organize. Not only do you have to secure the agreement of people to participate in your study; you also need to persuade them to turn up at a particular time. Small inducements, such as payment of expenses or provision of lunch, are sometimes made to induce participation, but nonetheless it is common for people not to turn up.
- The recordings are probably more time-consuming to transcribe than equivalent recordings of individual interviews, because of variations in voice pitch and the need to take account of who says what.
- There are possible problems of group effects. This includes the obvious problem of dealing with reticent speakers and with those who hog the stage! In this respect, they are a bit like tutorials. Krueger (1998) suggests in relation to the problem of overly prominent participants that the moderator should make clear to the speaker and other group participants that other people's views are definitely required; for example, he suggests saying something like: 'That's one point of view. Does anyone have another point of view?' (1998: 59). As for those who do not speak very much, it is recommended that they are actively encouraged to say something. Also, as the well-known Asch experiments showed (see Research in focus 19.7), an emerging group view may mean that a perfectly legitimate perspective held by just one individual may be suppressed. There is also evidence that, as a group comes to share a certain point of view, group members come to think uncritically about it and to develop almost irrational attachments to it (Janis 1982). It is not known how far such group effects have an adverse impact on focus group findings, but it is clear that they cannot be entirely ignored. In this context, it would be interesting to know how far agreement among focus group participants is more frequently encountered than disagreement (we have a hunch that it is), since the effects to which both Asch and Janis referred would lead us to expect more agreement than disagreement in focus group discussions. Related to this, in group contexts participants may be more prone to expressing culturally expected views than in individual interviews.
- Madriz (2000) proposes that there are circumstances when focus groups may not be appropriate, because of their potential for causing discomfort among participants. When such discomfort might arise, individual interviews are likely to be preferable. Situations in which unease might be occasioned are: when intimate details of private lives need to be revealed; when participants may not be comfortable in each other's presence (for example, bringing together people in a hierarchical relationship to each other); and when participants are likely to disagree profoundly with each other.



## Research in focus 19.7
## Group conformity and the focus group method

Asch's (1951) laboratory studies into individual conformity to group norms provide us with an indication of the risks that are associated with focus groups. One experiment involved seven men who were brought together as a group and seated at a table. The men were told that they were participating in a study on visual perception. However, only one of the men was a real participant, the rest were 'actors' paid by Asch to participate. The group was shown a series of lines and asked to judge which were equal in length.

However, the actor-participants had been instructed to lie about which of the lines was equal. Despite the obviousness of the task, in most of the trials that Asch conducted the individual subject conceded to the group judgement, rather than giving the response he or she judged to be correct. The research showed that it was difficult for individuals to express their opinions when they contradict the views of other group members.

These findings have obvious implications for the conduct of focus groups, particularly since Asch also found that conformity increased when group members had to continue working together in the future—a distinct possibility within organizational research. However, Asch also found that conformity decreased when subjects were not face to face, so there may be advantages in conducting virtual focus groups of the kind described in Research in focus 19.3.



# Checklist

## Issues to consider for your focus group

- ◯ Have you devised a clear and comprehensive way of introducing the research to participants?
- ◯ Do the questions or topics you have devised allow you to answer all your research questions?
- ◯ Have you piloted the guide with some appropriate respondents?
- ◯ Have you devised a strategy for encouraging respondents to turn up for the focus group meeting?
- ◯ Have you thought about what you will do if some participants do not turn up for the session?
- ◯ Have you ensured that interviews will allow novel or unexpected themes and issues to arise?
- ◯ Is your language in the questions clear and comprehensible?
- ◯ Are your questions relevant to the people who are participating in the focus groups?
- ◯ Have your questions been designed to elicit reflective discussions so that participants are not tempted to answer in 'yes' or 'no' terms?
- ◯ Have your questions been designed to encourage group interaction and discussion?
- ◯ Do your questions offer a real prospect of seeing the world from your interviewees' point of view rather than imposing your own frame of reference on them?
- ◯ Are you familiar with the setting(s) in which the interview will take place?
- ◯ Are you thoroughly familiar with and have you tested your recording or audio-visual equipment?
- ◯ Have you thought about how you will present yourself in the session, such as how you will be dressed?
- ◯ Have you devised a strategy for dealing with silences?
- ◯ Have you devised a strategy for dealing with participants who are reluctant to speak?
- ◯ Have you devised a strategy for dealing with participants who speak too much and hog the discussion?
- ◯ Do you have a strategy for how far you are going to intervene in the focus group discussion?
- ◯ Do you have a strategy for dealing with the focus group if the discussion goes off at a tangent?
- ◯ Have you tested out any aids that you are going to present to focus group participants (e.g. visual aids, segments of film, case studies)?



# Key points

- The focus group is a group interview that is concerned with exploring a certain topic.
- The moderator generally tries to provide a relatively free rein to the discussion. However, there may be contexts in which it is necessary to ask fairly specific questions, especially when cross-group comparability is an issue.
- There is concern with the joint production of meaning.
- Focus group discussions need to be recorded and transcribed.

- There are several issues concerning the recruitment of focus group participants—in particular, whether to use natural groupings or to employ stratifying criteria.
- Group interaction is an important component of discussions.
- Some writers view focus groups as well suited to a feminist standpoint.



## Questions for review

- Why might it be useful to distinguish between a focus group and a group interview?

### *Uses of focus groups*

- What advantages might the focus group method offer in contrast to an individual qualitative interview?

### *Conducting focus groups*

- How involved should the moderator be?
- Why is it necessary to record and transcribe focus group sessions?
- Are there any circumstances in which it might be a good idea to select participants who know each other?
- What might be the advantages and disadvantages of using an interview guide in focus group sessions?

### *Group interaction in focus group sessions*

- Why might it be important to treat group interaction as an important issue when analysing focus group data?

### *The focus group as a feminist method*

- Evaluate the argument that the focus group can be viewed as a feminist method.
- To what extent are focus groups a naturalistic approach to data collection?

### *Limitations of focus groups*

- Does the potential for the loss of control over proceedings and group effects damage the potential utility of the focus group as a method?
- How far do the greater problems of transcription and difficulty of analysis undermine the potential of focus groups?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Focus Groups.*

# 20

# Language in qualitative research

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 520

**Fine-grained approaches** 520

Conversation analysis 521

Discourse analysis 525

**Narrative analysis** 531

**Rhetorical analysis** 533

**Context-sensitive approaches** 537

Critical discourse analysis 538

**Overview** 540

***Key points*** 541

***Questions for review*** 541






## Chapter outline

This chapter is concerned with approaches to the examination of language, including conversation analysis and discourse analysis. For the practitioners of these approaches, language is an object of interest in its own right and not simply a resource through which research participants communicate with researchers. The chapter explores:

- fine-grained approaches to analysis, including conversation and discourse analysis, that focus in detail on the way that language is used, especially in conversation and dialogue;
- analytical approaches that explore the use of specific literary devices, including narrative and rhetoric, to create meaning in social situations through the use of language;
- approaches that seek to contextualize the use of language by analysing the historical and social circumstances in which it is produced by treating texts (see Chapter 21 for a definition) as interrelated to each other and dependent on context.

# Introduction

Language is bound to be of importance for organizational researchers. It is, after all, through language that we ask people questions in interviews and through which the questions are answered. Language is also central to the structuring of organizations, if only because people in work organizations rely so heavily on talk—in meetings, on the telephone, in the cafeteria—in order to accomplish their everyday business. It is through language that people in organizations exchange information, skills, services, and resources and make sense of their situation through interaction with each other. Furthermore, within managerial work a remarkably high emphasis is placed on verbal interaction, as findings from various research studies have suggested. For example, Mintzberg's (1973) study reports that verbal contacts, face to face and on the telephone, accounted for 75 per cent of senior managers' time and 67 per cent of their activities (see Chapter 8 for a more detailed explanation of Mintzberg's study). Other studies have shown that between 57 and 89 per cent of managerial time is spent in verbal interaction (Boden 1994). The role of the organizational researcher who focuses on language is to explore the nature of the relationship between language and action in these instances.

What is crucial about the approaches discussed in this chapter is that, unlike traditional views of the role of language in business research, they treat language as a topic rather than as a resource (admittedly a clichéd phrase). This means that language is treated as significantly more than a medium through which the business of research is conducted (such as asking questions in interviews). It becomes a focus of attention in its own right. This implies that language is not just seen as reflective of what goes on in an organization; instead, language and organization become one and the same. This means, for example, that, as soon as managers in a public-sector organization start to talk of their client groups as 'customers', a whole new way of defining the organization's purpose and activities is introduced.



# Fine-grained approaches

The first part of this chapter examines two fine-grained approaches that treat language as their central focal points—conversation analysis (CA) and discourse analysis (DA). Fine-grained approaches focus on language in use, in conversation, or in dialogue, and seek to examine talk in order to understand its organizing properties—in

other words, the rules and structures that determine what people say in a given interaction. Both CA and DA are predominantly concerned with capturing and analysing language as it is used in a particular moment rather than over a period of time. While CA and DA do not exhaust the range of possibilities for studying language as a topic, they do represent two of the most prominent fine-grained approaches. Each has evolved a technical vocabulary and set of techniques. The first part of this chapter will outline some of the basic elements of each of them and draw attention to some contrasting features.

## Conversation analysis

The roots of CA lie in ethnomethodology, a sociological position developed in the USA under the general tutelage of Harold Garfinkel and Harvey Sacks, though it is the latter with whom CA is most associated. Ethnomethodology takes as its basic focus of attention 'practical, common-sense reasoning' in everyday life and as such is fundamentally concerned with the notion of social life as an accomplishment. Social order is seen not as a pre-existing force constraining individual action, but as something that is worked at and accomplished through interaction. Contrary to what its name implies, ethnomethodology is *not* a research methodology; it is the study of the methods employed in everyday life though which social order is accomplished.

Two ideas are particularly central to ethnomethodology and find clear expression in CA: indexicality and reflexivity. The former means that the meaning of an act, which in CA essentially means spoken words or utterances, including pauses and sounds, depends upon the context in which it is used. Reflexivity means that spoken words are constitutive of the social world in which they are located; in other words, the principle of reflexivity in ethnomethodology means that talk is not a 'mere' representation of the social world, so that it does much more than just stand for something else. In these ways, ethnomethodology fits fairly squarely with two aspects of qualitative research—the predilection for a contextual understanding of action (see Chapter 16) and an ontological position associated with constructionism (see Chapter 1).



### Key concept 20.1
### What is conversation analysis?

Conversation analysis (CA) is the fine-grained analysis of talk as it occurs in interaction in naturally occurring situations. The talk is usually recorded and transcribed so that the detailed analyses can be carried out. These analyses are concerned with uncovering the underlying structures of talk in interaction and as such with the achievement of order through interaction.

In the years following its initial introduction into sociology, ethnomethodological research split into two camps. One entailed drawing on traditional social research methods, albeit in perhaps a somewhat altered form, and on ethnography in particular (e.g. Cicourel 1968). The other, which is mainly associated with Sacks and his co-workers (e.g. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), sought to conduct fine-grained analyses of talk in naturally occurring situations. Moreover, it is not just talk in itself that is the object of interest but talk as it occurs in and through social interaction. CA concerns itself with the organization of such talk in the context of interaction (see Key concept 20.1). In order to conduct such investigations, a premium was placed on the recording of naturally occurring conversations and their transcription for the purpose of intensive analysis of the sequences of interaction revealed in the subsequent transcripts. As such, CA is a multifaceted approach—part theory, part method of data acquisition, part method of analysis. The predilection for the analysis of talk gleaned from naturally occurring situations suggests that CA chimes with another preoccupation among qualitative researchers—namely, a commitment to naturalism (see Key concept 2.4 and Key concept 16.1).

As the definition in Key concept 20.1 and the preceding discussion suggest, CA takes from ethnomethodology

a concern with the production of social order through and in the course of social interaction, but takes conversation as the basic form through which that social order is achieved. The element of indexicality is also evident, in that practitioners of CA argue that the meaning of words is contextually grounded, while the commitment to reflexivity is revealed in the view that talk is constitutive of the social context in which it occurs.

Conversation analysts have developed a variety of procedures for the study of talk in interaction. Psathas (1995: 1) has described them as 'rigorous, systematic procedures' that can 'provide reproducible results'. Such a framework smacks of the commitment to the codification of procedures that generate valid, reliable, and replicable findings that are a feature of quantitative research. It is not surprising, therefore, that CA is sometimes described as having a positivist orientation. Thus, a cluster of features that are broadly in tune with qualitative research (contextual, naturalistic, studying the social world in its own terms and without prior theoretical commitments) are married to traits that are resonant of quantitative research. However, the emphasis on context in CA is somewhat at variance with the way in which contextual understanding is normally conceptualized in qualitative research. For CA practitioners, context refers to the specific here-and-now context of immediately preceding talk, whereas for most qualitative researchers it has a much wider set of resonances, which has to do with an appreciation of such things as the culture of the group within which action occurs. In other words, action is to be understood in terms of the values, beliefs, and typical modes of behaviour of that group. This is precisely the kind of attribution from which CA practitioners are keen to refrain. It is no wonder, therefore, that writers like Gubrium and Holstein (1997) treat it as a separate tradition within qualitative research (see Key concept 16.1), while Silverman (1993) finds it difficult to fit CA into broad descriptions of the nature of qualitative research.

Even though organizations are important contexts for talk and interaction, CA has rarely focused directly on the management of business and work organizations. However, although they have not tended to focus on work organizations *per se*, conversation analysts have studied talk in a number of other formal institutional settings, such as television news interviews, courtroom trials, and clinical interaction, which share similarities with the settings of business and management. Boden (1994) uses CA to explore how talk influences organizational structures. She highlights the importance of formal and informal meetings, which she sees as involving sequences of talk that enable people to transmit information, make decisions, and sort out misunderstandings. She suggests CA can provide a means of understanding these interactional contexts, by looking at the way talk is organized in meetings. A further example of CA in management meetings is provided by Gibson (2005), who analyses the effects of hierarchical and horizontal networks on managers' participation shifts (see Research in focus 20.2).

Heritage (1984, 1987) has proposed that CA is governed by three basic assumptions.

- *Talk is structured*. Talk comprises invariant patterns—that is, it is structured. Participants are implicitly aware of the rules that underpin these patterns. As a result, conversation analysts eschew attempts to infer the motivations of speakers from what they say or to ascribe their talk to personal characteristics. Such information is unnecessary, since the conversation analyst is orientated to the underlying structures of action, as revealed in talk.
- *Talk is forged contextually*. Action is revealed in talk, and as such talk must be analysed in terms of its context. This means that we must seek to understand what someone says in terms of the talk that has preceded it and that therefore talk is viewed as exhibiting patterned sequences.
- *Analysis is grounded in data*. Conversation analysts shun prior theoretical schemes and instead argue that characteristics of talk and of the constitutive nature of social order in each empirical instance must be induced out of data. Heritage (1987: 258) has written: 'It is assumed that social actions work in *detail* and hence that the specific details of interaction cannot simply be ignored as insignificant without damaging the prospects for coherent and effective analyses.' This assumption represents a manifesto for the emphasis on fine-grained details (including length of pauses, prolongation of sounds, and so on) that is the hallmark of CA.

As the third of the three assumptions associated with CA indicates, the approach requires the analyst to produce detailed transcripts of natural conversation that includes all the pauses, interruptions, and intonations used by speakers. Some of the basic notational symbols employed in CA are listed below:

- A figure in parentheses is used to indicate the length of a period of silence, usually measured in tenths of one second. Thus, (0.3) signals three-tenths of a second of silence.



## Research in focus 20.2

## A conversation analysis of the impact of networks on managers' participation in meetings

Gibson's (2005) research focused on social networks within organizations, but unusually he was also interested in how these networks affected interactional behaviour. In order to explore this he combined the methods of network analysts, which involved a questionnaire survey focusing on identifying patterns of friendship, co-working, socializing influence, and respect, with the methods of CA based on analysis of 37,309 observations of speaking taken from the observation of 75 meetings involving 10 groups of managers.

His focus was on identifying patterns of participation, and specifically 'participation shifts' which determine who speaks and who is the target of the verbal exchange according to **turn-taking** rules. This CA enabled statistical analysis of participation shifts, which were compared against the data concerning social networks, including hierarchical (superior–subordinate) and horizontal (friendship and co-working) relationships. Gibson observes that, although conversation analysts are generally sceptical of quantification, this can be a useful way of obtaining 'information on the larger sequential context in which a particular event occurs' (2005: 1566).

Among the findings arising from the study was that superiors were unlikely to reply when addressed by subordinates, and subordinates use more qualifiers when addressing their superiors and were unlikely to move conversation away from superiors when they had the floor. Gibson concludes that this mixed-method research design (see Chapter 25) also enabled a temporal dimension to be reflected, the network analysis providing 'snapshot complexity but no temporal definition' and the CA capturing 'snapshot simplicity . . . but tremendous temporal complexity' (2005: 1590).

- Punctuation marks, such as an exclamation mark, are used to capture characteristics of speech delivery rather than grammatical notation.
- Italics are indicative of an emphasis in the speaker's delivery of a word.
- A hyphen represents a cut-off of a prior word or syllable, which may arise because a speaker is interrupted by someone else.
- Brackets indicate the point at which simultaneous speech overlaps—for example when more than one speaker talks at the same time.
- A colon in the middle of a word indicates that the sound that occurs directly before the colon is prolonged (e.g. we:ll). More than one colon means further prolongation (e.g. : : : :).
- .hh h's preceded by a dot indicate an intake of breath. If no dot is present, it means breathing out.
- (.) Indicates a very slight pause.

The attention to detail in CA is very striking and represents a clear difference from the way in which talk is normally treated by social researchers in their transcription conventions when analysing qualitative interviews. It has sometimes been suggested that CA fails to capture body movements, but in recent times the use of video recordings, as in the analysis of the public lectures of management gurus by Greatbatch and Clark (2003; see Research in focus 20.3), has supplemented its tool kit of methods (e.g. Heath 1997). Attention to fine details is thus an essential ingredient of CA work. Pauses and emphases are not to be regarded as incidental or of little significance in terms of what the speaker is trying to achieve; instead, they are part of 'the specific details of interaction [that] cannot simply be ignored as insignificant', as Heritage (1987: 248) puts it.

The gradual accumulation of detailed analyses of talk in interaction has resulted in recognition of recurring features in the way that talk is organized. These features can be regarded as tools that can be applied to sequences of conversation. One of the most basic ideas in CA is the notion that one of the ways in which order is achieved in everyday conversation is through turn-taking. This is a particularly important tool of CA, because it illustrates that talk depends on shared codes. If such codes did not exist, there would not be smooth transitions in conversation. In other words, there must be codes for indicating the ends of utterances.



## Research in focus 20.3
## A conversation analysis of the public lectures of management gurus

Greatbatch and Clark (2003) used CA to analyse the public lectures of management gurus to try to find out how they used their appearance on the international lecture circuit to disseminate ideas and build their personal reputations with audiences. Their analysis was based on commercially produced video recordings of lectures conducted by Tom Peters, Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Peter Senge, and Gary Hamel, and their focus was on the occurrence of collective audience laughter. The use of video recordings enabled them to track gestures and gaze direction, as well as the details of the management gurus' speech. Greatbatch and Clark note that previous CA research on public speaking indicates that 'collective audience responses, such as applause and laughter, are not simply spontaneous reactions to the messages that evoke them' (2003: 1520). Instead, audiences will generally clap or laugh at public speakers' remarks only if they feel that other members of the audience will also do so. Crucial to enabling this is the speaker providing clear completion points in a speech sequence so that audience members can coordinate their actions, and also using non-verbal techniques, including comedic gestures, that 'invite' the audience to respond. For example, on one occasion, Tom Peters 'suddenly leans forward, glares at a section of the audience and speaks louder as he adopts a "mock angry" tone' (2003: 1530). The authors also note that the gurus use humour to refer to aspects of organizational life with which their audience is likely to identify, such as the difficulties of dealing with slow bureaucratic organizations, rather than to convey their core ideas. This is because the latter use of humour might cause the audience members to feel threatened or inadequate because they are unlikely to be using the ideas and therefore to feel unable to join in with the joke.

One of the ways in which turn-taking is revealed is through the examination of **adjacency pairs**. The idea of the adjacency pair draws attention to the well-attested tendency for some kinds of activity as revealed in talk to involve two linked phases: a question followed by an answer; an invitation followed by a response (accept/decline); or a greeting followed by a returned greeting. The first phase invariably implies that the other part of the adjacency pair will be forthcoming—for example, that an invitation will be responded to. The second phase is of interest to the conversation analyst not just because it becomes a springboard for a response in its own right but because compliance with the putative normative structure of the pairing indicates an appreciation of how one is supposed to respond to the initial phase. In this way, 'intersubjective understandings' are continuously reinforced (Heritage 1987: 259–60). This is not to imply that the second phase will *always* follow the first; indeed, the response to a failure to comply with the expected response is itself the focus of attention by conversation analysts.

A further tool employed in CA is the account. The important feature to note about the treatment of accounts in CA is that they are analysed in context—that is, the form that they assume is handled as being occasioned by the speech act that precedes it. Moreover, in CA, accounts are not unusual phenomena to be deployed when things go wrong but are intrinsic to talk in a variety of situations. It is striking that many accounts are in essence simply a description or expression of a state of affairs. However, this review of CA can only scratch the surface of an approach that has developed a highly sophisticated way of studying talk in interaction.

The insistence of conversation analysts that it is important to locate understanding in terms of sequences of talk, and therefore to avoid making extraneous inferences about the meanings of that talk, marks CA as representing a somewhat different approach from much qualitative research. As we have seen in previous chapters, qualitative researchers often claim (perhaps erroneously from the perspective of CA) that they seek to achieve understanding from the perspective of those being studied. Conversation analysts claim to do this only in so far as that understanding can be revealed in the specific contexts of talk. To import elements that are not specifically grounded in the here and now of what has just been said during a conversation risks the implanting of understanding that is not grounded in participants' own terms (Schegloff 1997). Boden (1994), for example, points out that her concern is not automatically with

'typical' variables such as age, race, class, or gender, nor does she assume organizational structure or size as an important starting point for analysis. The status of the speaker is not assumed to dictate the talk; instead, the point of interest for her as a conversation analyst is on how 'aspects of biography and social structure are made relevant in particular talk settings' (1994: 77).

Two points seem relevant here. First, this is a somewhat limiting stance, in that it means that the attribution of motives and meanings as a result of an in-depth understanding of a culture is illegitimate. While an interpretative understanding of social action carries risks on misunderstanding, an approach that prohibits such speculation is potentially restrictive. Secondly, CA is contextual in that it locates understanding in the sequences of talk. However, for the participants of an exchange, much of their talk is informed by their mutual knowledge of contexts. The analyst is restricted from taking those additional components of the context into account if they are not specifically part of the organization of talk. Again, this admonition seems to restrict the analyst more than is desirable in many circumstances and to consign CA to a range of research questions that are amenable solely to the location of meaning in talk alone. On the other hand, CA reduces the risk about making unwarranted speculations about what is happening in social interaction and has contributed much to our understanding of the accomplishment of social order, which is one of the classic concerns of social theory.

## Discourse analysis

Unlike CA, DA is an approach to language that can be applied to forms of communication other than talk. As such, it can be and has been applied to other types of texts, such as company mission statements, websites, or email messages, and in this respect it is more flexible than CA. Moreover, in DA there is much less of an emphasis on naturally occurring talk, so that talk in research interviews can be a legitimate target for analysis. However, DA should not be treated totally in opposition or contradistinction to CA, since it incorporates insights from it.

Unlike CA, which by and large reveals a uniformity based on an orthodoxy associated with certain classic statements concerning its core practices (e.g. Sacks, Schegloff, and Jefferson 1974), there are several different approaches that are labelled as DA (Potter 1997). The version that is to be discussed in this section is one that is associated with such writers as Potter (1997), Potter and Wetherell (1987, 1994), Billig (1992), and Gilbert and Mulkay (1984). It is to be differentiated from critical discourse analysis (CDA), which is associated with writers such as Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2003), Hardy (2001), and Phillips and Hardy (2002), and which will be dealt with later in this chapter. The version of DA that we are concerned with here (see Key concept 20.4) has been described as exhibiting two distinctive features at the level of epistemology and ontology (Potter 1997).



### Key concept 20.4
### What is discourse analysis?

The version of DA described in this section is one that has been of particular interest to social scientists; it can be applied to both naturally occurring and contrived forms of talk and to texts. According to Potter (1997), DA 'emphasizes the way versions of the world, of society, events and inner psychological worlds are produced in discourse' (1997: 146).

This definition of DA means that discourse is not just a mirror on the social world around us but in many ways plays a key role in producing that world. *How* we say things—our phrases, our emphases, the things we leave out—is meant to accomplish certain effects in others. In so doing, we have an impact on others' perceptions and understandings and as such on their and our reality.

- It is *anti-realist*: in other words, it denies that there is an external reality awaiting a definitive portrayal by the researcher and it therefore disavows the notion that any researcher can arrive at a privileged account of the aspect of the social world being investigated. Some discourse analysts, however, adopt a stance that is closer to a realist position, but most seem to be anti-realist in orientation.

- It is *constructionist*: in other words, the emphasis is placed on the versions of reality propounded by members of the social setting being investigated and on the fashioning of that reality through their renditions of it (see Key concept 1.14). More specifically, the constructionist emphasis entails a recognition that discourse entails a selection from many viable renditions and that in the process a particular depiction of reality is built up.

Thus, discourse is not simply a neutral device for imparting meaning. People seek to accomplish things when they talk or when they write; DA is concerned with the strategies they employ in trying to create different kinds of effect. This version of DA is, therefore, action orientated—that is, is a way of getting things done. This is revealed in three basic discourse-analytic questions:

1. What is this discourse doing?
2. How is this discourse constructed to make this happen?
3. What resources are available to perform this activity? (Potter 2004: 609)

In addition, DA shares with CA a preference for locating contextual understanding in terms of the situational specifics of talk. As Potter (1997: 158) puts it, discourse analysts prefer to avoid making reference in their analyses to what he refers to as 'ethnographic particulars' and argues that instead they prefer 'to see things as things that are worked up, attended to and made relevant in interaction rather than being external determinants'. However, DA practitioners are less committed to this principle than conversation analysts, in that the former sometimes show a greater preparedness to make reference to 'ethnographic particulars'.

Discourse analysts resist the idea of a codification of their practices and indeed argue that such a codification is probably impossible. Instead, they prefer to see their style of research as an 'analytic mentality' and as such as 'a craft skill, more like bike riding or chicken sexing than following the recipe for a mild chicken rogan josh' (Potter 1997: 147–8). One useful point of departure for DA research that has been suggested by Gill (1996), following Widdicombe (1993), is to treat the way that something is said as being 'a solution to a problem' (Widdicombe 1993: 97, quoted in Gill 1996: 146). Gill (2000) also suggests adopting a posture of 'sceptical reading'. This means searching for a purpose lurking behind the ways that something is said or presented. Gill has also proposed that DA can usefully be thought of as comprising four main themes, which are outlined in Thinking deeply 20.5.



## Tips and skills
## Using existing material

As some of the examples of DA illustrate, you may be able to use the technique to illuminate issues of interest to you based on materials that are in the public domain, such as speeches. In many cases, these will be available in electronic form. This means that you do not have to put a lot of effort into the collection of data, though it will be necessary to seek out the materials. Instead, you can give greater emphasis to analysing the materials using the DA approach. Research in focus 20.6 provides an example of a study that relied exclusively on publicly available written texts.

The bulk of the exposition of DA that follows is based on three studies:

- research into the discourses applied to unemployed older workers in Australia (Ainsworth and Hardy 2009);
- a study of computer-based monitoring of employee performance in a building society and a bank (Ball and Wilson 2000);
- an analysis of corporate social responsibility in the context of oil producing and refining company web pages (Coupland 2005).



## Thinking deeply 20.5
## Four themes in discourse analysis

Gill (2000) has drawn attention to four prominent themes in DA.

1. *Discourse is a topic*. This means that discourse is a focus of enquiry itself and not just a means of gaining access to aspects of social reality that lie behind it. This view contrasts with a traditional research interview in which language is a way of revealing what interviewees think about a topic or their behaviour and the reasons for that behaviour.
2. *Language is constructive*. This means that discourse is a way of constituting a particular view of social reality. Morever, in rendering that view, choices are made regarding the most appropriate way of presenting it, and these will reflect the disposition of the person responsible for devising it.
3. *Discourse is a form of action*. As Gill (2000: 175) puts it, language is viewed 'as a practice in its own right'. Language is a way of accomplishing acts, such as attributing blame, presenting oneself in a particular way, or getting an argument across. Moreover, a person's discourse is affected by the context that he or she is confronting. Thus, your account of your reasons for wanting a job may vary according to whether you are addressing interviewers in a job interview, members of your family, or friends.
4. *Discourse is rhetorically organized*. This means that DA practitioners recognize that discourse is concerned with 'establishing one version of the world in the face of competing versions' (Gill 2000: 176). In other words, there is a recognition that we want to persuade others when we present a version of events or state a position on an issue.



## Research in focus 20.6
## The application of mind and body discourses to older workers

Aimsworth and Hardy (2009) studied the discourses pertaining to the employment of older workers through a discursive analysis of a parliamentary inquiry in Australia, which was set up to examine the barriers that older unemployed workers face in regaining employment. The inquiry lasted just over a year (1998–9) and comprised a series of written submissions and public hearings held throughout Australia, where employee and lobby groups, unions, government representatives, and private individuals were invited to appear. A final report was then published in 2000 on the findings of the inquiry. One of the reasons for selecting the inquiry as a research site was because of the accessibility, volume, and range of available texts relating to it, which included media releases, written submissions, and more than 1,000 pages of oral evidence and testimony relating to the public hearings, which had been transcribed verbatim. There was the further advantage that many of these documents could be obtained from the government website. Ainsworth and Hardy (2009) claim that, because these 'naturally occurring' texts were generated independently of the researcher, they have the advantage of not being subject to **reactive effect** and provided very useful materials for systematic analysis.

The authors identify two discourses in the texts:

1. *physical discourses relating to the body*: which portray ageing as a process of inevitable decline;
2. *discourses of the mind*: which psychologize and individualize the problem of unemployment.

They further argue that, while these discourses have separate effects, their consequences for identity formation are even greater when brought together through a normative 'mechanism of grief', which encourages older unemployed workers to make use of labour market interventions that help them to accept their loss of employment rather than locate permanent job opportunities. Unemployed older workers were thus advised to 'manage the grief' associated with their loss of employment and to 'resolve the anger' that they felt in relation to job loss because this was deemed 'unhealthy' and claimed to be harming their chances of re-employment. The personal stories told by unemployed older workers were thereby discursively regulated through retelling and reframing by others in a way that deflected responsibility away from government agencies or employers. The authors conclude that, 'rather than provide space for resistance, the intersection of these discourses disempowers an already disadvantaged group' (Ainsworth and Hardy 2009: 1200).

The first study, by Ainsworth and Hardy (2009; see Research in focus 20.6), shows how discourses of the mind and body are used to discipline unemployed older workers in a way that is disempowering; the second study, by Ball and Wilson (2000; see Research in focus 20.7), provides an illustration of how the notion of interpretative repertoires can be used to explore power and control in organizations; finally, in the study of company websites by Coupland (2005; see Research in focus 20.8), discourse analysis is applied to understanding the way that constructions of corporate social responsibility are made plausible and legitimate in the context of company websites.

A further element to be sensitive to is that, as Gill (1996), following Billig (1991), suggests, what is said is always a way of *not* saying something else. In other words, either total silence on a topic, or formulating an argument in a conversation or article in one way rather than in another way, is a crucial component of seeing discourse as a solution to a problem. For example, Ainsworth and Hardy (2009) argue that discourse shapes the rules that determine how we speak and act in relation to a given topic, in a way that gives certain actors more legitimacy and rights to commentate than others. They found that discourses that represent the physical process of human ageing as a process of inevitable decline and discourses of the mind that focus on psychologizing feelings of loss and anger associated with job losses were used to marginalize older workers and to exclude them from the labour market. Formulating understandings of unemployment in this way thus discourages collective acknowledgement of responsibility for the problem of older worker unemployement and invites older unemployed people to accept their disempowered situation. This example illustrates the potential for discourses to affect the power relations between social actors, a point to which we will return at the end of this chapter, in the section on 'critical discourse analysis'.

Potter and Wetherell (1994) suggest that there are two tendencies within DA, although they acknowledge that the distinction is somewhat artificial. One is the identification of 'the general resources that are used to construct discourse and enable the performance of particular actions' (1994: 48–9), which is concerned with identifying *interpretative repertoires*. The other is concerned to identify 'the detailed procedures through which versions are constructed and made to look factual' (1994: 49). We will now explore these two strands of DA.

In order to illustrate the idea of an **interpretative repertoire**, a study of computer-based performance monitoring in two UK financial service organizations will be referred to (see Research in focus 20.7). Another example of the use of repertoires can be seen in the study by Coupland (2005) of corporate social responsibility on the Web. This research is outlined in Research in focus 20.8.

Ball and Wilson (2000) found significant differences between their two case study organizations in the way that language was used to make sense of computer-based performance monitoring. From this they identify four interpretative repertoires that reflect the ways that individuals make sense of power relations within the organization.



## Research in focus 20.7

## Interpretative repertoires in computer-based performance monitoring

In a study of computer-based performance monitoring, Ball and Wilson (2000) collected observational and interview data in two departments, one in a building society (Case 1) and the other in a bank (Case 2). In Case 1, the open-plan physical layout of the offices meant that teams were highly visible to the department manager; performance statistics were fed back to individuals at the end of each week, detailing the financial value of the telephone calls to clients that had been made. In Case 2, there was a greater degree of separation between offices, and the manager had little direct contact with his staff. Performance monitoring in this context focused on the relationship between work time and volume of work processed by each individual.

From their data analysis, Ball and Wilson suggest that, in Case 1, a repertoire of empowerment was dominant, whereas, in Case 2, a repertoire of legitimate authority prevailed. These were accompanied in each case by subordinate repertoires that enabled individuals to build alternative or resistant positions. They conclude that disciplinary power worked in quite different ways in the two organizations. In Case 1, individuals engage in subtle support of, or differentiation from, the dominant repertoire, whereas in Case 2 they developed outright opposition to them.



## Research in focus 20.8
## Repertoires of corporate social responsibility

In a study of corporate social responsibility (CSR) on the Web, Coupland's (2005) research design was founded on the premise that websites involve language games whose success relies on their persuasiveness 'in the light of available, alternative, versions of company behaviour' (2005: 357). Her focus was on repertoires of argumentation concerning CSR found on the websites of four multinational organizations in the petrochemical industry. This industry was selected because the nature of the activities of these organizations locates them within environmental debates. The aim of the study was to identify the argumentation repertoires that are used by the organizations to describe their socially responsible activities.

The websites were monitored over a six-month period, and major changes were noted. Using the websites' own search engines, keyword searches were conducted relating to 'social responsibility'. These searches resulted in several hundred hits from the four websites. The data were grouped into themes, or repertoires (Potter and Wetherell 1987), that emerged as supportive of corporate claims to socially responsible activities (Coupland 2005: 358). The aim of this analysis was to 'make an account of devices, or procedures, that contribute to the sense that discourses are literally describing the world' (2005: 358). Analysis of the content of company websites led Coupland to identify four interdependent repertoires of social responsibility:

- *Societal legitimation*. The main purpose of this rhetoric was to account for the organization's attention to issues beyond being focused on profit.
- *Responsible legitimation*. Three themes of responsibility were identified, first in relation to the 'business case' for CSR, second in relation to balancing the competing demands of shareholders and other stakeholders, and third in relation to the law of the country of operation.
- *Other de-legitimation*: This repertoire involved questioning of some pressure groups and acknowledgement of CSR as a passing trend about which there is little consensus.
- *Context-specific legitimation*: This repertoire relates to the genre of communication—the website. Hence producers of website content used titles that positioned the issues as 'vague, generalized, notions, which existed as separate from the company' (2005: 362).

Coupland describes these repertoires as 'virtuous circles' because of their interdependent nature. Coupland concedes that the study of website discourses involves bracketing material and social practices; in other words, what an organization says about CSR may be quite different from what it actually does. However, the importance of websites as a genre of communication renders them an important source in the study of organizational identity formation.

- *The empowerment repertoire*. This is informants' talk that contains themes of 'self management', 'pro-activity', 'choice', and 'freedom'. This is illustrated by one manager who positions himself in these terms, stating:

> Extract 1: '. . . you empower people, people start throwing out ideas and actually manage themselves, and that's worked, we think, quite well in our area. . .' (Ball and Wilson 2000: 551).

- *The 'life in work' repertoire*. This comprises a set of patterns that construe work as 'objective', 'neutral', and 'egalitarian', so that a manager may be seen, for example, as treating 'everybody as equal'.
- *The 'legitimate authority' repertoire*. This is typified by themes of 'discipline', 'rules', 'negative instruction', and 'inflexibility'. Ball and Wilson suggest that managers who claim a position based on legitimate authority repertoire tend to emphasize their access to, and control over, the computer-based performance monitoring statistics.
- *The 'power through experience' repertoire*. This is concerned with the knowledge and understanding that is needed to do the job; it can be mobilized as a form of resistance by showing how some managers do not have the experience to be able to manage. For example:

> Extract 10: 'I was an inputter, and I've done grade two and now I'm a grade three [supervisor]. I know, from scratch, so it's easier for me so I can relate to the grade ones and the grade twos, because I've been there and I've done it, so I'm in a good position I would say' (Ball and Wilson 2000: 555).

Ball and Wilson locate these interpretative repertoires as mechanisms whereby disciplinary power is exercised over individuals. However, they also suggest that, by 'troubling' (Wetherell 1998), individuals are able to exercise resistance to the dominant discourse through their conversation. Resistance is thereby generated through *reciprocal positioning*; this is when individuals position themselves so that, even though they use the terms associated with the dominant discourse, they do so in a way that enables them to position themselves in opposition to it. Another form of resistance is generated by *alternative positioning*, whereby an individual positions him or herself in terms of a discourse that represents an alternative to the dominant one.

The notion of the interpretative repertoire is interesting because it brings out the idea that belief and action take place within templates that guide and influence the writer or speaker. However, the interpretative repertoires identified by Ball and Wilson (2000) and Coupland (2005) by no means exhaust the range of possibilities of analysis, as the advantages of the notion of interpretative repertoires stem primarily from its flexibility in accounting for a diverse range of social practices. Hence, Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggest that repertoires are available to people with many different social group memberships. They also point out that there is no need to attempt to find consensus with regard to repertoires—because they are used to perform different sorts of accounting tasks, individuals are able to draw upon a variety of repertoires in different situations. Finally, they emphasize that 'the concept of repertoire is but one component in a systematic approach to the study of discourse' (Potter and Wetherell 1987: 157), one that in a few years' time may be developed further or even discarded.

In discourse analytic research there is also an emphasis on the resources that are employed in conveying allegedly factual knowledge—or what Potter and Wetherell (1994) might describe as *quantification rhetoric*, by which is meant the ways in which numerical and non-numerical statements are made to support or refute arguments. Instead, the texts largely consist of general statements, claims, and conclusions. This is interesting, given the importance of quantification in everyday life and the tendency for many social scientists to make use of this strategy themselves (John 1992).

A number of further characteristics apply to DA. Some of the most important are presented in the list that follows.

- *Reading the detail*: discourse analysts incorporate the CA preference for attention to the details of discourse.
- *Looking for rhetorical detail*: attention to rhetorical detail entails a sensitivity to the ways in which arguments are constructed.
- *Looking for accountability*: discourse analysts draw on CA practitioners' interest in and approach to accounts. From the point of view of both CA and DA, discourse can, and should, be regarded as accounts. For DA practitioners, the search for accountability entails attending to the details through which these accounts are constructed.
- *Cross-referencing discourse studies*: Potter and Wetherell suggest that reading other discourse studies is itself an important activity. First, it helps to sharpen the analytic mentality at the heart of DA. Secondly, other studies often provide insights that are suggestive for one's own data.

As this discussion of DA has emphasized on several occasions, DA draws on insights from CA. Particularly when analysing strings of talk, DA draws on conversation analytic insights into the ways in which interaction is realized in and through talk in interaction, but it is more flexible than CA in terms of the kinds of texts that are analysed, including various kinds of documents and research interviews, in addition to naturally occurring conversation in their work. The CA injunction to focus on the talk itself and the ways in which intersubjective meaning is accomplished in sequences of talk are also incorporated into DA. DA, however, permits the intrusion of understandings of what is going on that are not specific to the immediacy of previous utterances to a greater extent than CA. For their part, discourse analysts object to the restriction that this injunction imposes, because it means that conversation analysts 'rarely raise their eyes from the next turn in the conversation, and, further, this is not an entire conversation or sizeable slice of social life but usually a tiny fragment' (Wetherell 1998: 402). Thus, for discourse analysts, phenomena such as interpretative repertoires are very much part of the context within which talk occurs, whereas in CA they are inadmissible evidence. But it is here that we see the dilemma for the discourse analyst, for, in seeking to admit a broader sense of context (such as attention to interpretative repertoires

in operation) while wanting to stick close to the conversation analysts' distaste for ethnographic particulars, they are faced with the uncertainty of just how far to go in allowing the inclusion of conversationally extraneous factors.

Hence, fine-grained approaches such as CA and DA have been criticized for being too narrow in focus or not sufficiently sensitive to context. The anti-realist inclination of many DA practitioners has been a source of controversy, because the emphasis on representational practices through discourses sidelines any notion of a pre-existing material reality that can constrain individual agency. Reality becomes little more than that which is constituted in and through discourse. This lack of attention to a material reality that lies behind and underpins discourse has proved too abstracted for some social researchers and theorists. This is an issue that will be returned to at the end of this chapter, when we examine critical discourse analysis. The main point to note at this stage is that, while many DA practitioners are anti-realist, an alternative realist or critical realist position in relation to discourse is also feasible.



## Narrative analysis

Narrative analysis is an approach to the elicitation and analysis of language that is sensitive to the sense of temporal sequence that people, as tellers of stories about their lives or events around them, detect in their lives and surrounding episodes and inject into their accounts. Proponents of narrative analysis argue that most approaches to the collection and analysis of data neglect the fact that people perceive their lives in terms of continuity and process, and that attempts to understand social life that are not attuned to this feature neglect the perspective of those being studied. Life history research (see Key concept 18.4) is an obvious location for the application of a narrative analysis, but its use can be much broader than this. Mishler (1986: 77), for example, has argued for greater interest in 'elicited personal narratives'. In his view, and that of many others, the answers that people provide, in particular in qualitative interviews, can be viewed as stories that are potential fodder for a narrative analysis. In other words, narrative analysis relates not just to the life span but also to accounts relating to episodes and to the interconnections between them. Some researchers apply narrative analysis to interview accounts (e.g. Riessman 1993), while others deliberately ask people to recount stories (e.g. R. L. Miller 2000). A further type of qualitative analysis that is related to narrative relates to the analysis of organizations as a dramatic performance like a stage play (see Research in focus 20.15).

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) argue that a narrative should be viewed in terms of the functions that the narrative serves for the teller. The aim of narrative interviews is to elicit interviewees' reconstructed accounts of connections between events and between events and contexts. A narrative analysis will then entail a seeking-out of the forms and functions of narrative. R. L. Miller (2000) proposes that narrative interviews in life story or biographical research are far more concerned with eliciting the interviewee's perspective as revealed in the telling of the story of his or her life or family than with the facts of that life. There is a concern with how that perspective changes in relation to different contexts. The interviewer is very much a part of the process, in that he or she is fully implicated in the construction of the story for the interviewee.

Narrative analysis has made significant inroads into business and management research in recent years (Czarniawska 1998; Boje 2001; see also Research in focus 20.11). For the organizational researcher, narrative analysis can prove extremely helpful in providing a springboard for understanding what Weick (1995) has termed 'organizational sense making'. In one of the best-known studies using a narrative approach, Boje (1991) analyses the types and uses of stories in an office supply firm based on his participant observation in the organization and interviews with key actors. Stories became a common focus of attention when researchers became interested in organizational culture in the 1980s, and this interest in organizational stories has continued, but they have tended to form just one of a number of aspects of culture in which researchers have been interested (for example, rituals and mission statements). Thus, Boje (1991) provides an example of a strategic planning session in which, during a fairly brief interlude, a number of stories are recounted that serve the function of conveying to participants that printing was a different enterprise at the time of the stories in question from



## Research in focus 20.9
## The narrative styles of managers and workers

Beech (2000) analysed the stories told by managers and workers in three organizations that were implementing culture change and from this he identified six factors that were related to four underlying narrative styles that are typified in the following examples:

- *Heroic director*. This narrative is characterized by a problem that is solved by the heroic individual actions of a senior manager.
- *Romantic ward manager*. In this narrative the lead character asks the organization for help but is refused. Despite encountering a series of organizational obstacles, he or she keeps trying to build a positive future.
- *Tragic skilled worker*. This narrative involves the central figure who seeks to fulfil his or her organizational duty but is not listened to by the holders of power. The impossibility of the situation leads to failure and he or she pays the cost personally.
- *Ironic response to HRM*. In this narrative managerial intentions produce the opposite effect from what was intended because they do not take into account the experience and common sense of those who are managed.

Beech argues that, rather than being fixed in a single style category, managers' and workers' use of different narrative styles is dependent on their social circumstances.

the current situation (see also Boje 2001: 118–21). For the CEO, the story helps participants to make sense of their current situation and conveys a sense of things being better now than they were in the past, at the time when the less than desirable features relating to printing orders pertained. In the process, the CEO is able to gain a certain amount of political advantage by portraying the current context in a more favourable light. The example in Research in focus 20.9 illustrates how narrative analysts focus on the identification of particular narrative styles that are commonly found within organizations.

The significance of narrative for understanding the internal politics of organizations is further indicated by the study referred to in Research in focus 20.10. As Brown (1998) notes in relation to this study, one of the advantages of narrative analysis in a context such as this is that it conveys a clear sense of an organization as an arena in which a variety of perspectives and viewpoints coexist, rather than a monolithic entity with a single voice. However, as Brown notes, his rendition of the three narratives of the implementation is itself a narrative. As such, it is either a compelling one or one that fails to convince us. This point presages the kind of issue that will receive more treatment in Chapter 27. In this sense, all research when it is written up entails a narrative analysis because the researcher/author always has a story to tell about his or her data (see Research in focus 20.11).



## Research in focus 20.10
## An example of narratives in a hospital

Brown (1998) has examined the competing narratives involved in the aftermath of the introduction of a hospital information support system (HISS) at a British hospital trust referred to as 'The City'. The IT implementation was largely seen as unsuccessful because of the absence of clear clinical benefits and cost overruns. Drawing on his interviews with key actors regarding the IT implementation and its aftermath, Brown presents three contrasting narratives—the ward narrative; the laboratory narrative; and the implementation team's narrative—thereby presenting the perspectives of the main groups of participants in the implementation.

The three contrasting narratives provide a very clear sense of the organization as a political arena in which groups and individuals contest the legitimacy of others' interpretations of events. Thus, 'the representations of each group's narrative are described as vehicles for establishing its altruistic motives for embarking on the project, and for attributing responsibility for what had come to be defined as a failing project to others' (Brown 1998: 49).

Thus, while the three groups had similar motivations for participating in the initiative, largely in terms of the espousal of an ethic of patient care, they had rather different latent motivations and interpretations of what went wrong. In terms of the former, whereas the ward narrative implied a latent motivation to save doctors' and nurses' time, the laboratory team emphasized the importance of retaining the existing IT systems, and the implementation team placed the accent on the possible advantages for their own careers, in large part by the increased level of dependence on their skills. In terms of the contrasting narratives of what went wrong, the ward narrative was to do with the failure of the implementation team to coordinate the initiative and meet deadlines, and the laboratory team emphasized the tendency for the implementation team not to listen or communicate. As for the implementation team, their diagnosis was to do with the ward staff failing to communicate their needs, lack of cooperation from the laboratory staff, and poorly written software.



## Research in focus 20.11
## Narrative research in organizations

Rhodes and Brown (2005) conducted a review of the business and management literature on narrative analysis (one of which was the article in Research in focus 20.10). Their use of **narrative review** (see Chapter 4) is consistent with the focus of their review on a qualitative research method. They identify five principal research areas that narrative analysis has explored, assessing the theoretical value that each has added:

1. *sense-making*: focuses on the role of stories as a device through which people make sense of organizational events;
2. *communication*: explores how narratives are used to create and maintain organizational culture and power structure;
3. *learning/change*: analyses how stories help people to learn and subjectively make sense of change;
4. *politics and power*: considers the role of shared narratives in the control of organizational meaning;
5. *identity and structuration*: focuses on the role of stories in creating and maintaining organizational identity.

They observe that this research has been beneficial to the field for several reasons. First, it has helped to focus attention on the temporal aspects of organizational life—how stories about organizational events express change and how the stories themelves change over time. Secondly, it stimulates reflection on the different and often divergent interpretations of organizational life. Thirdly, it draws attention to the role and significance of language in constructing organizational realities.



# Rhetorical analysis

Related to narrative analysis is an approach that focuses on the importance of rhetorical devices as a means of communication and persuasion within management and organization. This includes analysis of classic rhetorical devices, such as argumentation, as well as various literary devices, including tropes such as metaphor, synecdoche, metonymy, and irony. Rhetoric and tropes are argued to be an unavoidable feature of organizational

life (Oswick, Putnam, and Keenoy 2004). However, analyses often tend to focus on their role in communicating with large audiences. For example, Swales and Rogers (1995; see Research in focus 20.12) analysed corporate mission statements to demonstrate the importance of linguistic features in fostering organizational affiliation and identification. Rhetorical analysis has also been used to critique management fashions and management gurus by exploring how language is used to communicate ideas to global audiences (B. Jackson 2001). Rhetorical analysis is also applied in the study of leadership, as another organizational context in which language is targeted at large audiences. For example, the study by Hartog and Verburg (1997) described in Research in focus 20.13 analysed the message, style, and delivery of charismatic business leaders' speeches, identifying several classic rhetorical devices.



## Research in focus 20.12
## The rhetoric of corporate mission statements

Swales and Rogers (1995) use DA to explore how corporations project their philosophy through mission statements. From a collection of over 100 individual texts, they analyse a sample of 30 mission statements that reflect a diverse range of industries, organizational types, and countries of operation. They conclude that the content of these texts is 'pithy and up-beat', consisting of general statements with almost a total lack of 'support' such as examples, statistics, and so on. Mission statements 'tend to stress values, *positive* behaviour and guiding principles within the framework of the corporation's *announced* belief system and analysis' (1995: 227, emphasis in original).

Swales and Rogers show how mission statements use a number of linguistic features that are designed to foster affiliation and identification. Many use the rhetorical device of adopting the first-person-plural pronoun, 'we', to denote 'the employees of the corporation', rather than senior management or the corporation. In one instance they note that twenty-two of the sixty-six sentences in the document 'begin with the credo-like incantation "We believe . . ."' (1995: 234).

The second part of their research involved focusing on the mission statements of two well-known US companies—the Dana Corporation, a worldwide automotive parts supplier, and Honeywell, best known internationally for its temperature control systems.

In order to go beyond the surface of the text and explore the *framing content*, the researchers studied the companies' history, collected a wide range of documents, searched the business press, made site visits, and talked to key players. This enabled them to establish how mission statements get written and how they are perceived by their creators and users.

However, their original research plan also involved interviewing a stratified sample (see Chapter 4) of employees about their attitudes towards and uses of mission statements. This was not possible—'in both corporations, we were politely but firmly discouraged from such an ambition' (1995: 236)—because they were perceived as cultural outsiders.

This study highlights the importance of rhetorical devices in provoking identification and commitment among listeners. It suggests that how a leader's message is framed, through the use of metaphors, rhythm, contrasts, and lists, is as important as what the speech is about in gaining commitment from followers. These 'tools for framing' define the form and construction of the message by providing vivid images for the audience. According to Hartog and Verburg (1997), they include the following:

- *Contrast*. This is where a subject is described in terms of its opposite in order to reinforce a point. For example, in one of Anita Roddick's speeches she states:



## Research in focus 20.13
## The rhetorical construction of charismatic leadership

Hartog and Verburg (1997) show how charismatic leaders rely on the rhetorical construction of messages to overcome social and spatial distances between them and their followers. They explore how the charismatic content of business leaders' speeches is constructed through the use of rhetorical devices, and consider what these speeches reveal about business leaders' attitudes towards internationalization. Using the method of DA, they focus on speeches of three CEOs of international corporations:

- Anita Roddick—the Body Shop;
- Matthew Barrett—Bank of Montreal;
- Jan Timmer—former CEO of Philips.

They show how the literal meaning of the message is strengthened by presenting it in a specific form, using a range of rhetorical devices. They suggest that the use of different rhetorical devices reflects the orientation of speakers towards internationalization. Roddick has a universalistic approach towards global strategy formation, Barrett pays more attention to the differences between countries or regions in his speeches, and Timmer seeks simultaneously to acknowledge the differences between countries and subsidiaries while still retaining a strong sense of Philips's identity. They conclude that the analysis of rhetoric can provide useful insight into the internationalization strategies of charismatic business leaders.

3. Remember, corporations are invented. They are human institutions, not species found in nature. (Hartog and Verburg 1997: 367)

- *List*. This is usually composed of three parts, this being the minimum number to show that there is a group of items without adding too many elements that would make the list excessive. Here is an example, in the first few sentences of a speech given by Jan Timmer:

6. That together we are strong, together we can make progress and that our destiny really is in our own hands. That we no longer say they ought to do something but that we continue to say after today we are going to do something. That will restore the Philips-image. That will make Philips again a very nice place to work in. That will make Philips a company we can all be proud of. (Hartog and Verburg 1997: 368)

This is analysed as:

1. together we are strong;
2. together we can make progress;
3. our destiny really is in our own hands.

- *Headline–punchline/puzzle–solution*. In this instance the speaker creates the opportunity to present a punchline or solution by first presenting a headline or puzzle. This is illustrated using an excerpt from a speech given by Anita Roddick:

9. I came from an Italian immigrant family. At ten years of age, when my father died, my mother and us four kids worked in a large café. There were no family holidays, there were no family diversions, except for the weekly cinema, it was work! It was a livelihood. It was an extension of our home, our kitchen. Courtships flourished in that café, marriages formed, friendships connected, the eye was delighted, the music from the jukebox spoke personally to

> everyone and your heart was in the workplace. It taught me a huge lesson, you can bring your heart to work with you. It taught me business was not financial science, it is about trading, buying and selling. It is about creating a product or service so good that people will pay a higher price for that. (Hartog and Verburg 1997: 369)

According to Hartog and Verburg, the story of Roddick's youth provides the puzzle from which she constructs a solution: 'it taught me . . . you can bring your heart to work with you'.

- *Position-taking*. The speaker begins by giving a fairly neutral description of a state of affairs and then he or she strongly agrees or disagrees with it. In a speech, Matthew Barrett takes a position regarding the state of the Canadian economy, stating:

> 10. As the weeks since October 30 have passed one by one, my optimism has slowly waned. What I hear are seductive voices calling us back to 'jobs and the economy'. Even the incoming premier of Quebec is saying as much. And the polls suggest the public agrees. I *don't* agree. (Hartog and Verburg 1997: 370)

- *Pursuit, repetition, alliteration*. The speaker may actively pursue audience reactions by repeating or otherwise stressing a point—for example, by saying 'I repeat . . .'. For example, in a speech, Jan Timmer uses repetition in the delivery of his three-part list:

1. *That will* restore the Philips-image.
2. *That will* make Philips again a very nice place to work in.
3. *That will* make Philips a company we can all be proud of. (Hartog and Verburg 1997: 370)

Rhetorical analysis enables a focus on the persuasive acts that help to engender identification and foster co-operation within a group. For example, in the study by Swales and Rogers (1995) of corporate mission statements (see Research in focus 20.12), the researchers were especially interested in the way that mission statements were rhetorically designed to ensure maximum employee 'buy-in' and identification with the company. However, they note that mission statements operate at a general and ambiguous level and deal mainly with abstractions. From the mission statements they analyse, they observe that there is an almost total absence of 'support' in the form of examples, quotations, or statistics. Swales and Rogers (1995: 227) note that verb forms used within the mission statements are predominantly present, imperative (for example, 'return to underwriting profit'), or purpose infinitive (for example, 'to provide a caring environment . . .'; 'to be the safest carrier'). The rhetorical devices that we have described in this section provide an important means whereby organizational researchers are able to explore and systematically analyse this use of language.

Research in focus 20.14 and Research in focus 20.15 provide some further examples of a rhetorical approach, though the latter is an extension of it, rather than an illustration as such.



## Research in focus 20.14
## The rhetoric of marketing management textbooks

Another interesting application of rhetorical analysis is Hackley's (2003) rhetorical analysis of textbooks in the field of marketing management. Hackley notes that this field has spawned a huge number of books and that two publishers alone—Pearson Education and Macmillan—between them had over 200 titles in their UK catalogues in 2000. He explored the underlying rhetoric of a selection of these texts, including the work of leading figures like Philip Kotler. Through his rhetorical exploration of these texts, Hackley uncovered several striking themes. He notes, for example, that 'theory' occupies a paradoxical position in these texts. It is both, as he puts it, 'aggrandized and despised' (2003: 1332). It is aggrandized because the texts typically indicate that they will cover key theories but then theory is knocked down because it is seen to be impractical and not likely, therefore,

to provide guides to action. They frequently use other terms like 'tool', 'framework', and 'concept' rather than 'theory' because of its association with lofty ivory tower (and presumably irrelevant) reflection. Another rhetorical device noted is what Hackley calls 'bogus reflexivity', which occurs when the author of the marketing text notes limitations of typical work in the field but then proceeds to reaffirm the stance of much of that typical work. In other words, there is an acknowledgement of shortcomings, but those shortcomings are often held in abeyance so far as the writing of the text is concerned. For Hackley, the rhetorical examination of these texts provides an insight into managerialist ideology.



## Research in focus 20.15
## Drama and executive action

Related to analyses of narrative and rhetoric is the notion of dramaturgy, as a method for analysing social action and people's explanations of social action. Building on the work of Goffman (1959) and the concept of impression management, dramaturgical analysis focuses on understanding the roles, scenes, scripts, and performances that people engage in as they interact with each other in a given setting.

Mangham's (1986) study of the executive function is based on the activities of a small group of managers as they think, talk, feel, and act on one afternoon during a boardroom discussion. Using a dramaturgical perspective, Mangham treats the processes whereby the executives interact with each other as 'performances', through which each member of the group asserts his power or status. The study focuses on just one short sequence of social activity, from which Mangham generates a series of 'readings' or interpretations of events. He explains:

> I have spent more hours of my life with these executives than I care to remember and recorded in one form or another thousands of lines of text. Out of this mass of material I have selected less than fifteen minutes and from these confused and confusing minutes I have shaped my presentation. A verbatim transcript of what was actually said—the entire repertoire of false starts, incomplete sentences, talkings over and the like—together with a detailed description of their non-verbal behaviour—the scratching, the fidgeting, the movement of feet, the twitching of brows, the coughs, stomach rumbles and so on—would fill several volumes and still be but a poor record of the actual scenes and exchanges. (1986: 153)

Mangham's analysis draws attention to the way that social actors construct their own power and status. This involves great skill in working with scripted roles combined with appropriate displays of emotion.



# Context-sensitive approaches

The accusations levelled at fine-grained approaches, as too narrowly focused on language in use and insufficiently related to social and historical context, lead to consideration of approaches that seek to take into account to a greater extent factors that influence how language is produced, disseminated, and consumed. The approaches of narrative and rhetorical analysis can be considered to be more focused on the way that social reality is shaped through language. They can therefore be characterized as meso-level approaches (Alvesson and Karreman 2000), being more sensitive to the context in which language is produced, concerned with finding generalizable patterns, and going beyond the detail of the text to a greater extent than fine-grained approaches. However, there is a further group of what Grant et al. (2004) describe as 'context-sensitive approaches' that

take account of factors beyond the text itself. The most influential of these, in organizational research at least, is critical discourse analysis (CDA). The section that follows will introduce the theoretical approaches that underpin CDA and outline the basic framework and key concepts that CDA practitioners employ.

## Critical discourse analysis

Critical discourse analysis emphasizes the role of language as a power resource that is related to ideology and socio-cultural change. It draws in particular on the theories and approaches of Foucault (1974, 1979, 1980), who sought to uncover the representational properties of discourse as a vehicle for the exercise of power based on the construction of disciplinary practices that enable the construction of the self-disciplining subject. The notion of discourse is, therefore, defined more broadly than in fine-grained approaches, as this summary by Phillips and Hardy (2002) illustrates.

> We define a discourse as an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that brings an object into being (I. Parker 1992) . . . In other words, social reality is produced and made real through discourses, and social interactions cannot be fully understood without reference to the discourses that give them meaning. As discourse analysts, then, our task is to explore the relationship between discourse and reality. (Phillips and Hardy 2002: 3)

As the final part of this quote indicates, CDA practitioners are more receptive to the idea of a pre-existing material reality that constrains individual agency, and in particular to the epistemology of critical realism (see Key concept 1.9), arguing that discourses should be examined in relation to social structures, including the power relationships that are responsible for occasioning them (Reed 2000). Discourse is thus conceived as a 'generative mechanism' rather than as a self-referential sphere in which nothing of significance exists outside it, as Thinking deeply 20.16 explains.

In an organizational context, one of the things that CDA practitioners seek to trace is how discourses are constructed and maintained in relation to certain phenomena, such as globalization or strategic management (see Thinking deeply 20.17). Analysis seeks to reveal the meaning of a particular phenomenon by exploring how:

- the discourse has come to have a particular meaning today when forty or fifty years ago it may have had none or a quite different meaning;
- the discourse draws on and influences other discourses;
- the discourse is constructed through texts (such as academic articles or journalistic writing);
- the discourse gives meaning to social life and makes certain activities possible, desirable, or inevitable;
- particular actors draw on the discourse to legitimate their positions and actions (Phillips and Hardy 2002: 8).

As the second point in the above list indicates, discourses are conceived of as drawing on and influencing other discourses. So, for example, the discourse of globalization might affect discourses on new technology, free trade and liberalism, or corporate social responsibility. However, this is not always a complementary process, as in some cases discourses compete with each other for dominance in what is termed *dialogical struggle* (Keenoy, Oswick, and Grant 1997). An example of this can be seen in the analysis by Legge (1995) that traces the changing rhetorics of personnel management and HRM in the UK. Legge argues that 'the importance of HRM, and its apparent overshadowing of personnel management, lies just as much and (possibly more so) in its function as rhetoric about how employees should be managed to achieve competitive advantage than as a coherent new practice' (1995: p. xvi). This has the potential to give rise to a rhetoric–reality gap, in which discourses coexist and are translated into social practice in a variety of ways (Watson 1994*a*). CDA thus involves exploring why some meanings become privileged or taken for granted and others become marginalized. In other words, discourse does not just provide an account of what goes on in organizations; it is also a process whereby meaning is created. This involves asking 'who uses language, how, why and when' (Van Dijk 1997: 2).

Analysis of a particular *discursive event* is usually carried out according to a 'three-dimensional' framework, which proceeds as follows:

- examination of the actual content, structure, and meaning of the text under scrutiny (*the text dimension*);



## Thinking deeply 20.16
## Critical realism and the discourse of organization

Fairclough (2005) argues that a version of CDA based on critical realism (see Key concept 1.9) is of particular value to organization studies, especially in relation to the study of organizational change. Fairclough is sceptical of the anti-realist assumptions of some discourse analysts who reject objectivist conceptions of organization as social structure in favour of seeing it as 'an interactive accomplishment' (2005: 917), according to a constructionist perspective (see Chapter 1). He quotes Mumby and Clair (1997) as typical of the latter position in saying 'we suggest that organizations exist only in so far as their members create them through discourse' (1997: 181).

Instead, Fairclough recommends an approach that centres on the tension between organizational discourse and organizational structure. Therefore, a critical realist approach to discourse analysis involves analysing not just the discourse *per se* but also its relationship to non-discoursal elements. This is particularly important in relation to the study of organizational change because, 'while change in discourse is a part of organizational change, and organizational change can often be understood partly in terms of the constructive effects of discourse on organizations, organizational change is not simply change in discourse' (2005: 931). Fairclough identifies four sets of organizational research issues that a critical realist approach to discourse analysis can address:

- *Emergence*: founded on the notion that 'new' organizational discourses emerge 'through "reweaving" relations between existing discourses' (2005: 932);
- *Hegemony*: focusing on how particular discourses become hegemonic in particular organizations and on 'how discourse figures within the strategies pursued by groups of social agents to change organizations in particular directions' (2005: 933);
- *Recontextualization*: involving identification of the principles through which 'external' discourses are internalized within particular organizations;
- *Operationalization*: focusing on how discourses are operationalized, transformed into new ways of acting and interacting, inculcated into new ways of being, or materialized, within organizations.

- examination of the form of discursive interaction used to communicate meaning and beliefs (*the discursive practice dimension*);
- consideration of the social context in which the discursive event is taking place (*the social practice dimension*). (Grant et al. 2004: 11).

A further key concept within CDA is the notion of *intertextuality*, which draws attention to the notion of discourse as existing beyond the level of any particular discursive event on which analysis is focused. The notion of intertextuality thus enables a focus on the social and historical context in which discourse is embedded.



## Thinking deeply 20.17
## Critical discourse analysis and strategic management research

Phillips, Sewell, and Jaynes (2008) argue that there is potential for critical discourse analysis to be more widely applied in strategic management research. Using an example of a three-year case study of strategic change in a large banking and financial services institution, they show how the application of critical discourse analysis enables a focus on the way in which external discourses are imported into the organization. The authors did not confine themselves to written text but also conducted interviews and participant observation so that they 'were able to observe discursive practices as they unfolded' (Phillips, Sewell, and Jaynes 2008: 783). They show how discourses of 'Business' and 'Science' were used to legitimate the strategic change through drawing on modernist notions of rationality and progress in a way that portrayed the 'Transform' strategic change programme as natural and inevitable. This enabled any opposition to the programme to be characterized as an irrational response to scientifically derived facts. They further show how particular subject positions were authorized by the internal discourse, including 'Transform champions' and 'Transform trainees', showing how these limit appropriate conduct within the organization. Through extending their focus beyond official, written documents relating to the Transfom programme, the researchers were able to identify resistance to the authoritative discourse in the form of ironic and counter-narratives that they say they would not have picked up on had they relied on written documents alone.



# Overview

As the discussion in this chapter has emphasized, the different approaches to analysing language tend to draw on each other to a greater or lesser extent. Furthemore, DA, narrative, and critical discourse analysis are in some respects more flexible approaches to the study of language in management research than CA, because they are not solely concerned with the analysis of naturally occurring talk and enable a broader acknowledgement of the socio-historical context within which language is located. Consequently, they encourage researchers to use methods such as interviews and participant observation, in addition to analysing written documents. For these reasons, discourse analysis has become increasingly popular as a method in management research in recent decades, and there is now a regular international conference dedicated to discursive approaches to organizational analysis as well as a handbook (Grant et al. 2004) and several journal special issues dedicated to the study of organizational discourses. As researchers who study discourse note, the focus on language in business research is perhaps not surprising, because language plays such a significant role in 'constructing, situating, facilitating and communicating the diverse cultural, institutional, political and socio-economic parameters of "organizational being"' (Grant, Keenoy, and Oswick 1998: 12).

One of the difficulties relating to discursive approaches to organizational analysis concerns the anti-realist inclination of some DA researchers. This arises from the focus on representational practices—talk and written text—rather than on organizational action or behaviour. The lack of attention to a material reality that lies behind and underpins discourse has led some management researchers to view the approach as too abstract. For example, writing from a critical realist position (see Key concept 1.9), M. I. Reed (2000) has argued that discourses should be examined in relation to social structures, such as power relationships, that are responsible for shaping discourses. Attention would additionally be focused on the ways in which discourses work through existing structures. Discourse is thereby conceived as a 'generative mechanism' rather than a self-referential sphere in which nothing of significance exists outside it. M. I. Reed (2000) provides an interesting example of such an alternative view:

> Discourses—such as the quantitatively based discourses of financial audit, quality control and risk management—are now seen as the generative mechanisms through which new regulatory regimes 'carried out' by rising expert groups—such as accountants, engineers and scientists—become established and legitimated in modern societies. What they represent is less important than what they do in facilitating a radical re-ordering of pre-existing institutional structures in favour of social groups who benefit from the upward mobility which such innovative regulatory regimes facilitate . . . (M. I. Reed 2000: 529)

As this passage suggests, while some DA practitioners are anti-realist, an alternative realist position in relation to discourse is feasible. Such an alternative position is perhaps closer to the concerns of the business researcher than an anti-realist stance.

Furthermore, the extensive use of this term 'discourse' brings its own problems, because what different researchers understand the term discourse to mean varies considerably, and so does their approach to analysis. There is thus a danger, noted by Alvesson and Kärreman (2000), that the term 'discourse analysis' is too broad to be meaningful, authors treating the term as though it has a clear, broadly agreed-upon meaning, which, just from reading this chapter, you will be able to see it does not. Hence, 'discourse sometimes comes close to standing for everything, and thus nothing' (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000: 1128). However, the important thing to remember is that understanding how language is used is viewed by some researchers as crucial to understanding the social world, and the approaches examined in this chapter provide some tools through which language can be explored as a focus of attention in its own right.



## Key points

- The approaches examined in this chapter take the position that language is itself a focus of interest, and not just a medium through which research participants communicate with each other or with researchers.
- Fine-grained approaches such as CA and DA focus in detail on the organizing properties of language and the rules and structures that determine what people say in a given interaction.
- CA is a highly detailed approach to the analysis of naturally occurring conversation and dialogue that uses systematic rules to reveal the underlying structures of language.
- DA is an anti-realist, constructionist approach for the analysis of language that conceives of discourse as a means of conveying meaning.
- Narrative analysis is an approach to the elicitation and analysis of language that is sensitive to the stories that people tell about their lives or events around them.
- Rhetorical analysis examines the use of persuasive forms of language that help to engender identification and foster cooperation within a group, focusing on the importance of rhetorical devices in this process.
- CDA conceives of a discourse as an interrelated set of texts and sees discourses as drawing on and influencing other discourses.
- CDA emphasizes the role of language as a power resource that is related to ideology and socio-cultural change.



## Questions for review

- In what ways do fine-grained approaches to language differ from context-sensitive approaches?

### *Conversation analysis*

- What three basic assumptions underpin the CA practitioner's approach?
- Why are notational symbols employed in CA?

### *Discourse analysis*

- What is the significance of saying that DA is anti-realist and constructionist?
- What is an interpretative repertoire?

### *Narrative analysis*

- What might be the main purpose of seeking to uncover organizational stories?
- How is it that the writing-up of research is in itself a process of narrative construction?

### *Rhetorical analysis*

- List some of the main areas of business and management where rhetorical analysis has been applied and explain why rhetorical analysis is useful in understanding them.

*Context-sensitive approaches*

- What are the main criticisms made of fine-grained approaches?

*Critical discourse analysis*

- What key questions might a CDA practitioner ask in seeking to reveal the meaning of TQM discourses?
- Why is the notion of intertextuality important to CDA practitioners?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Language in Qualitative Research*

# 21

# Documents as sources of data

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 544

**Personal documents** 545

**Public documents** 548

**Organizational documents** 550

**Mass media outputs** 552

**Visual documents** 553

**Virtual documents** 557

**The world as text** 558

Readers and audiences—active or passive? 558

**The reality of documents** 559

**Interpreting documents** 560

Qualitative content analysis 560

Semiotics 561

Hermeneutics 563

Historical analysis 564

***Checklist*** 567

***Key points*** 567

***Questions for review*** 568



## Chapter outline

The term 'documents' covers a very wide range of different sources. This chapter aims to reflect that variability by examining a range of documentary sources that have been or can be used in qualitative business and management research. In addition, the chapter touches on approaches to the analysis of such sources. The chapter explores:

- personal documents in both written form—such as diaries and letters—and visual form—such as photographs;
- public documents deriving, for example, from an inquiry or legal investigation;
- official documents deriving from organizational sources—such as company annual reports, policy documents, and internal memoranda;
- mass media outputs—such as newspaper articles;
- virtual outputs—such as Internet resources;
- the criteria for evaluating each of the above sources;
- how far readers of documents are active or passive consumers of documents;
- four approaches to the analysis of documents: qualitative content analysis; semiotics; hermeneutics; and historical analysis.

# Introduction

This chapter will be concerned with a fairly heterogeneous set of sources of data, such as letters, memos, diaries, autobiographies, internal reports, newspapers, magazines, and photographs. The emphasis is placed on documents that have not been produced at the request of a business researcher—instead, the objects that are the focus of this chapter are simply 'out there' waiting to be assembled and analysed. However, this is not to suggest that the fact that documents are available for the business and management researcher to work on renders them somehow less time-consuming or easier to deal with than collecting primary data. On the contrary, the search for documents relevant to your research can often be a frustrating and highly protracted process. Moreover, once they are collected, considerable interpretative skill is required to ascertain the meaning of the materials that have been uncovered.

In this chapter we will emphasize documents in the form of material that:

- can be read (though the term 'read' has to be understood in a somewhat looser fashion than is normally the case when we come to visual materials, like photographs);
- has not been produced specifically for the purposes of research, although we will also refer to documents that have been generated by researchers;
- is preserved so that it becomes available for analysis; and
- is relevant to the concerns of the business researcher.

Documents have already been encountered in this book, albeit in a variety of contexts or guises. For example, the kinds of source upon which content analysis is often carried out are documents, such as newspaper articles. However, the emphasis in this chapter will be upon the use of documents in qualitative organizational research. A further way in which documents have previously surfaced was in the brief discussion in Key concept 13.12, which noted that archive materials are one form of unobtrusive measure. Indeed, this points to an often-noted advantage of using documents of the kind discussed in this chapter—namely, they are non-reactive. This means that, because they have not been created specifically for the purposes of business research, the possibility of a reactive effect can be largely discounted as a limitation on the validity of data.

In discussing the different kinds of documents used in the social sciences, John Scott (1990) has usefully distinguished between personal documents and official documents, and has further classified the latter in terms of private as opposed to state documents. These distinctions will be employed in much of the discussion that follows. A further set of important distinctions made by Scott relate to the criteria for assessing the quality of documents. He suggests (1990: 6) four criteria.

- *Authenticity*. Is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?
- *Credibility*. Is the evidence free from error and distortion?
- *Representativeness*. Is the evidence typical of its kind, and, if not, is the extent of its untypicality known?
- *Meaning*. Is the evidence clear and comprehensible?

This is an extremely rigorous set of criteria against which documents might be gauged, and frequent reference to them will be made in the following discussion.



# Personal documents

Personal documents such as diaries and letters may be used as the primary source of data within a qualitative study or alternatively as adjuncts to other methods, such as interviews or participant observation. Diaries and letters kept for reasons other than research purposes tend to be used extensively by other groups of social researchers such as historians but less by business researchers. However, there is some scope for them to be used in the study of management, as Research in focus 21.1 illustrates. In this example, Grey's (1996) analysis of managerialism is based on the work of Simone Weil. In addition to his analysis of Weil's academic writings, Grey draws on Weil's published diaries, which document her experiences as a factory worker, arguing that these experiences were significant in informing her view of management as a form of oppression.



## Research in focus 21.1
## The diary of a French factory worker

The diaries and letters of Simone Weil (1909–43), a French philosopher and social-political writer, are used by Grey (1996) to gain insight into Weil's conceptualization of management as a form of oppression. Grey suggests that Weil's views about management derive in part from her experiences as a factory worker. Quoting from her *Factory Journal* (Weil 1987), in which she records her experiences of working at the Alsthom electrical plant in Paris, a metal-working factory, and at Renault, Grey shows how these experiences shaped Weil's view that mechanized work was degrading to the individual. He further argues that 'Weil's experience of factory work showed her that the condition of oppression was in part an outcome of the ways in which workers themselves were actors in the reproduction of their own servility' (Grey 1996: 604). In other words, it was Weil's view that managerial oppression relies on employees being willing to submit themselves to managerial control and being active in maintaining and reinforcing this oppression.

Another example of the use of personal documents in historical organizational research is given in Research in focus 21.2. In this study, Bloor (2002) analysed oral history tapes and transcripts from interviews carried out with Welsh miners in the 1970s. As Bloor comments, the main interest of these documents for the researcher 'lies in the fact that they describe events from the partisan standpoint of lived experience. They are thus a record of a local culture and of situated communal understandings of events' (2002: 93). Personal documents can also be used to trace the history of an organization through the letters and diaries of its founders. For example, the

company archives of the chocolate manufacturer Cadbury are held at the Birmingham factory. The archives include diaries and letters documenting more than 100 years of history of the family firm. Many of these documents are held in private collections, making research access potentially difficult. However, it is likely that the use of personal diaries and letters in business and management research will be confined largely to retrospective, historical analysis. A classic example of the use of letters to build up a historical picture of working life is provided by E. P. Thompson (1968) in his comprehensive and enormously detailed account of the making of the English working classes. Research for the book draws upon numerous data sources such as legal records, autobiographies, notes, pamphlets, newspapers, minutes of committee meetings, and letters. This latter data source includes 'correspondence preserved by Sir Joseph Radcliffe, the exceedingly active Huddersfield magistrate who received his knighthood in recognition of his services in bringing leading Yorkshire Luddites to trial' (1968: 941). However, the emergence of alternative forms of communication has undoubtedly limited the use of letters as a source of data, and it is likely that the emergence of email will mean that the role of letters as a potential source of documentary data will continue to decline.



## Research in focus 21.2
## Using oral histories in a historical study of safety risks in mining

In a study of industrial injury and safety threats in the coal-mining industry, Bloor (2002) used the oral history archive in the South Wales Miners' Library, focusing on 176 taped oral history interviews conducted in 1973–4 (see Key concept 18.4 for a definition of oral history interviews). He explains: 'the tapes describe experiences of pit and community going back before the First World War, and in some cases going back to the end of the 19th century' (Bloor 2002: 92). Bloor analysed the transcripts and untranscribed tapes for references to 'accidents' and 'disasters', photocopying relevant sections of the transcripts and transcribing relevant sections of the untranscribed tapes. He was interested in the way that miners acted as enforcers of pit safety regulations and the role of the workforce's representatives, 'workmen inspectors', in reducing safety threats in pits between 1900 and 1947. Bloor argues that these documents have relevance for health and safety at work today by showing that collective health behaviour is driven by class struggle against management and government, whom the workers did not trust to ensure their own safety.

Another way that diaries can be used in qualitative research is as a method of data collection. In this instance, the diaries are produced specifically for the purpose of the research and the diarists are normally given some sort of topic guide to help them. They are different from quantitative diary studies (see Chapter 9), because a lesser degree of structure is imposed on the diarist. For example, Bowey and Thorpe (1986) were interested in exploring coal miners' attitudes to incentive schemes as part of a larger, multi-method study. Over a three-month period the miners were asked to keep a daily written record of their feelings, observations, and opinions about their life and work. The miners were given a large amount of scope in terms of what they wrote about in the diaries. In addition to writing about the bonus incentive scheme, they were invited to write about workplace relationships and matters relating to production. The researchers were thereby able to build up a picture of the operation of the incentive system that took into account the contextual features that framed its operation. The diaries were returned to the researchers each week, so that they could keep track of their development and write back to the diarist asking for clarification of specific points. Bowey and Thorpe claim that, in addition to aiding the analysis, this dialogue helped to encourage the diarists to keep writing in their diaries, because they felt that an interest was being taken in their work.

Whereas letters are a form of communication with other people, diarists invariably write for themselves. However, when they are written for wider consumption, diaries are difficult to distinguish from another kind of personal document—the autobiography. Like letters and diaries, autobiographies can be written at the behest of the researcher, particularly in connection with life history

studies (see Key concept 18.4 for a full explanation of the life history method). However, commercially published autobiographical sources can also be used for research purposes. For example, in the research into organizational culture carried out by Martin and Siehl (1983; see Research in focus 21.3), the authors relied extensively on a biography of the General Motors division manager, John DeLorean, written by Wright in 1979. Direct quotations and organizational stories from this source were analysed to build up a picture of the organizational counterculture that developed under DeLorean's influence.



## Research in focus 21.3
## Using biographical accounts in a study of organizational culture

In an article about organizational counterculture at General Motors (GM), Martin and Siehl (1983) draw on data from two sources:

1. Ed. Cray, *Chrome Colossus: General Motors and its Times* (1980)—a corporate history of GM.
2. J. P. Wright, *On a Clear Day You Can See General Motors* (1979)—an account of the activities of the influential manager John DeLorean at GM.

The first source was selected because it was the most current source at the time. It provides a detailed picture of the firm's dominant culture, and it includes some information that is critical of the firm. The second source was chosen because it is the most thorough published account of DeLorean's activities at GM. The two sources were supplemented by a number of interviews with present and former GM employees and by the use of other published books about the company.

An in-depth qualitative content analysis of the two books was conducted, and this was used as the basis for the interpretations, using direct quotations and stories from the two accounts.

Martin and Siehl note that a limitation of the two accounts is that they both focus primarily on the activities of 'relatively high ranking executives' without exploring 'how these activities were perceived by subordinates' (1983: 56).

They also note that, because Wright writes of DeLorean's experiences in the first person, the book is cited as representing DeLorean's point of view. However, they point out that DeLorean has disowned Wright's account, and it is highly likely that their opinions differ on some issues. They acknowledge that 'in such cases the book is probably more representative of Wright's opinions than DeLorean's, in spite of the former's use of the first person' (1983: 64).

However, the widespread distinction between biographies and autobiographies can sometimes break down. Walt Disney provides a case in point. As Bryman (1995) has shown, Disney provided, in short articles he authored and in articles written by others, many snippets about his life. The first biography of Disney, written by his daughter, Diane Disney Miller (1956), would almost certainly have been fed information by its subject. Moreover, several writers have noted the 'sameness' about subsequent biographies. This feature can be attributed to the tight control by the Disney Archive, which is itself controlled by the Walt Disney Corporation. It is from the primary materials of this archive (letters, notes of meetings, and so on) that biographies would be fashioned. As a result, while Walt Disney never wrote an autobiography in the conventional meaning of the term, his hand and subsequently that of the company can be seen in the biographies that have been written.

When we evaluate personal documents, the *authenticity* criterion is clearly of considerable importance. Is the purported author of the letter or diary the real author? In the case of autobiographies, this has become a growing problem in recent years as a result of the increasing use of 'ghost' writers by the famous. In Martin and Siehl's (1983) study of organizational counterculture (see Research in focus 21.3), how can we be sure that

interpretations of culture based on accounts of events and direct quotations from these biographical and historical sources are accurate? But the same is potentially true of other documents. Turning to the issue of *credibility*, John Scott (1990) observes that there are at least two major concerns with respect to personal documents: the factual accuracy of reports, and whether or not they report the true feelings of the writer. Scott recommends a strategy of healthy scepticism regarding the sincerity with which the writer reports his or her true feelings. Famous business people such as Richard Branson or Anita Roddick are likely to be fully aware that their letters or diaries will be of considerable interest to others and may, therefore, have one eye firmly fixed on the degree to which they really reveal themselves in their writings, or alternatively ensure that they convey a 'front' that they want to project. Authorized biographies and autobiographies have to be treated with similar caution, since they can frequently be exercises in reputation building.

*Representativeness* is an additional concern for these materials. Surviving historical documents are relatively few in number, and they have been preserved only in relation to the most influential of companies, such as Cadbury, Unilever, or the Ford Foundation. Therefore, such historical documents are likely to be biased in terms of the organizations they represent. A further problem is the selective survival of documents like letters. Why do any survive at all and what proportion are damaged, lost, or thrown away? The question of *meaning* is often rendered problematic by such things as damage to letters and diaries, and the use by authors of abbreviations or codes that are difficult to decipher.



## Public documents

The state is the source of a great deal of information of potential significance for business researchers. It produces a large amount of statistical information, some of which was touched on in Chapter 13. In addition to such quantitative data, the state is the source of a lot of textual material of potential interest, such as Acts of Parliament and official reports.

An interesting use of official documents is B. A. Turner's (1994) employment of the reports of public inquiries into three disasters, one of which—the fire at the Summerland Leisure Centre, Douglas, Isle of Man, in 1973—is particularly emphasized in his discussion. The report was published in 1974. Turner was primarily interested in the preconditions of the fire—the factors that were deemed by the inquiry to have led to the fire itself and to the way in which the handling of the incident produced such disastrous consequences (fifty deaths). In his initial analysis, which was based on a grounded theory approach, Turner aimed to produce a theoretical account of the fire's preconditions. Turner describes the process for this and the other two public inquiry reports he examined as one of slowly going through the details of the report. He describes the process as follows:

> I asked, for each paragraph, what names or 'labels for ideas' I needed in order to identify those elements, events or notions which were of interest to me in my broad and initially very unfocused concern to develop a theory of disaster preconditions. I then recorded each name or concept label on the top of a 5 inch by 8 inch card, together with a note of the source paragraph, and added further paragraph references to the card as I encountered additional instances of the concept identified. (1994: 198)

He ended up with 182 of these cards, which provided the raw materials for building his theoretical model. Similar sources were employed by Weick (1990) in his study of the Tenerife plane crash in 1977, in that he used an official report of the Spanish Ministry of Transport and Communication and a further report by the US-based Airline Pilots Association.

A further example of this kind of study is provided by Gephart (1993), who based his analysis on naturally occurring retrospective and archival qualitative data, including public inquiry transcripts and proceedings, newspaper reports, and corporate and government documents (see Research in focus 21.4). This type of analysis, which uses publicly available data to analyse critical events or disasters, has been referred to as 'organizational post mortem' research (Orton 1997), and there is an increasing

number of research studies in business and management that use this approach. Other examples include Vaughan's (1990) analysis of the space shuttle *Challenger* tragedy in 1986 and Orton's (1997) study of three critical events in the history of the US intelligence community. In the former, Vaughan used documents gathered by the Presidential Commission and reports and transcripts that related to the disaster; she also interviewed journalists and people responsible for regulating safety at NASA. Orton instead relied on organizational and presidential libraries, in particular the Ford Library, which contained over fourteen million original documents from the Ford



## Research in focus 21.4
## Using public documents to analyse an organizational disaster

Gephart (1993) employed what he describes as a 'textual approach', using a variety of retrospective archival material in a way that treats researchers' observations and written documents as 'texts'. Two kinds of data were collected:

1. naturally occurring retrospective and archival qualitative data, including public inquiry transcripts and proceedings, newspaper reports, and corporate and government documents;
2. self-generated texts, including field notes describing inquiry events.

These texts were analysed in order to trace the life history of the focal event—a pipeline disaster—from the perspectives of a range of participants. The study sought to address the following research questions in the public inquiry context:

- What concepts and terms, or vocabularies are used by organizational members in sense-making about disasters?
- How do people use risk and blame concepts in disaster sense-making?
- How are sense-making practices used in the interpretation of disasters?
- What role do collective and individual interpretative schemes play in disaster sense-making?

The pipeline accident occurred in 1985 on the Western Pipe Lines system in Canada. A fireball erupted during attempts to control a leak of natural gas liquids, and two employees of the company died of burns. There followed a public inquiry in which the federal government energy board took evidence about the causes and consequences of the disaster. The public inquiry provided Gephart with a focus for his investigation through the series of texts that attempted to make sense of the disaster and tried publicly to attribute responsibility and blame.

Gephart attended the public inquiry throughout, informally interviewing managers, lawyers, and safety managers who were also attending the inquiry. This ethnographic aspect of his data collection resulted in 500 pages of field notes. These were combined with the other, naturally occurring, data used in the study, such as the official proceedings of the inquiry, and used to compile two electronically held databases:

1. a word processor database containing all the information from the transcripts, company documents, field notes, newspaper articles, and official report;
2. a textual database from the entire text of the inquiry proceedings.

Analysis, using a computer-based text retrieval programme, focused on creating 'textual exhibits' 'that tell the story of the disaster and the inquiry using actual segments of text'; this enabled Gephart in his analysis to 'remain close to the raw data' and to illustrate its richness (1993: 1483). A set of keywords was then developed to reflect the way that participants saw concepts of risk, blame, and responsibility.

It was then possible to retrieve 'every occurrence of the keywords in the data' using the textual analysis software and to show these frequencies speaker by speaker. Gephart claims that the textual approach offers a way of uncovering practices and processes that generate and sustain organizational interpretations of events. The use of archival materials enables a longitudinal study of events, which in this case was complemented by the collection of primary, ethnographic data.

Administration. Familiarizing oneself with these kinds of research materials can be an extremely time-consuming activity, mainly because of the vastness and detail of documents associated with official events and inquiries, and this needs to be taken into account when planning to use such materials as a potential source of data.

In terms of John Scott's (1990) four criteria, such materials can certainly be seen as authentic and as having meaning (in the sense of being clear and comprehensible to the researcher), but the two other standards require somewhat greater consideration. The question of credibility raises the issue of whether or not the documentary source is biased. In other words, such documents can be interesting precisely because of the biases they reveal. Equally, this point suggests that caution is necessary in attempting to treat them as depictions of reality. The issue of representativeness is complicated in that materials like these are in a sense unique, and it is precisely their official or quasi-official character that makes them interesting in their own right. There is also, of course, the question of whether or not the case itself is representative, but in the context of qualitative research this is not a meaningful question, because no case can be representative in a statistical sense. The issue is one of establishing a cogent theoretical account and possibly examining that account in other contexts. B. A. Turner (1994) in fact examined three disasters and noted many common factors that were associated with behaviour in crisis situations.



## Organizational documents

This is a very heterogeneous group of sources that is of particular importance to the business and management researcher, not least because of the vast quantity of documentary information that is available within most organizations. Some of these documents are in the public domain, such as annual reports, mission statements, reports to shareholders, transcripts of chief executives' speeches, press releases, advertisements, and public-relations material in printed form and on the Web. Other documents are not (or may not be) in the public domain, such as company newsletters, organizational charts, external consultancy reports, minutes of meetings, memos, internal and external correspondence, manuals for new recruits, policy statements, company regulations, and so on. Such materials can provide the researcher with valuable background information about the company; they are, therefore, often used by organizational ethnographers as part of their investigations. Similarly, in case study research, documents can be used to build up a description of the organization and its history. Because documents can offer at least partial insights into past managerial decisions and actions, they can also be useful in building up a 'timeline', particularly in processual studies of organizational change (see Chapter 16 and Research in focus 16.9).

However, the difficulty of gaining access to some organizations means that some researchers have to rely on public-domain documents alone. Even if the researcher is an insider who has gained access to an organization, it may well be that certain documents that are not in the public domain will not be available to him or her. For his study of ICI, Pettigrew (1985; see Research in focus 2.16) was allowed access to company archives, so that, in addition to interviewing, he was allowed to examine 'materials on company strategy and personnel policy, documents relating to the birth and development of various company OD (organizational development) groups, files documenting the natural history of key organizational changes, and information on the recruitment and training of internal OD consultants, and the use made of external OD consultants' (1985: 41). Such information can be very important for researchers conducting case studies of organizations using such methods as participant observation or (as in Pettigrew's case) qualitative interviews. Other writers have relied more or less exclusively on documents. For example, in B. A. Turner's (1994) study of large-scale disasters, his analysis relied entirely on the detailed accounts of action provided by the public inquiry records, and these formed the basis for his own written notes, which constituted his data documents.

Such documents need to be evaluated using Scott's four criteria. As with the materials considered in the previous section, documents deriving from private sources like companies are likely to be authentic and meaningful, in the sense of being clear and comprehensible to the researcher, though this is not to suggest that the analyst of documents should be complacent. Issues of credibility and representativeness are likely to exercise the analyst of documents somewhat more. For instance, organizational documents that are in the public domain, such as company annual reports, may not be an accurate representation of how different organizational actors perceive the situations in which they are involved.



## Telling it like it is
## Using organizational documents in a small-scale research project

Lucie's research design involved the use of documentary data from the courses that she attended on enterprise delivered by the institute. 'I was able to collect all the handouts and presentations from guest speakers and from the lecturers that attended the courses run by the institute. They were able to give me all the information that was presented to students on the courses. I also collected all the lecture notes and handouts that they gave on the courses that I attended. As part of the courses students had to make presentations and make posters about what they thought enterprise was about, what they were there for and who their heroes were—things like that. So I was able to take that as well—the posters and things like that.' The posters that Lucie collected as part of her data collection process were an interesting source of visual data, but Lucie felt that she was unable, partly because of time constraints, to do very much in-depth analysis of these documents. This was also because she had generated a lot of very rich data of different kinds. However, she did refer to the posters in her analysis and included examples of them in her appendices.



*To hear more about Lucie's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



## Research in focus 21.5
## The difference between readers' and writers' intentions concerning managerial initiatives

In a study of the state-sponsored people management initiative Investors in People, Bell, Taylor, and Thorpe (2002) explored the meaning of visual artefacts (the badge, the plaque, and the flag) displayed in organizations that had achieved the Standard. On the basis of their case study research in six organizations, the authors suggest there can be a significant gap between understanding of what the initiative ought to signify and what it comes to represent. For example, one story was told of an organization that had achieved the Standard. While being formally recognized as an Investor in People, it was informally known by employees as a 'Divestor of People', partly as a result of a major, long-term redundancy programme. This finding confirms that readers, in this case employees, frequently come up with alternative readings to those that were intended by writers of the text—in this case managers and policy-makers working with the initiative.

People who write organizational documents, such as managers, are likely to have a particular point of view that they want to get across (see Research in focus 21.5). An interesting illustration of this simple observation is provided by a study of company documentation by Forster (1994). In the course of a study of career development issues in a major British retail company (referred to as TC), Forster carried out an extensive analysis of company documentation relating primarily to HRM issues, as well as interviews and a questionnaire survey. Because he was able to interview many of the authors of the documents about what they had written, 'both the accuracy of the documents and their authorship could be validated by the individuals who had produced them' (1994: 155). In other words, the authenticity of the documents was confirmed, and it would seem that credibility was verified as well. However, Forster also tells us that the documents showed up divergent interpretations among different groupings of key events and processes.

> One of the clearest themes to emerge was the apparently incompatible interpretations of the same events and processes among the three subgroups within the company—senior executives, HQ personnel staff and regional personnel managers. . . . These documents were not produced deliberately to distort or obscure events or processes being described, but their effect was to do precisely this. (1994: 160)

In other words, members of the different groupings expressed through the documents certain perspectives that reflected their positions in the organization. Consequently, although authors of the documents could confirm the content of those documents, the latter could not be regarded as 'free from error and distortion', as John Scott puts it. Therefore, documents cannot be regarded as providing objective accounts of a state of affairs. They have to be interrogated and examined in the context of other sources of data. As Forster's case suggests, the different stances that are taken up by the authors of documents can be used as a platform for developing insights into the processes and factors that lie behind divergence. In this instance, the documents are interesting in bringing out the role and significance of subcultures within the organization.

Issues of representativeness are likely to loom large in most contexts of this kind. Did Forster have access to a totally comprehensive set of documents? It could be that some had been destroyed or that he was not allowed access to certain documents that were regarded as sensitive. Finally gaining access to confidential or potentially sensitive documents within an organization, such as personnel files, as Dalton (1959) did (see Chapter 17), raises particular ethical issues, which have been discussed in Chapter 5.



## Mass media outputs

Newspapers, magazines, television programmes, films, and other mass media are potential sources for business and management study. Of course, we have encountered these kinds of source before when exploring content analysis in Chapter 12. An example is given in Research in focus 21.6 of a study that relied exclusively on articles about a well-known business leader published in the popular press. In addition to exploring mass-media outputs using a quantitative form of data analysis like content analysis, such sources can also be examined so that their qualitative nature is preserved. Typically, such analysis entails searching for themes in the sources that are examined, but see the discussion on analysing documents below for a more detailed examination of this issue.

Authenticity issues are sometimes difficult to ascertain in the case of mass-media outputs. While the outputs can usually be deemed to be genuine, the authorship of articles is often unclear (for example, editorials, some magazine articles), so that it is difficult to know if the account can be relied upon as being written by someone in a position to provide an accurate version.

Credibility is also frequently an issue, but in fact it is often the uncovering of error or distortion that is the objective of the analysis. For example, Jackson and Carter (1998) explored the constitution of management gurus through the analysis of a BBC management video featuring Frederick Herzberg giving a live lecture to an audience of UK managers on his Motivation–Hygiene theory. They compare this video with an earlier transmission of the lecture, which was shown on normal television in 1973, under the title 'Jumping for the Jelly Beans'. Comparison of the two versions reveals a number of differences between them; notably, in the video version a section subtitled 'KITA' (Herzberg's acronym for 'Kick in the Arse'), containing some offensive references including a joke about rape, has been edited out of the lecture. Jackson and Carter suggest that the reason for this careful editing relates to the need to maintain Herzberg's credibility as a management guru, ensuring that his image remains intact, despite the fact that the editing distorts the presentation of his ideas.

Representativeness is rarely an issue for analyses of newspaper or magazine articles, since the corpus from which a sample has been drawn is usually ascertainable, especially when a wide range of newspapers is employed. Finally, the evidence is usually clear and comprehensible but may require considerable awareness of contextual factors relating to the organization or company, such as information about share prices, movements of key personnel, and merger speculation.



## Research in focus 21.6
## Qualitative content analysis in leadership research

Chen and Meindl (1991) analysed articles in the popular press about Donald Burr, an entrepreneur who in 1980 started the low-cost US airline, People Express. Burr was widely revered as a charismatic leader because of the early success of his business and the high level of commitment exhibited by his staff. However, in 1984 the company began to founder, and it was taken over by a rival in 1987.

The researchers carried out two analyses of magazine and newspaper articles about Burr. The first followed traditional content analysis methods (of the kind described in Chapter 9); it involved identifying themes and then recording the frequency of their occurrence in the text. However, the second analysis was more interpretative; it involved identification of the metaphors used to describe Burr over the course of the airline's history. The first analysis sought to analyse Burr's image from the perspective of the *reader* of the news article, whereas the second analysis concentrated on gaining an impression from the point of view of the *writer*.

Articles were presented to a sample of seventy-five undergraduate business students, who were asked to write a description of Burr based on the materials they had just read. Fourteen different themes were extracted from the image descriptions and these were subjected to traditional content analysis to establish a pattern of frequency. The analysis revealed that the themes used to describe Burr varied according to the time period in the company's history that the articles covered. For example, when the company was doing well, Burr was seen as ambitious, fair, and caring, but when it was doing badly he was seen as determined and instrumental.

In the qualitative content analysis, Chen and Meindl (1991) focused on the journalists' descriptions of Burr (that is, the writers rather than the readers of the text):

> We screened, sentence by sentence, the same sampled journal articles that were presented to the respondents. Those words, phrases, or clauses that metaphorically described Burr's personality, his behaviours, or his impact were identified as metaphorical expressions. Altogether, 46 such expressions were identified. (1991: 539)

One of the most common metaphors uncovered was that of Burr as an unorthodox preacher who was visionary, charismatic, and dedicated to his mission, as these journalistic quotes illustrate:

> Within the new structure . . . Burr will go on preaching his unorthodox management approach. (1991: 550)
>
> Burr works hard when he talks. He paces, he sits; he stands; he throws out his arms; he condemns and praises, implores and jokes. (1991: 550)

The study found a high degree of correspondence between images constructed through metaphors and images constructed by the readers. This finding demonstrates the influence of the business press in constructing particular images of organizational leaders.



# Visual documents

As we highlighted in Chapter 17, there is a growing interest in the visual in business and management research. While photographs are the most obvious manifestation of this trend (see Key concept 21.7), visual documents also encompass a wide range of graphic and artistic images, the visual content contained on websites, and video data including film and YouTube clips. Organizations are significant producers of visual documents, which tend to play an important role in constituting an organization's image and identity, and they have the advantage of often

being publicly accessible and widely disseminated—for example, through websites, advertising, or newspaper reports. The example of Davison's (2009) study of the Bradford & Bingley bank illustrates the potential for analysis of corporate brand images (see Research in focus 21.9). With the vast amount of visual data that is now produced by organizations, including audio and video film data, there is considerable potential for organizational researchers to collect this type of data. Consequently, in recent years there has been a growth in the analysis of visual documents in business research, but, as we noted in Chapter 12, the potential of this data source has yet to be fully realized.

One of the main types of visual document that can be used as either a main or a supplementary data source alongside written or spoken words are photographs. As mentioned in Chapter 17, we make a distinction between photographs and other visual materials that are produced as part of fieldwork and those that are naturally occurring. An example of the analysis of photographs that are naturally occurring can be seen in research by Dougherty and Kunda (1990). In this study, photographs found in company annual reports formed the basis of analysis (see Research in focus 21.8). An interesting example of the use of both naturally occurring and fieldwork-produced visual data is provided by Schwartzman (1993), who neatly and somewhat poignantly juxtaposes three photographs of the General Electric Hawthorne works that was the focus of the famous Hawthorne studies (see Research in focus 2.8): one contemporary image from the AT&T archives of one of the departments in which the studies were carried out (the Bank Wiring Observation Room); a 1987 photograph from the *Chicago Sun-Times* of the demolished Hawthorne works buildings; and a photograph taken of the Hawthorne Works Shopping Centre that was built on the cleared land.

However, the photograph must not be taken at its face value when used as a research source; it is also necessary to have considerable additional knowledge of the social context to probe beneath the surface. Glossy photographs of happy, smiling employees in corporate brochures or newsletters, for example, might suggest that there is a gap between the photographic image of the company and the underlying reality as experienced at a day-to-day level. Scott sees the issue of *representativeness* as a particular problem for the analyst of photographs. As he suggests, the photographs that survive the passage of time—for example, in archives—are very



## Key concept 21.7
## Photographs in business research

Photographs may be used in a variety of ways in business research. While Chapter 17 and the present chapter discuss them in relation to qualitative research, they can also be used in quantitative research. For example, photographs can be the focus of **content analysis** (two examples of this from tourism studies are given in Chapter 12, p. 298) or may be used as prompts in connection with **structured interviewing** (see Key concept 8.11 and Research in focus 8.12) or **experiments**. However, the growing interest in photographs and visual materials more generally has tended to come from qualitative researchers. There is an important distinction between the use of *extant* photographs that have not been produced for the research and *research-generated* photographs that have been produced by the researcher or at the researcher's behest. Three common uses are:

1. *Illustrative.* Photographs may be used to do little more than illustrate points and thereby enliven what might otherwise be a rather dry discussion of findings. The examples given in Research in focus 17.18 and Research in focus 17.19 are typical of this.
2. *As data*. Photographs may be viewed as data in their own right. Research-generated photographs can essentially be understood as part of the researcher's **field notes** (see Research in focus 17.21 for an example). Extant photographs can be understood as a main source of data about the field in which the researcher is interested. The examples given in Research in focus 17.21, Research in focus 21.8, and Research in focus 21.9 are in this category.
3. *As prompts*. Photographs may be used as prompts to entice people to talk about what is represented in them. Both research-driven photographs, such as in the example of S. Warren's (2002, 2005) study of organizational aesthetics discussed in Chapter 17 and Buchanan's (1998) study of change in a hospital (Research in focus 8.12), and extant photographs may be used in this way.



## Research in focus 21.8

# Using photographs to capture organizational beliefs about customers

In order to develop a longitudinal and comparative research design for the study of organizational beliefs about customers, Dougherty and Kunda (1990) focused on company annual reports because they were comparable across organizations and could be studied over time, thereby incorporating a longitudinal element into the study. They looked in particular at the photographs of customers found in the reports, which revealed 'aspects of an organization's theory of its customers in a nonverbalized yet substantive way' (1990: 187).

The study was limited to firms in the computer equipment manufacturing sector and annual reports from the five largest of these—IBM, Burroughs, Digital (DEC), Data General (DG), and Honeywell. Dougherty and Kunda analysed 425 photographs from the annual reports of these companies between 1975 and 1984. A major task for the researchers was to develop categories for the analysis of the data. After several weeks of scrutiny and discussion, they decided on two broad descriptive dimensions. These related to the nature of

1. *the customer organization*: how many people are shown in the photograph, what are they like—e.g. sex, hierarchical position, and what tasks are they undertaking?
2. *the relationship with customers*: where and how does the product fit into the customer's activities?

The photographs were categorized according to these dimensions to reveal the unique views of customers held across the firms. For example, in relation to the task theme, which conveys what the organization believes their customers do, the photographs illustrate how hospital, bank, and aircraft manufacturing customers are viewed differently by the five firms.

For example, in relation to the hospital customer, Dougherty and Kunda illustrate how DEC's photographs emphasize the importance of the task and its social contribution, combined with an emphasis on the high degree of technological sophistication that is involved. A typical image is, therefore, of a tense, dramatic moment in a hospital operating room. In contrast, both IBM and Burroughs use photographs to portray the more ordinary, repetitive aspects of hospital work; showing a relaxed, simple check-up in the case of IBM, and featuring information processing in the image portrayed by Burroughs. People are thus 'adjuncts to the task of information processing; data going into or coming out of the equipment dominate the scene' (1990: 193).

Moreover, Dougherty and Kunda show how many of these perceptions of customers remained consistent over the ten-year period, despite changes in users of computing products. They suggest that beliefs about customers are significant because they can affect an organization's ability to adapt to its environment. However, perhaps the more significant contribution made by this study lies in its methods; as the authors themselves acknowledge: 'We hope our findings at least suggest that much can be learned from the contrast of seemingly innocent photographs and the self conscious tales they tell' (1990: 204).

unlikely to be representative. They are likely to have been subject to all sorts of hazards, such as damage and selective retention. Sensitivity to what is not photographed can reveal the 'mentality' of the person(s) behind the camera. What is clear is that the question of representativeness is much more fundamental than the issue of what survives, because it points to the way in which the selective survival of photographs may be constitutive of a reality that business owners and managers seek to fashion.

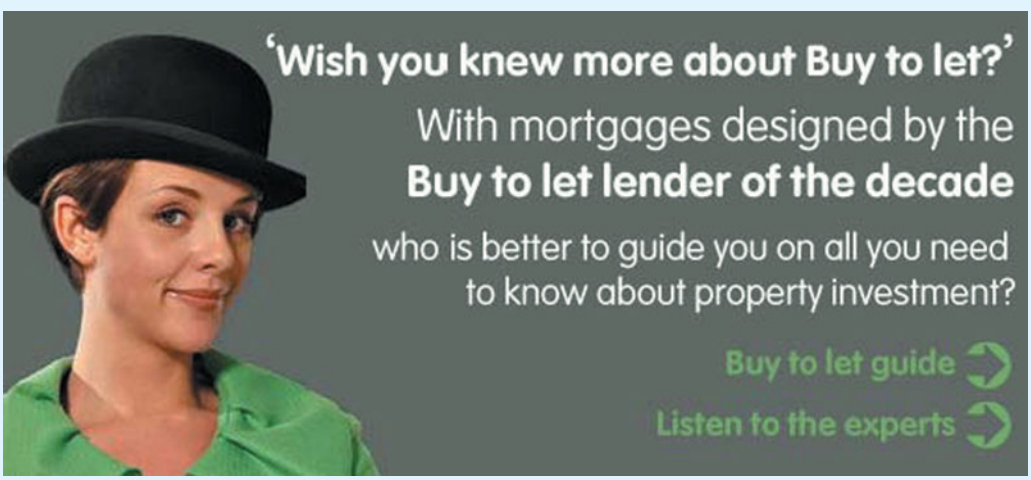
## Research in focus 21.9

# A study of the visual iconography of the bowler hat in a UK bank

Davison's (2009) study of Bradford & Bingley shows how changes in lending and funding practices since its formation in the 1960s, which were indicative of shifts in the UK bank's ethos, were mirrored by changes in the visual iconography that the company used in its marketing campaigns and annual reporting documents. Davison traces the way that the iconography of the bowler hat, which formed an enduring part of the bank's brand identity, changed over time. Davison locates the icon of the bowler hat in popular culture, citing a diverse range of sources from film and television that have shaped its changing meaning. She thus argues that the bowler hat has been used as a symbol of class, as epitomized by the character John Steed in the 1960s UK TV series *The Avengers*, as a way of representing professionalism, as in the film *Men in Black* (1997), and to denote eroticism and entertainment, such as when worn by women such as Liza Minelli in the film *Cabaret* (1972). Two of the images from Davison's analysis are presented here. Plate 21.1 shows a relatively recent image from the company's website. Davison argues that, through the wearing of this item of traditionally male attire by a woman, the company seeks to shift the brand from its former values of masculine, anonymous, traditional, and reserved, to an identity that is more feminine, proactive, and seductive. Plate 21.2 shows a further use of the icon that is based on abstract representation in a manner that echoes the style of the artist Warhol. Davison states that 'here the icon of the bowler hat has been separated from its wearer to acquire a life and importance of its own in these repetitive stylised motifs' (Davison 2009: 897) in a way that provides memorability through repetition. Through this detailed reading of the visual meaning of the brand, Davison highlights its role and importance even in documents as apparently objective and numerically focused as the annual financial reports produced by banks.

## Plate 21.1

### 'Woman in bowler 2008'




*Source*: Davison (2009: 896) Copyright Bradford & Bingley. Reproduced with thanks.

## Plate 21.2

**'Bradford & Bingley logo from 1990s "20 coloured bowler hats"'**



*Source*: Davison (2009: 897) Copyright Bradford & Bingley. Reproduced with thanks.



# Virtual documents

There is one final type of document that ought to be mentioned—the documents that appear on the Internet. This is an area that is rapidly growing among business researchers because of the vastness of the Internet and its growing accessibility, which make it a likely source of documents for both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Coupland's (2005) analysis of the websites of four multinational oil-producing and refining organizations (see Research in focus 20.8) provides one example involving the analysis of virtual documents. Similarly, Ainsworth and Hardy (2009) analysed texts that were all obtained via a government website, including media releases, transcripts of public hearings, and reports (see Research in focus 20.6).

There is clearly huge potential with the Internet as a source of documents, but John Scott's criteria need to be kept in mind. First, authenticity: anyone can set up a website, so that information and advice may be given by someone who is not an authority. Secondly, credibility: we need to be aware of possible distortions. For example, if we were studying advice about the purchase of shares, it is known that websites have been set up encouraging people to buy or sell particular stocks held by the website authors, so that the prices of stocks can be manipulated. Thirdly, given the constant flux of the Internet, it is doubtful that we could ever know how representative websites on a certain topic are. An important consideration related to this issue stems from the dynamic nature of the content of websites, which may be updated on a weekly or even daily basis. It is particularly important, therefore, not only to record the date on which a website was consulted, but also to print out the relevant content in case it changes. Indeed, these changes may be important to the analysis; for example, Coupland's (2005) study monitored oil company websites for discourses of corporate social responsibility over a six-month period, noting any major changes in the discourse in this time period. Finally, websites are notorious for a kind of Webspeak, so that it may be difficult to comprehend what is being said without considerable insider knowledge. As the use of computers and in particular the Internet as a source of data is undoubtedly increasing, we will be returning to these issues and discussing them further in Chapter 26.



# The world as text

There is one word that we have done our best to avoid using in the chapter so far—text. The word 'text' is frequently employed as a synonym for a term like 'written document'. We have clearly strayed from this association, in that photographs and films have been touched upon. But, in relatively recent times, the word 'text' has been applied to an increasingly wide range of phenomena, so that theme parks, landscapes, heritage attractions, technologies, and a wide range of other objects are treated as texts out of which a 'reading' can be fashioned (e.g. Grint and Woolgar 1997). Thus, in Barthes's (1972) influential collection of essays, objects as varied as wrestling matches, Citroën cars, and striptease acts are submitted to readings. In a sense, therefore, just about everything can be treated as a text and perhaps as a document. Research in focus 21.4 provides an example of textual analysis in management and business. In this study Gephart (1993) treats both the written documents and his own ethnographic field notes as texts, analysing them both using the same methods. The aim using this approach is 'to account for how a given text is made meaningful to readers', seeking 'to uncover the general conventions, interests and cultural practices' (1993: 1468) that enable meaning to be created. This approach is based on two assumptions: first, that the texts have the interpretations of their creators embedded in them and, second, that a text acquires meaning through 'its embeddedness in a multiplicity of discourses and texts' (1993: 1469). Gephart thus seeks to interpret the meaning of texts in relation to events, both of which constitute aspects of culture.

## Readers and audiences—active or passive?

A further important issue about texts and their nature is whether or not audiences/readers are active interpreters of what they see or hear. Do they passively derive the meanings that authors or designers infuse into their texts, or do they resist those meanings and arrive at resistant readings, or do they arrive at a middle point that incorporates both passive and active elements? Much research on this issue suggests that audiences frequently come up with alternative readings to those that were intended by authors or designers, as the example given in Research in focus 21.5 illustrates. Although the idea of the 'active audience' has not gone unchallenged (e.g. McGuigan 1992), the stream of research has been very influential and has placed a question mark over the readings of texts by social scientists. This means that we have to be cautious in concluding that the interpretations offered by social scientists of texts are going to be the same as those of another social scientist, or as those of the readers or audiences of these outputs. The business researcher is always providing his or her own 'spin' on the texts that are analysed. The same is true of all social science data: the conclusions you derive from your questionnaire or ethnographic data are always going to be a reflection of your own personal interpretation. However, the main point being made for the present is that caution is required when reading writers' renditions of texts of all kinds.



# The reality of documents

An issue that has attracted attention only relatively recently and that has implications for the interpretation of documents (the focus of the next section) is that of their status as a source of knowledge about reality. It is clearly tempting to assume that documents reveal something about an underlying social reality, so that the documents that an organization generates (minutes of meetings, newsletters, mission statements, job specifications, etc.) are viewed as representations of the reality of that organization. In other words, we might take the view that such documents tell us something about what goes on in that organization and will help us to uncover such things as its culture or ethos. According to such a view, documents are windows onto social and organizational realities.

However, some writers have expressed scepticism about the extent to which documents can be viewed in this way. Rather than view documents as ways of gaining access to an underlying reality, writers like Atkinson and Coffey (2004) suggest that documents should be viewed as a distinct level of 'reality' in their own right. Atkinson and Coffey argue that documents should be examined in terms of, on the one hand, the context in which they were produced and, on the other hand, their implied readership. When viewed in this way, documents are significant for what they are supposed to accomplish and who they are written for. They are written in order to convey an impression, one that will be favourable to the author and those whom they represent. Moreover, any document should be viewed as linked to other documents, because invariably they refer to and/or are a response to other documents. Other documents form part of the context or background to the writing of a document. Atkinson and Coffey refer to the interconnectedness of documents as *inter-textuality*.

The minutes of a meeting in an organization might be the kind of document that would interest a business researcher. On the face of it, they are a record of such things as: issues raised at the meeting; the discussion of those issues; views of the participants; and actions to be taken. As such, they might be deemed interesting for a business researcher for their ability to reveal such things as the culture of the organization or department responsible for the minutes, its preoccupations, and possible disputes among the meeting participants. However, precisely because the minutes are a document that are to be read not only by participants but also by others (members of other departments or other organizations; in the case of a UK public-sector organization, the minutes may be accessed by the public under the Freedom of Information Act), they are likely to be written with a view to prospective scrutiny by others in mind. Disagreements may be suppressed and actions to be taken may reflect a desire to demonstrate that important issues are to be addressed rather than because of a genuine desire to act on them. Also, the minutes are likely to be connected either explicitly or implicitly to other documents of that organization, such as previous minutes, mission statements, organizational regulations, and external documents (such as legislation). Further, following Atkinson and Coffey's suggestions, the minutes should be examined for the ways in which language is used to convey certain messages.

Atkinson and Coffey's central message is that documents have a distinctive **ontological** status, in that they form a separate reality, which they refer to as a 'documentary reality', and they should not be taken to be 'transparent representations' of an underlying organizational or social reality. They go on to write: 'We cannot . . . learn through written records alone how an organization actually operates day by day. Equally, we cannot treat records—however "official"—as firm evidence of what they report' (Atkinson and Coffey 2004: 58).

Atkinson and Coffey's central point is that documents need to be recognized for what they are—namely, texts written with distinctive purposes in mind, and not as simply reflecting reality. This means that, if the researcher wishes to employ documents as a means of understanding aspects of an organization and its operations, it is likely that he or she will need to buttress an analysis of documents with other sources of data. An example of this relates to Vaughan's (1990) analysis of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* accident, mentioned earlier in this chapter. As Vaughan (2006) points out, examining documents like Presidential Commission reports can be extremely illuminating about the kinds of issues that they emphasize and the kinds of ways in which the issues are framed. This is precisely the point that Atkinson and Coffey (2004) are making. Vaughan (2006) examined three Commission Reports: the *Challenger* report; the *Columbia* Accident Investigation Board Report, which dealt with another space shuttle disaster that took place in February 2003; and the 9/11 Commission Report. She shows that each report was shaped by a dominant frame, which was

respectively: an 'accident investigation frame'; a 'sociological frame'; and a 'historical/war frame' (2006: 304). Further, she notes that the 9/11 report locates causation in what she calls 'regulatory failure' (2006: 300), which is to do with problems with the activities of the agencies charged with upholding national security. An effect of that attribution of causation is to absolve the President and to some extent US foreign policy of responsibility. This examination of documents implies that they can tell us about such things as how those responsible for reporting officially on major incidents construct the background and the causes of those incidents. As Atkinson and Coffey remind us, what documents cannot tell us is what actually led up to their production.



# Interpreting documents

Although it means straying into areas that are relevant to the next chapter, this section will briefly consider the question of how to interpret documents qualitatively. Four possible approaches are outlined: qualitative content analysis; semiotics; hermeneutics and historical analysis. In addition to these, discourse analysis, which was covered in Chapter 20, has been employed as an approach for the analysis of documents.

## Qualitative content analysis

This is probably the most prevalent approach to the qualitative analysis of documents, although in business and management it remains less frequently used than quantitative content analysis (Insch, Moore, and Murphy 1997). It comprises a searching-out of underlying themes in the materials being analysed and can be discerned in several of the studies referred to earlier, such as Dougherty and Kunda (1990) and Gephart (1993). A further example is provided in Chen and Meindl's (1991) study of the metaphors used to describe the entrepreneur and business leader Donald Burr (see Research in focus 21.6). Unlike quantitative content analysis, the processes through which the themes are extracted are usually left implicit. The extracted themes are usually illustrated—for example, with brief quotations from a newspaper article or magazine. The procedures adopted by B. A. Turner (1994) in connection with his research on the Summerland disaster are an example of the search for themes in texts, although Turner provided greater detail about what he did than is often the case.

Altheide (1996) has outlined an approach that he calls **ethnographic content analysis** (which he contrasts with quantitative content analysis of the kind outlined in Chapter 12). Altheide's approach (referred to by him as ECA) represents a codification of certain procedures that might be viewed as typical of the kind of qualitative content analysis on which many of the studies referred to so far are based. He describes his approach as differing from traditional quantitative content analysis, in that the researcher is constantly revising the themes or categories that are distilled from the examination of documents. As he puts it:

> ECA follows a recursive and reflexive movement between concept development-sampling-data, collection-data, coding-data, and analysis-interpretation. The aim is to be systematic and analytic but not rigid. Categories and variables initially guide the study, but others are allowed and expected to emerge during the study, including an orientation to *constant discovery* and *constant comparison* of relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings, and nuances. (Altheide 1996: 16; emphases in original)

Thus, with ECA there is much more movement back and forth between conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and interpretation than is the case with the kind of content analysis described in Chapter 12. Quantitative content analysis typically entails applying predefined categories to the sources; ECA employs some initial categorization, but there is greater potential for refinement of those categories and the generation of new ones.

Qualitative content analysis as a strategy for searching for themes in one's data lies at the heart of the coding approaches that are often employed in the analysis of qualitative data and as such will be encountered again in the next chapter.

## Semiotics

Semiotics is invariably referred to as the 'science of signs'. It is an approach to the analysis of symbols in everyday life and as such can be employed in relation not only to documentary sources but also to all kinds of other data because of its commitment to treating phenomena as texts. The main terms employed in semiotics are:

- the *sign*—that is, something that stands for something else;
- the sign is made up of: a *signifier* and the *signified*;
- the *signifier* is the thing that points to an underlying meaning (the term *sign vehicle* is sometimes used instead of *signifier*);
- the *signified* is the meaning to which the signifier points;
- a *denotative meaning* is the manifest or more obvious meaning of a signifier and as such indicates its function;
- a *sign-function* is an object that denotes a certain function;
- a *connotative meaning* is a meaning associated with a certain social context that is in addition to its denotative meaning;
- *polysemy* refers to a quality of signs—namely, that they are always capable of being interpreted in many ways;
- the *code* is the generalized meaning that interested parties may seek to instil in a sign; a code is sometimes also called a *sign system*.

Semiotic analysis focuses on the way that messages are communicated as systems of cultural meaning. It is based on semiotic theory, which suggests that the symbolic order of a culture is constructed and interpreted through a system of signs. A *sign* constitutes the relationship between the *signifier* (the recognizable word, sound, or picture that attracts our attention and communicates a particular message) and the *signified* (the message or concept itself). The link between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary; its meaning depends on the conventions held by groups of sign users about the mental concept (signified) that the material object (signifier) is intended to represent. Barley (1983) provides the following example:

> As you drive toward me in your speeding car, I hold up my hand, palm out, intending an expression signifying the content, 'Stop while I cross the street.' From your vantage point behind the wheel, you wonder why I am so brash as to say hello from the middle of the crosswalk and you step on the gas. Obviously our conventions differ. (1983: 395–6)

This example places greater emphasis on the recipient of the message, who must actively interpret the signifier in order to establish its meaning by drawing on his or her cultural knowledge. The task of the researcher in semiotic analysis is to discover the rules that bind users of a sign together and enable them to make sense of their cultural world.

Signs contribute to systems of signification or *codes*, which provide a model for social action; these are composed of *denotative* and *connotative* elements. The denotative code represents meaning that is associated directly with the sign-vehicle itself, whereas the connotative code represents meaning that links the sign with its cultural context. An example from research into the UK state-sponsored people management initiative Investors in People by Bell, Taylor, and Thorpe (2002) illustrates this distinction (see Research in focus 21.5); the signifier of 'Investment in People' is a laurel wreath, a symbol that denotes victory, valour, or distinction. However, in certain organizational contexts, the connotative meaning of the sign can come to form part of a code that conveys a message about not investing in people, directly contradicting the intended denotative meaning of the sign.

Despite the potential for applying semiotic analysis in the study of organizational cultures, its use has instead been mainly confined to studies of marketing and advertising. In advertising, semiotic analysis encourages recognition of the way that individuals interpret the same advertising message in slightly different ways. Combe and Crowther (2000) suggest, for example, that signs and symbols influence the positioning and repositioning of brands, such as Murphy's Irish stout, in recipients' minds. A further application of semiotic analysis in an organizational context is provided by Barley (1983) in his study of funeral work (see Research in focus 21.10).

Semiotics is concerned to uncover the hidden meanings that reside in texts as broadly defined. Consider, by way of illustration, the curriculum vitae (CV) in academic life. The typical CV that an academic will produce contains such features as: personal details; education; previous and current posts; administrative responsibilities and experience; teaching experience; research experience;



## Research in focus 21.10
## A semiotic analysis of a funeral business

Over a three-month period, Barley (1983) engaged in observation and conducted interviews in a US funeral home, with the intention of uncovering the signs used by funeral directors to make sense of their work. After interviewing funeral directors about various aspects of their work, including the history of the business, the layout and decor of the home, and the tasks involved in preparing a body or making a removal, Barley began to develop maps of connotative codes through which he saw funeral directors as striving to achieve the quality of 'naturalness' in the funeral scene by making arrangements in a way that they believe is least likely to disturb mourners. This might involve arranging the corpse in such a way as to convey the image of a restfully sleeping person or furnishing the funeral home in a way that simulates a comfortable living room, with coffee tables and comfortable chairs. Barley concludes that the funeral director's role relies on a system of signs or codes that create a subtle illusion of everyday life, in order to obscure the strangeness of death and thereby to reassure mourners.

research grants acquired; and publications. We can treat the CV as a system of interlocking signifiers that signify at the level of denotative meaning a summary of the individual's experience (its sign function) and at the connotative level an indication of an individual's value, particularly in connection with his or her prospective employability. Each CV is capable of being interpreted in different ways, as anyone who has ever sat in on a short-listing meeting for a lectureship can testify, and is therefore polysemic, but there is a code whereby certain attributes of CVs are seen as especially desirable and that are therefore less contentious in terms of the attribution of meaning. Indeed, applicants for posts know this latter point and devise their CVs to amplify the desired qualities so that the CV becomes an autobiographical practice for the presentation of self, as Miller and Morgan (1993) have suggested.

Research in focus 21.11 provides an illustration of a study from a semiotic perspective of Disneyland as a text. The chief strength of semiotics lies in its invitation to the analyst to try to see beyond and beneath the apparent ordinariness of everyday life and its manifestations. The main difficulty one often feels with the fruits of a semiotic analysis is that, although we are invariably given a



## Research in focus 21.11
## A semiotic Disneyland

Gottdiener (1982; 1997: 108–15) has proposed that Disneyland in Los Angeles, California, can be fruitfully analysed through a semiotic analysis. In so doing, he was treating Disneyland as a text. One component of his analysis is that Disneyland's meaning 'is revealed by its oppositions with the quotidian—the alienated everyday life of residents of L.A.' (1982: 148). He identifies through this principle nine *sign systems* that entail a contrast between the park and its surrounding environment: transportation; food; clothing; shelter; entertainment; social control; economics; politics; and family. Thus, the first of these sign systems—transportation—reveals a contrast between the Disneyland visitor as pedestrian (walk in a group; efficient mass transportation, which is fun) and as passenger (car is necessary; poor mass transportation; danger on the congested freeways). A further component of his analysis focuses on the **connotations** of the different 'lands' that make up the park. He suggests that each land is associated as a signifier with signifiers of capitalism, as follows:

- Frontierland—predatory capital;
- Adventureland—colonialism/imperialism;
- Tomorrowland—state capital;
- New Orleans—venture capital;
- Main Street—family capital. (1982: 156)

compelling exposition of a facet of the quotidian, it is difficult to escape a sense of the arbitrariness of the analysis provided. However, in all probability this sensation is unfair to the approach, because the results of a semiotic analysis are probably no more arbitrary than any interpretation of documentary materials or any other data, such as a thematic, qualitative content analysis of the kind described in the previous section. Indeed, it would be surprising if we were not struck by a sense of arbitrariness in interpretation, in view of the principle of polysemy that lies at the heart of semiotics.

## Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics refers to an approach that was originally devised in relation to the understanding or interpretation of texts, and of theological texts in particular. It has been influential in the general formulation of interpretivism as an epistemology (see Chapter 1, where the idea of hermeneutics was briefly encountered) and is more or less synonymous with Weber's notion of *Verstehen*. The central idea behind hermeneutics is that the analyst of a text must seek to bring out the meanings of a text from the perspective of its author. This will entail attention to the social and historical context within which the text was produced. An approach to the analysis of texts like qualitative content analysis can be hermeneutic when it is sensitive to the context within which texts were produced. Hermeneutics is seen by its modern advocates as a strategy that has potential in relation both to texts as documents and to social actions and other non-documentary phenomena.

Phillips and Brown (1993) and Forster (1994) separately identify an approach to the interpretation of company documents that they describe as a *critical hermeneutic* approach. A hermeneutic approach, because of its emphasis on the location of interpretation within a specific social and historical context, would seem to represent an invitation to ensure that the analyst of texts is fully conversant with that context. As such, the approach is likely to entail the collection and analysis of data that will allow an understanding in context to be forged. As noted previously, Forster's study of the company referred to as TC included interviews with senior managers and a questionnaire survey. For their study of the corporate image advertisements of a Canadian company that produces synthetic crude oil, Phillips and Brown also employed a large database of magazine and newspaper articles relating to the company, which also supplied the authors with additional documentary materials. Forster's critical hermeneutic analysis entailed the interrogation of the documents and the extraction of themes from them by reference to his knowledge of the organizational context within which the documents and the people and events within them were located.

Phillips and Brown's (1993) somewhat more formal approach entailed the examination of the advertisements in terms of three 'moments':

- *The social–historical moment*, which involves 'an examination of the producer of the text, its intentional recipient, its referent in the world [i.e. what it refers to], and the context in which the text is produced, transmitted, and received' (1993: 1558).
- *The formal moment*, which involves 'a formal analysis of the structural and conventional aspects of the text' (1993: 1563). This means that the texts must be examined in terms of the constituent parts of each text and the writing conventions employed. This phase can involve the use of any of several techniques, such as semiotics or discourse analysis (see Chapter 20). Phillips and Brown used the former of these.
- *The interpretation–reinterpretation moment*, which 'involves the interpretation of the results of the first two moments' (1993: 1567); in other words, they are synthesized.

Through this strategy, Phillips and Brown show, for example, the ways in which the corporate image advertisements constitute an attempt to mobilize support for the company's activities from government (and from among the public, who were unlikely to be familiar with the company) at a time of intense competition for funding, and to ward off environmental legislation. The approach has points of affinity with the idea of the active audience (see above), in that there is an emphasis on the reception of texts and as such the notion that there may be a plurality of interpretations of them.

The critical hermeneutic approach thus can draw on practices associated with qualitative content analysis and can fuse them with ways of formally approaching texts, such as semiotics. What is crucial is the linkage that is made between understanding the text from the point of view of the author and the social and historical context of its production. Indeed, in many respects, for a hermeneutic approach, the latter is a precondition of the former. Its appeal to qualitative researchers is that it is an approach to the analysis of documents (and indeed other data) that explicitly draws on two central tenets of the qualitative research strategy: an emphasis on the point of view of the author of the text and sensitivity to context.

## Historical analysis

Historical analysis is in this chapter because the kind of research that we are referring to in this section typically involves documents and other artefacts that can be used to trace the history of an organization or an industry. This can include letters and diaries of company founders and other members of the organization, financial reports, and records of meetings, which are often held in private or public archives for the purposes of historical study by researchers. However, historical analysis relates not just to the study of documents from the past but also to the methods that are used to interpret them. In recent years there has been a growing debate around the role of historical analysis in business research. There is a long-standing tradition in business research of studying the history of individual companies and industries, primarily through corporate archive research. However, some researchers have argued that business history has tended to be conducted from a relatively realist (see Chapter 1), or possibly even empiricist (see Key concept 1.4), perspective that suffers from a tendency towards 'myopic fact-collect[ing] without a method' (Kieser 1994: 612) involving 'a high degree of arbitrariness' (1994: 617) and a tailoring of 'facts to fit a preconceived theory' (1994: 617)—that it is a research strategy that is 'especially susceptible to ideologies' (1994: 617); and associated with 'inductively generated theories where causal mechanisms are either absent, implicit or used in an ad hoc manner' (1994: 618). In other words, business history has been accused of being an approach that does not use, or take account of recent developments in, historiographic methods (see Key concept 21.12 and Thinking deeply 21.13).

A more recent generation of business and management historians has instead taken inspiration from the work of White (1987). White argues that historical analysis is limited by a number of processes that make writing history akin to fiction—for example, in the choices the historian has to make as to which historical elements to focus on and which narrative style to use to order them. This has led to the development of a perspective on business and management history which sees it as a discourse and a narrative (see Chapter 20) that is actively constructed by historians and other social actors—including organizational leaders and managers, who often have a vested interest in promoting a particular view of the past in order to shape its role in the present life of the organization.



### Key concept 21.12
### What is historiography?

Historiography is the study of historical method. It involves an examination of how history is conceived—for example, whether it utilizes a positivist or an interpretivist epistemology (see Chapter 1); how it is written—for example, what discourses are invoked and what narrative form is used (see Chapter 20); and how it is analysed—for example, does the historian frame the `historical traces' in terms of a grand narrative or a competing histories approach. However, with few exceptions, historiography has not been widely discussed in management and organizational history, let alone management and business research.

A recent discussion of historiography (Taylor et al. 2009) attempts to take business historians to task for this lack of discussion. These authors argue that there is an implicit **epistemological** position in most business history writing. Some historians believe that it is 'risky' to talk and write openly about the status of data or analysis, because it might undermine the credibility of their arguments and conclusions and make their research easier to ignore. Taylor, Bell, and Cooke challenge this, and argue that, if historians were to be more open about their epistemological assumptions, then their research would actually become more credible. Instead, by ignoring the linguistic turn (see Chapter 27) in the social sciences and in refusing to talk about whether data and analysis reflect realities or construct them, business historians are writing in a way that gives an unrealistic sense of authenticity.

This has led some commentators to suggest that there has been a historic turn in management research, in the form of an attempt to write history back into management theory and in particular to acknowledge the socio-historical context within which management research is produced. This can be seen partly as a response to criticisms of business and management studies for having a tendency towards presentism, in which 'the present is

often assumed to be a period of unprecedented change, heralding the dawning of a new age' (Booth and Rowlinson 2006: 6). As Booth and Rowlinson argue, this is often done without 'proper consideration of possible historical precedents' and is 'largely a rhetorical device for privileging an unbounded, extended present' (2006: 6). These ideas build on the earlier work of business scholars like Kieser (1994), who argues that, despite the earlier importance of history to organization studies, it has now 'become extremely rare' for organizational researchers to draw on historical analysis (1994: 609). In arguing for a historic turn in business and management research, Kieser makes four main arguments:

1. *Understanding of contemporary organizations relies on having an awareness of how they developed historically*. Kieser (1994) uses the example of Hofstede's (1984) research into the influence of national cultural differences on organizational culture (see Research in focus 1.12) and argues that these value differences are in fact rooted in historical development (Kieser 1994: 610).
2. *Historical analysis can reduce the ideological biases that are embedded in 'current "fashionable" trends in organization theory and practice'* (Kieser 1994: 610). Kieser's (1997) own work on 'rhetoric and myth in management fashion' details how management theory can reflect popular currents of thought (see also Abrahamson 1996). Historical analysis can also help to reveal ideological biases that lead to the popularization of one organizational theory over another (see Research in focus 21.14 for an example).
3. *Historical analysis enables interpretation of existing organizational arrangements as the result of intentional or implicit decisions made in the past rather than determined by objective laws.* Here the work of Henry Mintzberg and his colleagues is illustrative. Through a number of studies Mintzberg has examined the development of strategy over time to reveal that not all strategies are consciously developed but often arise out of a combination of spoken and unspoken assumptions that can be detected as patterns in a stream of action, whether the patterns are intended, or realized despite—or in the absence of—intentions (Mintzberg, Brunet, and Waters 1986: 4).
4. *'By confronting theories of organizational changes with historical development, these theories can be subjected to a more radical test than they have to pass when merely being confronted with data on short-run changes'* (Kieser 1994: 612). Through a historical analysis of the realized strategies employed by McGill University in the period 1829–1980, Mintzberg and Rose (2003) call into question a number of the 'fundamental premises of strategic management' (2003: 270). They discovered that, 'amidst continual change in detail, there was remarkable stability in the aggregate, and nothing resembling quantum or revolutionary change in strategy ever occurred' (2003: 270). As this example illustrates, historical analysis enables the sometimes overly grand claims of management to be subjected to empirical scrutiny in a way that allows their validity to be assessed more rigorously.



## Thinking deeply 21.13
## Three arguments for a historical perspective in organization studies

Rowlinson (2004*a*: 8) outlines three arguments for a historical perspective in organization studies: factual, narrative, and archaeo-genealogical:

1. The *factual approach* can be seen as aligned with positivism in the argument that 'if organization studies were to take account of the facts revealed by history then a number of erroneous assumptions would be undermined' (2004*a*: 8). From this framework, history is viewed as 'a repository of facts which, so long as historians properly interpret them, can conveniently confirm or refute preferred or non-preferred theoretical positions in organization studies' (2004*a*: 10).
2. The *narrative approach* is so-called because it focuses on the role of narrative in the social construction of historical accounts. Here the argument is that history is not so much the skillfully crafted recounting of real, or factual, events from the past so much as a well-crafted story about the past that is constructed by the historian through the careful use of narrative. We have already mentioned the work of White (1987) as exemplifying this type of work in his contention that 'all history is the study, not of past events that are gone for ever from perception, but rather of the "traces" of those events distilled into documents and monuments on one side, and the praxis of present social formations on the other. These "traces" are the raw materials of the historian's discourse, rather than the events themselves' (White 1987: 102,

cited in Rowlinson 2004*b*: 10). The work of White 'has shifted the emphasis away from seeing archival research as the historian's craft towards a view that it is the conventions and customs of writing that constitute the craft of history' (Rowlinson 2004*b*: 11). Nonetheless, White's approach to history 'is informed by a programmatic, if ironic commitment to the return to narrative as one of its enabling presuppositions' (Rowlinson 2004*b*: 11).

3. The *archaeo-genealogical approach* is derived from the work of Foucault and his various attempts to deconstruct the present through analyses of the past. In what he called his archaeological phase, Foucault explored 'in language the sedimented evidence of the assumptions; the values; the common sense through which, for instance, a phenomenon such as madness could have one set of meanings in one era and a contradictory set of meanings in another' (Jacques 2010: 310). In his later genealogical phase Foucault examined 'the conditions under which the different ways of interpreting and evaluating ourselves have come to exist. The purpose of the genealogical method is to analyse and excavate the taken-for-granted' assumptions that define the present (Poutanen and Kovalainen 2010: 263). As Rostis (2010: 418) puts it, 'the problematization of the present is at the core of genealogy'. This process of problematization arises through a process of defamilarization of the taken for granted through a rejection of 'linear histories of knowledge that emerge from a single origin' (2010: 418). In effect it sets out to reframe 'the conduct of historical analysis to understand how it has transpired that the present has come to be accepted as inevitable or natural' (2010: 418).

   In contrast to the traditional historian who presents historical events as 'linked together into a rational, linear progression from an origin toward the current order of things . . . the genealogist seeks to demonstrate that the present is not the product of an inevitable series of events' (Rostis 2010: 416–17). Arguably, genealogy differs from traditional histories in three significant ways. First, it 'does not portray the present as the inevitable outcome of a select series of past events . . . [Secondly, it seeks] to understand how the present has come to be defined and understood in its current form' (2010: 416). Thirdly, the genealogist departs from the traditional historian in her or his understanding of archival research.

Nonetheless, 'there is a point where the activity in *doing* archival research is remarkably similar in appearance, and that similarity is in the use and accessing of documents and other artifacts, which have been, in the traditional sense, archived . . . The difference lies in the treatment of the documents' (Mills and Helms Mills in press). Genealogical research has generated numerous studies in the field of business research, but, as Rowlinson (2004*b*: 13) contends, few of these accounts have involved any form of archival research (either in the narrow or the broader sense of the word). A key exception to this is the work of Cooke (2003, 2006) (see Thinking deeply 21.14).



## Thinking deeply 21.14
## The influence of slavery and the cold war on management theory

In two journal articles, Bill Cooke (2003, 2006) demonstrates both the potential significance of reflective historical writing and the limited ways in which we tend to think about the history of management. In fact, as Cooke argues, there are multiple histories of management to add to the standard textbook accounts based around 'great men' such as Frederick Taylor or Elton Mayo.

In the first paper (Cooke 2003), he argues that we can find the roots of management theories and practices in nineteenth-century US cotton plantations staffed with slave labour. Cooke bases this argument on a close reading of primary and secondary sources—that is, both on contemporaneous accounts written by people living and working on the plantations and on academic analysis of the plantations. Using these sources, Cooke argues that management theorists have actively written out the shameful roots of many practices that we accept now as normal or rational. Cooke goes so far as to term this a 'denial', and such is the strength and clarity of his evidence and argument that it is difficult to argue against that conclusion.

In the second paper (Cooke 2006), his analysis of the roots of management practice focuses on the twentieth century, to a time of the cold war between the USA, the Soviet Union, and their various allies. Here Cooke works with a more traditional historical dataset, a series of letters between two men who contributed to the development of action research. The overall aim is similar, however, as the social, political, and ethical contexts of what we now take to be a rational, neutral managerial system are picked apart. Cooke's 'historicization' of action research suggests that one of the founders wanted to make it much more radical than the other, and that the more conservative version won out.

In common with many historians, Cooke does not spend a lot of time explaining his methods, but he is clear about his data sources and the uses he puts the data to. In this respect, Cooke's historical research can be seen as an example of reflexive, critical historical writing.

Despite the recent increase in historical analyses of business and management this remains a relatively marginal research field and it is rarely taught in undergraduate or postgraduate degree programmes. Cooke's research suggests one reason why this might be; Wolfram Cox and Hassard (2007) provide another. They suggest that management research and theory developed within modernism, leading to a focus on controlling and predicting future behaviour or events to make a better, more efficient world. Researchers therefore tend to concentrate on understanding the present to predict the future, forgetting about the past and its potential significance. However, recent interest in historical analysis, as indicated by the launch of a new journal, *Management & Organizational History,* in 2006, could be interpreted as a sign that this may be changing.



# Checklist

## Evaluating documents

Can you answer the following questions?

- ◯ Who produced the document?
- ◯ Why was the document produced?
- ◯ Was the person or group that produced the document in a position to write authoritatively about the subject or issue?
- ◯ Is the material genuine?
- ◯ Did the person or group have an axe to grind and if so can you identify a particular slant?
- ◯ Is the document typical of its kind and if not is it possible to establish how untypical it is and in what ways?
- ◯ Is the meaning of the document clear?
- ◯ Can you corroborate the events or accounts presented in the document?
- ◯ Are there different interpretations of the document from the one you offer and if so what are they and why have you discounted them?



# Key points

- Documents constitute a very heterogeneous set of sources of data, which include personal documents, official documents from both the state and private sources, and the mass media.
- Such materials can be the focus of both quantitative and qualitative enquiry, but the emphasis in this chapter has been upon the latter.
- Documents of the kinds considered may be in printed, visual, digital, or indeed any other retrievable format.
- For many writers, just about anything can be 'read' as a text.
- Criteria for evaluating the quality of documents are: authenticity; credibility; representativeness; and meaning. The relevance of these criteria varies somewhat according to the kind of document being assessed.
- There are several ways of analysing documents within qualitative research. In this chapter we have covered qualitative content analysis, semiotics, hermeneutics, and historical analysis.



# Questions for review

- What is meant by a document?
- What are John Scott's four criteria for assessing documents?

### *Personal documents*

- Outline the different kinds of personal documents.
- How do they fare in terms of John Scott's criteria?
- What might be the role of personal documents in relation to the life history or biographical method?
- What uses can photographs have in business research?

### *Public documents*

- What do the studies by Gephart and Turner suggest in terms of the potential for business researchers to use official documents?
- How do such documents fare in terms of John Scott's criteria?

### *Organizational documents*

- What kinds of documents might be obtained from organizational sources?
- How do such documents fare in terms of John Scott's criteria?

### *Mass media outputs*

- What kinds of documents are mass media outputs?
- How do such documents fare in terms of John Scott's criteria?

### *Virtual documents*

- Do Internet documents and other virtual outputs raise special problems in terms of assessing them from the point of view of John Scott's criteria?
- Name three ways that photographs can be used as a source of data in business research and explain the difference between them.

### *The world as text*

- Can anything be treated as a text?
- What is the significance of audiences in connection with textual readings by academics?

### *The reality of documents*

- To what extent can documents provide evidence that business researchers can use as data?

### *Interpreting documents*

- How does qualitative content analysis differ from the kind of content analysis discussed in Chapter 12?
- What is a sign? How central is it to semiotics?
- What is the difference between denotative meaning and connotative meaning?
- What is a hermeneutic approach to documents?

- What lessons can be learned from the studies by Phillips and Brown and by Forster concerning the potential uses of a hermeneutic approach?
- What is historical analysis and how can it be applied in business research?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Documents as Sources of Data.*

22

# Qualitative data analysis

## Chapter outline


**Introduction** 571

**General strategies of qualitative data analysis** 574

- Analytic induction 574
- Grounded theory 577

**More on coding** 584

- Steps and considerations in coding 585
- Turning data into fragments 587
- Problems with coding 588

**Secondary analysis of qualitative data** 590

***Key points*** 591

***Questions for review*** 591






## Chapter outline

Because qualitative data deriving from interviews or participant observation typically take the form of a large corpus of unstructured textual material, they are not straightforward to analyse. Moreover, unlike quantitative data analysis, clear-cut rules about how qualitative data analysis should be carried out have not been developed. In this chapter, some general approaches to qualitative data analysis will be examined, along with *coding*, which is the main feature of most of these approaches. The chapter explores:

- **analytic induction** as a general strategy of qualitative data analysis;
- *grounded theory* as a general strategy of qualitative data analysis; this is probably the most prominent of the general approaches to qualitative data analysis; the chapter examines its main features, processes, and outcomes, along with some of the criticisms that are sometimes levelled at the approach;
- *coding* as a key process in grounded theory and in approaches to qualitative data analysis more generally; it is the focus of an extended discussion in terms of what it entails and some of the limitations of a reliance on coding;
- the criticism that is sometimes made of coding in relation to qualitative data—namely, that it tends to fragment data; the idea of *narrative analysis* is introduced as an approach to data analysis that is gaining a growing following and that does not result in data fragmentation;
- the possibility of conducting a secondary analysis of other researchers' qualitative data.

# Introduction

One of the main difficulties with qualitative research is that it very rapidly generates a large, cumbersome database because of its reliance on prose in the form of such media as field notes, interview transcripts, or documents. Miles (1979) has described qualitative data as an 'attractive nuisance', because of the attractiveness of its richness but the difficulty of finding analytic paths through that richness. The researcher must guard against being captivated by the richness of the data collected, so that there is a failure to give the data wider significance for the business and management community. In other words, it is crucial to guard against failing to carry out a true analysis. This means that you must protect yourself against the condition Lofland (1971: 18) once called 'analytic interruptus'.

Yet, finding a path through the thicket of prose that makes up your data is not an easy matter and is baffling to many researchers confronting such data for the first time. 'What do I do with it now?' is a common refrain. In large part, this is because, unlike the analysis of quantitative data, there are few well-established and widely accepted rules for the analysis of qualitative data. Although learning the techniques of quantitative data analysis may seem painful at the time, they do give you an unambiguous set of rules about how to handle your data. You still have to interpret your analyses, but at least there are relatively clear rules for getting to that point. Qualitative data analysis has not reached this degree of codification of analytic procedures and many writers would argue that this is not necessarily desirable anyway (see Bryman and Burgess 1994*b* on this point). What *can* be provided are broad guidelines (Okely 1994), and it is in the spirit of this suggestion that this chapter has been written.

One of the most common ways of approaching qualitative data analysis is through conducting what is referred to as thematic analysis. However, unlike strategies such as grounded theory or critical discourse analysis, this is not an approach to analysis that has an identifiable heritage or that has been outlined in terms of a distinctive

cluster of techniques. Indeed, the search for themes is an activity that can be discerned in many if not most approaches to qualitative data analysis, including grounded theory, critical discourse analysis, qualitative content analysis, and narrative analysis. Also, what business researchers mean when they talk about thematic analysis varies; for some a theme is more or less the same as a code (a term that will be explained later in this chapter), whereas for others it transcends any one code and is built up out of codes. Moreover, in a simple exercise conducted for the purposes of writing this book, we searched the Web of Science database for articles in journals in the field of management over the previous ten years that used the term 'thematic analysis' in either the title or abstract and came up with only fourteen hits (search conducted 14 July 2010). It would thus seem that thematic analysis is not a particularly meaningful term in business and management research and therefore not particularly helpful in describing how qualitative researchers undertake data analysis.



## Telling it like it is
## Generating large amounts of data and doing thematic analysis

Tom found that in one key respect his experience of doing a research project did tally with what he'd been led to expect from his reading—the tendency for qualitative research to generate large amounts of textual data that were difficult to analyse systematically. 'All textbooks say, don't they, that inexperienced researchers are likely to collect too much data and then not be able to process it all or analyse it all properly and it's true! [*laughs*] It's true! I certainly found it hard to process the amount of stuff that I'd collected.'

Lucie had a similar experience in her research project. 'It was really hard. It was probably the biggest part of my project. It just took me so long—the whole summer—because there was so much. I had to go through it all and try and look for the themes. I knew while I was doing it kind of what type of themes were emerging, so I went through the data looking for things to support that, but I had such a lot of data it was really difficult not to miss out anything and to try and get through all the data. It was really hard to pick out emerging themes—just going through the data was so difficult. At first I was a bit overwhelmed. I didn't really know how to do it. I hadn't carried out kind of qualitative research before, so I didn't really know how to approach it that well and I didn't really have a background in that because my undergraduate degree was in psychology so it was more quantitative, so I found it really difficult to kind of go through and also to be unbiased. Eventually I broke it down into the different themes and talked about those and used the data as evidence that supported what I was trying to say. The interview data was really useful because I could quote from it and what people said was really useful. They said it better than I could have said it. So I put that into my findings and analysis and quoted from their experiences of the courses and things like that.' Lucie also included the full transcripts of her interviews in an appendix.



*To find out more about Tom and Lucie's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

This chapter has three main sections.

- *General strategies of qualitative data analysis*. In this section, we consider two approaches to data analysis—analytic induction and grounded theory.
- *Basic operations in qualitative data analysis*. This section builds on Chapter 21 and focuses on the steps, considerations, and problems that are associated with *coding*.
- *Narrative analysis*. This section explores an approach to qualitative data analysis that has become popular among some researchers in the field of management and business called narrative analysis.

In the next chapter, the use of computers in qualitative data analysis will be outlined.



## Tips and skills
## Analysing data as part of an inductive research strategy

One of the things that we find in dealing with students who are analysing qualitative data is that they find it difficult to know how to deal with the emergence of themes in their data that do not relate to the theories they identified in their literature review. What typically happens is that, in the course of data collection involving semi-structured interviewing that encourages respondents to go into areas not covered in the interview schedule, some of the themes the student identifies within the dataset relate to literature that has been reviewed prior to the research but they also identify interesting themes that do not. The student is then confused about how to deal with these new themes. Should they include them in their analysis, in which case they may need to go off and read a lot more literature on these subjects, or should they stick to the subject of their literature review, leaving themes that do not closely relate to it out of the analysis?

To an extent this dilemma is a logical outcome of using an inductive research strategy (see Chapter 1), in which data are collected to build theory rather than to test it. In inductive research, the data collected form the basis from which generalizable inferences are drawn. Inductive research is usually iterative, involving tracking back and forth between theory and data. This would suggest that the student should go back and read more theory to enable him or her to make sense of his or her data. But practical constraints can make this difficult. As we highlight in this chapter, qualitative data analysis can be very time-consuming, and students will probably be working towards writing up within a submission deadline, alongside other demands associated with being in their final year of study (see Chapter 27 for more on the need to start writing up early). The student is also likely to be dealing with constraints of length (see Chapter 27 for more on this issue). By exploring more themes and dealing with an ever broader set of literature, there is a risk that the student ends up trying to cover too much within the dissertation, and their engagement with theory and analysis of the data consequently becomes too superficial.

Moreover, as we noted in Chapter 1, research is very rarely entirely inductive, and the process of reviewing the literature and reading about existing theory will almost certainly have informed the student's initial approach to data collection. In addition, within a dissertation project there is obviously less expectation on the researcher to develop or test theory, although in a few cases this does happen and it can lead to paper publication, often jointly with the dissertation supervisor. The main point to bear in mind is that it is important to try to achieve a balance here, and this is often a good point for the student to seek some advice from his or her supervisor.



## Telling it like it is
## Getting support from your supervisor

When students reach the stage of analysing qualitative research for the first time, they can find the prospect quite daunting. As Karen explained: 'I had a lot of qualitative data from my interviews and a lot of sort of comments that I thought were really valuable, but I couldn't really work out how to actually analyse it. My tutor helped a lot at that point; he helped me to understand how to go about analysing it and pulling it all together.'

The supervisors we spoke to in preparing this edition of the book said that data analysis was an area that many students struggled with, some choosing qualitative methods of data collection because they saw this as an easier option, only to realize that the analysis of qualitative data is, if anything, more complex. Supervisors further commented that it was only in the very best projects where students were able coherently and clearly to analyse their data and explain how they had done it; in far more cases, students tended simply to describe the data rather than to analyse and interpret it. One supervisor also said that it was often only once students had reached the stage of analysing their data that the whole point of studying research methods suddenly began to make sense! All of this highlights the importance of taking time over qualitative data analysis and becoming skilled in undertaking it.



*To hear more about Karen's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

# General strategies of qualitative data analysis

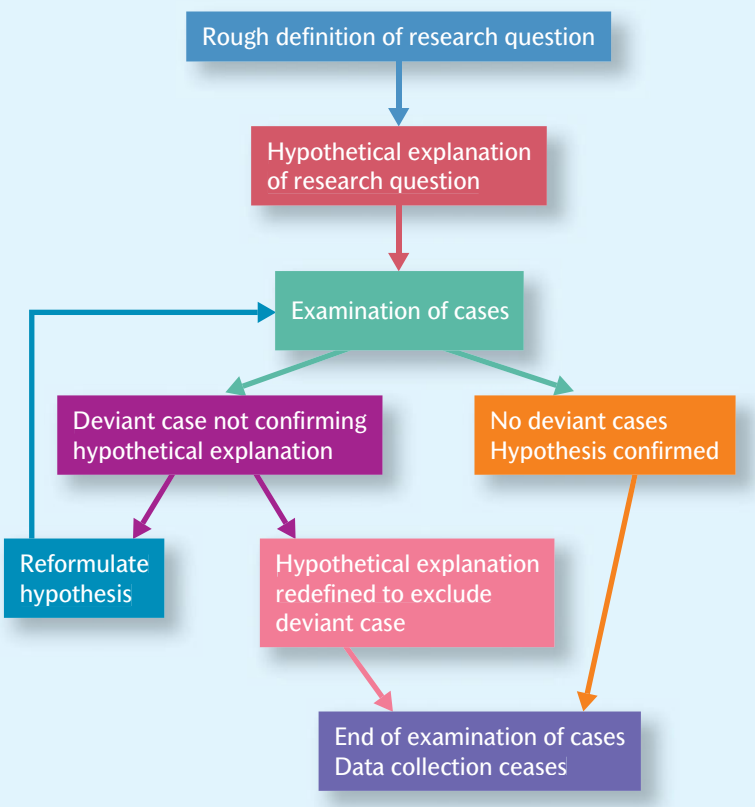
This section considers two strategies of analysis—analytic induction and grounded theory. They are probably the most frequently cited approaches, though others do exist (e.g. R. Williams 1976; Hycner 1985). By a general strategy of qualitative data analysis, we simply mean a framework that is meant to guide the analysis of data. As we will see, one of the ways in which qualitative and quantitative data analysis sometimes differ is that, with the latter, analysis invariably occurs after your data have been collected. However, as noted in Chapter 16, general approaches like grounded theory (and analytic induction) are often described as *iterative*—that is, there is a repetitive interplay between the collection and analysis of data. This means that analysis starts after some of the data have been collected and the implications of that analysis then shape the next steps in the data collection process. Consequently, while grounded theory and analytic induction are described as strategies of analysis, they can also be viewed as strategies for the *collection* of data as well.

## Analytic induction

The main steps in analytic induction are outlined in Figure 22.1. Analytic induction (see Key concept 22.1) begins with a rough definition of a research question, proceeds to a hypothetical explanation of that question, and then continues onto the collection of data

Figure 22.1

**The process of analytic induction**



(examination of cases). If a case that is inconsistent with the hypothesis is encountered, the analyst *either* redefines the hypothesis so as to exclude the deviant or negative case *or* reformulates the hypothesis and proceeds with further data collection. If the latter path is chosen, if a further deviant case is found, the analyst must choose again between reformulation or redefinition. An example of analytic induction used in a study of corporate ecological responsiveness is given in Research in focus 22.2.



## Key concept 22.1
## What is analytic induction?

Analytic induction is an approach to the analysis of data in which the researcher seeks universal explanations of phenomena by pursuing the collection of data until no cases that are inconsistent with a hypothetical explanation (deviant or negative cases) of a phenomenon are found.



## Research in focus 22.2
## An example of the use of analytic induction

The aim of Bansal and Roth's (2000) research was to develop a robust model of the motives for corporate ecological responsiveness, or 'greening'. They chose an analytic induction approach because it enabled them to accommodate existing theories of corporate greening. This allowed them to begin by reviewing the literature in order to develop a set of hypotheses and then to move back and forth between data collection and theory generation.

From the data they developed a preliminary model of corporate ecological responsiveness as driven by legislation, stakeholder pressures, economic opportunities, and ethical motives. To test this model, data were collected from fifty-three firms in the UK and Japan. Theoretical sampling was used to select the case studies from sectors that faced a wide range of ecological issues. These included:

- food retailers—chosen because they were facing issues relating to the location of sites, the distribution of products, packaging, labelling, and recycling;
- subsidiaries of the British-based multinational P&O—chosen to assess the importance of internal organizational structure and culture in motivating a corporate environmental policy;
- auto manufacturers—a sample of five firms based in the UK;
- oil companies—involved in the extraction or refining of oil in the UK;
- Japan-based companies—a sample of ten companies chosen in order to challenge the emerging theory in a different cultural context.

Data sources included:

- interviews—a selection of key informants within the firms, chosen for their knowledge of the ecological initiatives of their firms;
- participant observation—of training seminars where environmental issues were discussed;
- public and private documents—including a newspaper search of the Reuters and Data Star databases, company accounts, annual reports, and corporate environmental reports.

Analysis involved an iterative process of collecting data from these sources, coding, developing, or refining emerging ideas, relating them to existing theory, and selecting further data for the next phase of analysis. Analysis focused on understanding why companies engaged in ecologically responsible initiatives. Three basic motives for ecological responsiveness were found:

1. competitiveness;
2. legitimation;
3. ecological responsibility.

Motives were also affected by three contextual dimensions, which influenced the dominant motivation of a firm. This led to the development of an advanced theoretical model that took the relationship between motives and context into account. By assessing the relationship between motives and context, Bansal and Roth suggest that it is possible to predict the kinds of ecological initiatives that firms will adopt.

The main weakness of the model, however, stems from the fact that Bansal and Roth were attempting to uncover a firm's motivations only after they had made the decision to act. This means that the research is subject to bias associated with retrospective accounts.

As this brief outline suggests, analytic induction is an extremely rigorous method of analysis, because encountering a single case that is inconsistent with a hypothesis is sufficient to necessitate further data collection or a reformulation of the hypothesis, and the selection of cases must be sufficiently diverse as to have adequately challenged the theory. This is reflected by Bansal and Roth's inclusion of Japanese companies in their sample, in order to test their model of corporate ecological responsiveness in a different cultural context. Nor should the alternative of reformulating the hypothetical explanation be regarded as a soft option. The rigours of analytic induction have not endeared the approach to qualitative researchers, and most of the examples used in textbooks to illustrate analytic induction derive from the 1940s and early 1950s (Bryman and Burgess 1994*a*: 4); Bansal and Roth's (2000) work is unusual in being a relatively recent example.

Two further problems with analytic induction are worth noting. First, the final explanations that analytic induction arrives at specify the conditions that are *sufficient* for the phenomenon occurring but rarely specify the *necessary* conditions. This means that analytic induction may find out why companies with certain characteristics or in certain circumstances become ecologically responsive but it does not allow us to say why those particular companies became more responsive, rather than others in the same situation with the same characteristics. Secondly, it does not provide useful guidelines (unlike grounded theory) as to how many cases need to be investigated before the absence of negative cases and the validity of the hypothetical explanation (whether reformulated or not) can be confirmed.



## Key concept 22.3
## What is grounded theory?

In its most recent incarnation, grounded theory has been defined as 'theory that was derived from data, systematically gathered and analysed through the research process. In this method, data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another' (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 12). Thus, two central features of grounded theory are that it is concerned with the development of theory out of data *and* the approach is *iterative*, or *recursive*, as it is sometimes called, meaning that data collection and analysis proceed in tandem, repeatedly referring back to each other.

## Grounded theory

Grounded theory (see Key concept 22.3) has become by far the most widely used framework for analysing qualitative data. The book that is the chief wellspring of the approach, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss (published in 1967), must be one of the most widely cited books in the social sciences. However, providing a definitive account of the approach is by no means a straightforward matter, for the following reasons:

- Glaser and Strauss developed grounded theory along different paths after the publication of the above book. Glaser felt that the approach to grounded theory that Strauss was promoting (most notably in Strauss 1987 and Strauss and Corbin 1990) was too prescriptive and emphasized too much the development of concepts rather than of theories (Glaser 1992). However, because of the greater prominence of Strauss's writings, his version is largely the one followed in the exposition below. There is, however, considerable controversy about what grounded theory is and entails (Charmaz 2000).
- Straussian grounded theory has changed a great deal over the years. This is revealed in a constant addition to the tool chest of analytic devices that is revealed in his writings.
- Some writers have suggested that grounded theory is honoured more in the breach than in the observance, implying that claims are often made that grounded theory has been used but that evidence of this being the case is at best uncertain (Bryman 1988*a*: 85, 91; Locke 1996; Charmaz 2000). Sometimes the term is employed simply to imply that the analyst has grounded his or her theory in data. Grounded theory is more than this and refers to a set of procedures that are described below. Referencing academic publications is often part of a tactic of persuading readers of the legitimacy of one's work (Gilbert 1977), and this process can be discerned in the citation of grounded theory. Alternatively, researchers sometimes appear to have used just one or two features of grounded theory but refer to their having used the approach without qualification (Locke 1996).

Against such a background, writing about the essential ingredients of grounded theory is not an easy matter.

It is not going to be possible to describe here grounded theory in all its facets; instead, its main features will be outlined. In order to organize the exposition, we find it helpful to distinguish between *tools* and *outcomes* in grounded theory.

### Tools of grounded theory

Some of the tools of grounded theory have been referred to in previous chapters. Their location is indicated in the list that follows.

- *Theoretical sampling*: see Key concept 17.11.
- *Coding*: the key process in grounded theory, whereby data are broken down into component parts, which are given names. It begins soon after the collection of initial data. As Charmaz (2000: 515) puts it: 'We grounded theorists code our emerging data as we collect it . . . Unlike quantitative research that requires data to fit into *preconceived* standardized codes, the researcher's interpretations of data shape his or her emergent codes in grounded theory' (emphasis in original). In grounded theory, different types or levels of coding are recognized (see Key concept 22.4).
- *Theoretical saturation*: see Key concept 17.12. Theoretical saturation is a process that relates to two phases in grounded theory: the coding of data (implying that you reach a point where there is no further point in reviewing your data to see how well they fit with your concepts or categories) and the collection of data (implying that, once a concept or category has been developed, you may wish to continue collecting data to determine its nature and operation but then reach a point where new data are no longer illuminating the concept).
- *Constant comparison*: an aspect of grounded theory that was prominent in Glaser and Strauss (1967) and that is often referred to as a significant phase by practitioners, but that seems to be an implicit, rather than an explicit, element in more recent writings. It refers to a process of maintaining a close connection between data and conceptualization, so that the correspondence between concepts and categories with their indicators is not lost. More specifically, attention to the procedure of constant comparison enjoins the researcher constantly to compare phenomena being coded under a certain category so that a theoretical elaboration of that category can begin to emerge. Glaser and Strauss advised writing a memo (see below) on the category after a few phenomena had been coded. It also entails being sensitive to contrasts between the categories that are emerging.



# Key concept 22.4
# Coding in grounded theory

Coding is one of the most central processes in grounded theory. It entails reviewing transcripts and/or field notes and giving labels (names) to component parts that seem to be of potential theoretical significance and/or that appear to be particularly salient within the social worlds of those being studied. As Charmaz (1983: 186) puts it: 'Codes . . . serve as shorthand devices to *label*, *separate*, *compile*, and *organize* data' (emphases in original). Coding is a somewhat different process from coding in relation to quantitative data, such as survey data. With the latter, coding is more or less solely a way of managing data, whereas in grounded theory, and indeed in approaches to qualitative data analysis that do not subscribe to the approach, it is an important first step in the generation of theory. Coding in grounded theory is also somewhat more tentative than in relation to the generation of quantitative data, where there is a tendency to think in terms of data and codes as very fixed. Coding in qualitative data analysis tends to be in a constant state of potential revision and fluidity. The data are treated as potential indicators of concepts and the indicators are *constantly compared* (see under 'Tools of grounded theory') to see which concepts they best fit with. As Strauss (1987: 25) put it: 'Many indicators (behavioral actions/events) are examined comparatively by the analyst who then "codes" them, naming them as indicators of a class of events/behavioral actions.'

Strauss and Corbin (1990), drawing on their grounded theory approach, distinguish between three types of coding practice:

- *Open coding*: 'the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data' (1990: 61); this process of coding yields concepts, which are later to be grouped and turned into categories.
- *Axial coding*: 'a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories' (1990: 96). This is done by linking codes to contexts, to consequences, to patterns of interaction, and to causes.
- *Selective coding*: 'the procedure of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development' (1990: 116). A *core category* is the central issue or focus around which all other categories are integrated. It is what Strauss and Corbin call the storyline that frames your account.

The three types of coding are really different levels of coding and each relates to a different point in the elaboration of categories in grounded theory.

## Outcomes of grounded theory

The following are the products of different phases of grounded theory:

- *Concept(s)*—refers to labels given to discrete phenomena; concepts are referred to as the 'building blocks of theory' (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 101). The value of concepts is determined by their usefulness or utility. One criterion for deciding whether a concept is useful is that a useful concept will typically be found frequently, and members of the organization under study will be able to recognize it and relate it to their experiences. Concepts are produced through *open coding* (see Key concept 22.4). Concepts can be recorded using concept cards (see Research in focus 22.5), through which incidents in the data can be recorded. An example of a concept card is provided in Figure 22.2.
- *Category, categories*—a concept that has been elaborated so that it is regarded as representing real-world phenomena. A category may subsume two or more concepts. As such, categories are at a higher level of abstraction than concepts. A category may become a *core category* around which the other categories pivot (see Key concept 22.4). The number of core categories may, in fact, be relatively few. For example, Martin and Turner (1986) give an example of one study in which from a large dataset and an initial 100 concepts, fewer than 40 of these proved to be very useful and only 10 provided the basis for the final analysis.



## Research in focus 22.5
## Categories in grounded theory

Prasad (1993) used techniques of grounded theory to analyse the vast quantity of field notes and interview transcripts that were generated by her study (see Chapter 16 for a detailed account of this research). Using *concept cards* to identify important *concepts* in the data, she accumulated incidents, events, or pieces of conversation—*elements*—that related to a particular theme and put them together under a meaningful *label* on a concept card (see Figure 22.2). The initial aim of labels was to find a level of abstraction that was high enough to avoid creating a separate card for every element observed but low enough to ensure that the concept accurately represented the phenomenon.

Maintaining the concept cards was an iterative process that began early in the research process. New concepts were generated and further elements were added to the cards as more data were collected. Prasad then scanned the concept cards for relationships among elements on the same and different cards. She states that this led to the development of 'a new set of second-order cards that helped me make connections between certain symbolic representations of computerization and areas of organizational action' (1993: 1411).

### Figure 22.2

**An example of part of a concept card to show the symbolism of organizational turmoil related to work computerization**

| Data source | Organization member | Incident, quotation, opinion, event |
|---|---|---|
| **Field notes No. 7, p. 3** | Project manager | Discussing possible resistance to computers: 'Yes . . . we have got to pull out all our weapons to fight this thing out. But until we win . . . It's going to mean confusion.' |
| **Interview No. 8, p. 23** | Receptionist | Describing the first two weeks of computerization: 'What I hated was the anger and, well, the confusion. It was almost like my divorce all over again . . . blaming each other and mistakes every minute.' |
| **Field notes No. 33, p. 24** | Nurse supervisor | Official memo to trainers: 'We need to be well prepared for the next few weeks of chaos. Even the people you work with will not seem the same any more.' |
| **Interview No. 24, pp. 8–9** | Senior manager | 'I finally know what army generals feel like . . . that's exactly what it was like. Fighting people all the time . . . the girls, the nurses, Joe, and the big brass at Paragon . . . and not knowing where the next attack would come from.' |

*Source*: adapted from Prasad (1993).

- *Properties*: attributes or aspects of a category.
- *Hypotheses*: initial hunches about relationships between concepts.
- *Theory*: according to Strauss and Corbin (1998: 22), 'a set of well-developed categories . . . that are systematically related through statements of relationship to form a theoretical framework that explains some relevant social . . . or other phenomenon'. Since the inception of grounded theory, writings have pointed to two types or levels of theory: *substantive*

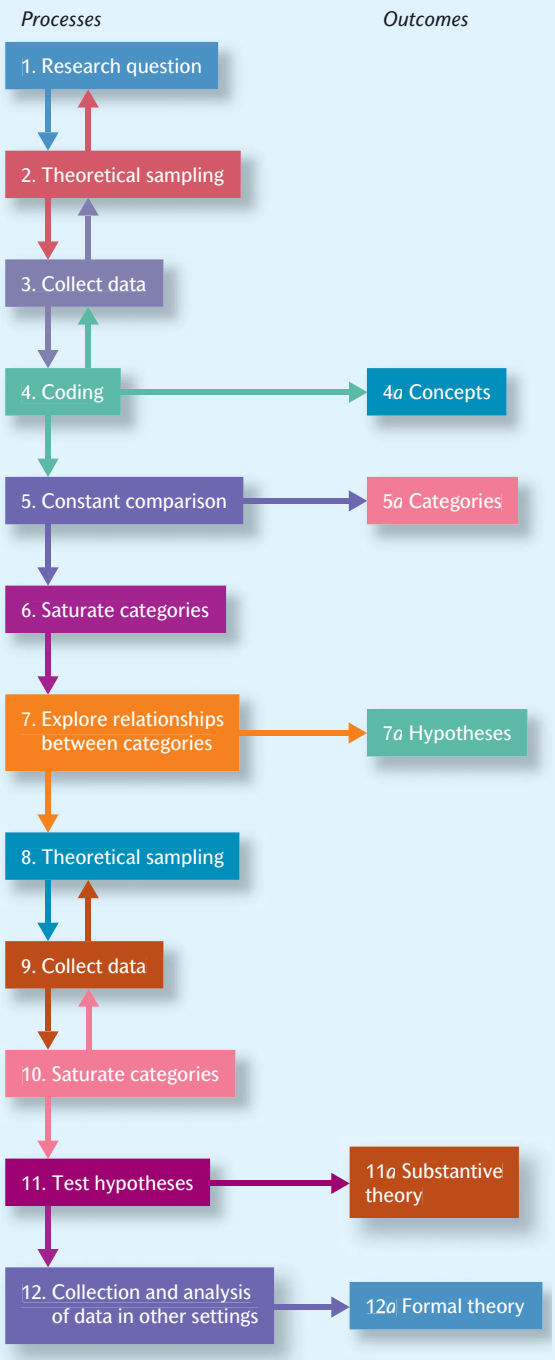
*theory* and *formal theory*. The former relates to theory in a certain empirical instance or substantive area, such as occupational socialization. A formal theory is at a higher level of abstraction and has a wider range of applicability to several substantive areas, such as socialization in a number of spheres, suggesting that higher-level processes are at work. The generation of formal theory requires data collection in contrasting settings.

The different elements are portrayed in Figure 22.3. As with all diagrams, this is a representation, and it is particularly so in the case of grounded theory, because the existence of different versions of the approach does not readily permit a more definitive rendition. Also, it is difficult to get across diagrammatically the iterative nature of grounded theory—in particular, its commitment to the idea that data collection and analysis occur in parallel. This is partly achieved in the diagram through the presence of arrows pointing in both directions in relation to certain steps. The figure implies the following:

- The researcher begins with a general research question (step 1).
- Relevant people and/or incidents are theoretically sampled (step 2).
- Relevant data are collected (step 3).
- Data are coded (step 4), which at the level of open coding may generate concepts (step 4*a*).
- There is a constant movement backwards and forwards between the first four steps, so that early coding suggests the need for new data, which results in the need to sample theoretically, and so on.
- Through a constant comparison of indicators and concepts (step 5), categories are generated (step 5*b*). The crucial issue is to ensure that there is a fit between indicators and concepts.
- Categories are saturated during the coding process (step 6).
- Relationships between categories are explored (step 7) in such a way that hypotheses about connections between categories emerge (step 7*a*).
- Further data are collected via theoretical sampling (steps 8 and 9).
- The collection of data is likely to be governed by the theoretical saturation principle (step 10) and by the testing of the emerging hypotheses (step 11), which leads to the specification of substantive theory (step 11*a*).

# Figure 22.3

## Processes and outcomes in grounded theory



- The substantive theory is explored using grounded theory processes in relation to different settings from that in which it was generated (step 12), so that formal theory may be generated (step 12*a*). A formal theory will relate to more abstract categories, which are not specifically related to the research area in question.

Step 12 is relatively unusual in grounded theory, because researchers typically concentrate on a certain setting, although the study described in Research in focus 22.6 did examine other settings to explore the emerging concepts. A further way in which formal theory can be generated is through the use of existing theory and research in comparable settings.

Concepts and categories are perhaps the key elements in grounded theory. Indeed, it is sometimes suggested that, as a qualitative data analysis strategy, it works better for generating categories than theory. In part, this may be because studies purporting to use the approach often generate grounded *concepts* rather than grounded theory as such. Concepts and categories are nonetheless at the heart of the approach, and key processes such as coding, theoretical sampling, and theoretical saturation are designed to guide their generation.



## Research in focus 22.6
## Grounded theory in a study of consumer experiences of museums

Goulding (2009) has discussed the way in which she implemented grounded theory in the context of a study of how consumers experience museums, particularly so-called living museums that seek to recreate the UK's industrial heritage. The approach she took was closer to Glaser's than to Strauss's version of grounded theory. Initially, she selected an open-air museum and interviewed the director and then conducted observations of parties of visitors, noting how they interacted with the attractions and exhibits. While these relatively unstructured observations were illuminating in terms of how visitors responded to the attractions, they did not generate insights into motivations, so Goulding conducted interviews with visitors to shed light on such things as their expectations and their perceptions of the exhibits. She conducted a line-by-line analysis of the interview transcripts, which generated a huge number of codes and words. She reduced this vast array of codes to themes that helped her to understand her data, and this produced seven concepts, such as: the stimulation of nostalgia, the desire for education, and the experience of alienation in the present. Each of these concepts had distinctive properties or dimensions. For example, the stimulation of nostalgia was encapsulated in such things as a sense of retreat from the present and a 'rose-tinted' recollection of the past. However, Goulding felt that she had not saturated her concepts, so she collected new data in two new comparable but different sites. The same data collection approach was taken as with the original site but no new concepts were generated. However, the new data did allow her to reinforce her concepts and to produce a categorization of three types of visitors to such museums: existential, purist, and social. For example, existential visitors tended to exhibit high levels of simulation of nostalgia (that is, of the seven concepts derived from the data), which was apparent from their position with regard to codes like 'selective recall', 'rose-tinted remembrance', a 'rejection of the present', and an 'ability to distort the past'.

### Memos

One aid to the generation of concepts and categories is the *memo*. Memos in grounded theory are notes that researchers might write for themselves and for those with whom they work concerning such elements of grounded theory as coding or concepts. They serve as reminders about what is meant by the terms being used and provide the building blocks for a certain amount of reflection. Memos are potentially very helpful to researchers in helping them to crystallize ideas and not to lose track of their thinking on various topics. An illustration of a memo from research in which Bryman was involved is provided in Research in focus 22.7.



# Research in focus 22.7
## A memo

In the course of research into the bus industry that Bryman carried out with colleagues in the early 1990s (Bryman, Gillingwater, and McGuinness 1996), the researchers noticed that the managers they interviewed frequently referred to the notion that their companies had inherited features that derived from the running of those companies before deregulation. They often referred to the idea of inheriting characteristics that held them back in trying to meet the competitive environment they faced in the 1990s. As such, inheritance is what Strauss (1987) calls an *in vivo code* (one that derives from the language of people in the social context being studied), rather than what he calls *sociologically constructed codes*, which are labels employing the analyst's own terminology. The following memo outlines the concept of inheritance, provides some illustrative quotations, and suggests some properties of the concept.

Memo for Inheritance

*Inheritance*: many of our interviewees suggest that they have inherited certain company traits and traditions from the period prior to deregulation (i.e. pre-1985). It is a term that many of them themselves employed to denote company attributes that are not of their choosing but have survived from the pre-deregulation period. The key point about inheritance is that the inherited elements are seen by our interviewees as hindering their ability to respond to the changing environment of the post-deregulation era.

Inherited features include:

- expensive and often inappropriate fleets of vehicles and depots;
- the survival of attitudes and behaviour patterns, particularly among bus drivers, which are seen as inappropriate to the new environment (for example, lack of concern for customer service) and which hinder service innovation;
- high wage rates associated with the pre-deregulation era; means that new competitors can enter the market while paying drivers lower wages.

Sample comments:

> We *inherited* a very high cost structure because of deregulation. 75% of our staff were paid in terms of conditions affected by [rates prior to deregulation]. (Commercial Director, Company B).
>
> I suppose another major weakness is that we are very tied by conditions and practices we've *inherited*. (Commercial Director, Company G).
>
> We have what we've *inherited* and we now have a massive surplus of double decks . . . We have to go on operating those. (Managing Director, Company B).

Managing Director of Company E said the company had inherited staff who were steeped in pre-deregulation attitudes, which meant that 'we don't have a staff where the message is "the customer is number one". We don't have a staff where that is emblazoned on the hearts and minds of everyone, far from it.'

*Pre/post-deregulation*: interviewees make a contrast between the periods before and after deregulation to show how they have changed. This shows in a sense the *absence* of inherited features and their possible impact; can refer to how the impact of possibly inherited features was negated or offset. For example, *X* referring to the recent end of the three-week strike: 'there was no way we were going to give in to this sort of thing, this sort of blackmail. We just refused to move and the trade unions had never experienced that. It was all part of the change in culture following deregulation . . .'.

*Inheriting constraints*: such as staff on high wage rates and with inappropriate attitudes.

*Inheriting surplus capacity*: such as too many buses or buses of the wrong size.

Finding examples of grounded theory that reveal all its facets and stages is very difficult, and it is unsurprising that many expositions of grounded theory fall back on the original illustrations provided in Glaser and Strauss (1967). Many studies show some of its ingredients but not others. For example, Prasad's (1993) study of technological change (see Chapter 16, Research in focus 22.5, and Figure 22.2) certainly incorporates some of the features of a grounded theory approach, such as the use of concept cards to keep a record of coding, enabling a series of 'second-order' or core categories to be generated. However, other tools of grounded theory, such as memos, were not used as part of this study. Similarly, although Gersick (1994) claims to have used a grounded theory approach in her study of the effects of time on organizational adaptation, her coding was based partly on themes that she was interested in prior to data collection, in addition to those that emerged during the interviews. Gersick's approach thus relied on isolating and coding statements from the interview transcripts that related to time and identifying themes among them.

### Criticisms of grounded theory

In spite of the frequency with which it is cited and the frequent lip service paid to it, grounded theory is not without its limitations, of which the following can be briefly registered:

- Bulmer (1979) has questioned whether or not, as prescribed by the advocates of grounded theory, researchers can suspend their awareness of relevant theories or concepts until quite a late stage in the process of analysis. Business researchers are typically sensitive to the conceptual armoury of their disciplines, and it seems unlikely that this awareness can be put aside. Indeed, nowadays it is rarely accepted that theory-neutral observation is feasible. In other words, it is generally agreed that what we 'see' when we conduct research is conditioned by many factors, one of which is what we already know about the social world being studied (in terms both of social scientific conceptualizations and as members of society). Also, many writers might take the view that it is desirable that researchers are sensitive to existing conceptualizations, so that their investigations are focused and can build upon the work of others.
- Related to this first point is that, in many circumstances, researchers are required to spell out the possible implications of their planned investigation. For example, a lecturer making a bid for research funding or a student applying for funding for postgraduate research is usually required to demonstrate how his or her research will build upon what is already known or to demonstrate that he or she has a reasonably tightly defined research question, something that is also frequently disdained in grounded theory.
- There are practical difficulties with grounded theory. The time taken to transcribe tape recordings of interviews, for example, can make it difficult for researchers, especially when they have tight deadlines, to carry out a genuine grounded theory analysis with its constant interplay of data collection and conceptualization.
- It is somewhat doubtful whether grounded theory in many instances really results in *theory*. As previously suggested, it provides a rigorous approach to the generation of concepts, but it is often difficult to see what theory, in the sense of an explanation of something, is being put forward. Moreover, in spite of the frequent lip service paid to the generation of formal theory, most grounded theories are substantive in character; in other words, they pertain to the specific social phenomenon being researched and not to a broader range of phenomena (though, of course, they *may* have such broader applicability).
- In spite of the large amount written on grounded theory, but perhaps because of the many subtle changes in its presentation, it is still vague on certain points, such as the difference between concepts and categories. For example, while Strauss and Corbin (1998: 73) refer to theoretical sampling as 'sampling on the basis of emerging *concepts*' (emphasis added), Charmaz (2000: 519) writes that it is used to 'develop our emerging *categories*' (emphasis added). The term 'categories' is increasingly being employed rather than 'concepts', but such inconsistent use of key terms is not helpful to people trying to understand the overall process.
- Grounded theory is very much associated with an approach to data analysis that invites researchers to fragment their data by coding the data into discrete chunks. However, in the eyes of some writers, this kind of activity results in a loss of a sense of context and of narrative flow (Coffey and Atkinson 1996), a point to which we will return below.
- The presence of competing accounts of the ingredients of grounded theory does not make it easy to characterize it or to establish how to use it. This situation has been made even more problematic by Charmaz's (2000) suggestion that most grounded theory is objectivist and that an alternative, constructionist (she calls it *constructivist*) approach is preferable. She

argues that the grounded theory associated with Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin is objectivist in that it aims to uncover a reality that is external to social actors. She offers an alternative, constructionist version that 'assumes that people create and maintain meaningful worlds through dialectical processes of conferring meaning on their realities and acting within them . . . Thus, social reality does not exist independent of human action' (Charmaz 2000: 521). Such a position stands in contrast to earlier grounded theory texts that 'imply that categories and concepts inhere within the data, awaiting the researcher's discovery . . . Instead, a constructivist approach recognizes that the categories, concepts, and theoretical level of an analysis emerge from the researcher's interaction within the field and questions about the data' (Charmaz 2000: 522). One difficulty here is that the two meanings of constructionism referred to in Key concept 1.14 seem to be conflated. The first quotation refers to constructionism as an ontological position in relating to social objects and categories; the second is a reference to constructionism in relation to the nature of knowledge of the social world. It is certainly fair to suggest that Glaser, Strauss, and Corbin in their various writings neglect the role of the researcher in the generation of knowledge, but it is not clear that they are indifferent to the notion that social reality exists independently of social actors. Strauss was, after all, the lead of the study referred to in Chapter 1 concerning the hospital as a negotiated order, which was used as an illustration of constructionism (Strauss et al. 1973). However, there is little doubt that there is considerable confusion currently about the nature of grounded theory. According to Partington (2000), there is little evidence of the successful application of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory within management and business research. This is partly because of the greater difficulty in following this more prescriptive, proceduralized approach, which contrasts sharply with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) earlier emphasis on the development of insight based on open-minded sensitivity.

Nonetheless, grounded theory probably represents the most influential general strategy for conducting qualitative data analysis, though how far the approach is followed varies from study to study. Locke (2001) argues that grounded theory is particularly well suited to organizational research. She suggests that it is particularly good at the following:

- *Capturing complexity*. Grounded theory is good at capturing the complexity of contexts as action unfolds.
- *Linking with practice*. It frequently facilitates an appreciation among organizational members of their situations. Such understanding can provide a helpful springboard for organizational action.
- *Facilitating theoretical work in substantive areas that have not been well researched by others*. As new forms of organizational or technological change emerge and become prominent in the business world, grounded theory is ideal for an open-ended research strategy that can then be employed for the generation of theory out of the resulting data.
- *Putting life into well-established fields*. Grounded theory can provide the basis for an alternative view of well-established fields, such as group effectiveness and leadership, through its open-ended approach to data collection followed by a rigorous approach to theoretical work.

In addition, many of grounded theory's core processes, such as coding, memos, and the very idea of allowing theoretical ideas to emerge out of one's data, have been hugely influential. Indeed, it is striking that one of the main developments in qualitative data analysis in recent years—computer-assisted qualitative data analysis—has implicitly promoted many of these processes, because the software programs have often been written with grounded theory in mind (Richards and Richards 1994; Lonkila 1995).



## More on coding

Coding is the starting point for most forms of qualitative data analysis, including ethnography (see Research in focus 22.8 for an example). The principles involved have been well developed by writers on grounded theory and others. Some of the considerations in developing codes, some of which are derived from Lofland and Lofland (1995), are as follows:



## Research in focus 22.8
## An example of ethnographic coding

Delbridge (1998) describes the process of analysing the hundreds of pages of handwritten field notes that described day-to-day events on the shopfloor of Valleyco and Nippon CTV as extremely challenging:

> Once the field notes were completed, I read through the first set from Valleyco and began to pick out themes which emerged from these notes. At first this consisted of noting any type of event, interaction or comment which occurred more than once. After generating a very long list of such instances, I then grouped these around a set of tentative themes which had begun to emerge. In the first round of reviewing the data, I identified about 150 key events or notes from my first month at Valleyco and labelled these under one or more of the nine themes. I then grouped the second month's notes from Valleyco within these themes and added to or amended the themes to cope with additional instances. I repeated these iterative loops on a weekly basis for the Nippon CTV notes until I have centred on thirteen issues which came from the data. (1998: 22)

The thirteen labels were:

| | |
|---|---|
| QLTY | denoting systems of quality management; |
| SYS | the manufacturing system at the plants; |
| RELS | data regarding formal and informal relationships between actors; |
| UNTY | denoting issues of uncertainty and informality in the workplace; |
| CONT | issues of control and surveillance; |
| WORK | workers, their roles, and experiences; |
| COMM | communication issues and practices; |
| MGT | managers, their roles, and perspectives; |
| ACCOMM | issues of accommodation, indulgence, and resistance; |
| UNION | the role of unions in the workplace; |
| RES | issues pertaining to the research process; |
| COFACT | factual data on the companies involved; |
| JAP | data relating specifically to Japan and the Japanese. |

It is interesting to note that, in starting to identify themes based on events, interactions, or comments that occurred 'more than once', Delbridge was attempting to make an initial judgement about the significance of the data based on frequency. However, it is not that unusual for qualitative researchers to engage in some kind of quantitative assessment of qualitative data, as Chapter 25 illustrates.

- Of what general category is this item of data an instance?
- What does this item of data represent?
- What is this item of data about?
- Of what topic is this item of data an instance?
- What question about a topic does this item of data suggest?
- What sort of answer to a question about a topic does this item of data imply?
- What is happening here?
- What are people doing?
- What do people say they are doing?
- What kind of event is going on?

## Steps and considerations in coding

The following steps and considerations need to be borne in mind in preparation for and during coding.

- *Code as soon as possible*. It is well worth coding as you go along, as grounded theory suggests. This may sharpen your understanding of your data and help with theoretical sampling. Also, it may help to alleviate the feeling of being swamped by your data, which may happen if you defer analysis entirely until the end of the data collection period. At the very least, you should ensure that, if your data collection involves recording interviews, you begin transcription at a relatively early stage.

- *Read through your initial set of transcripts, field notes, documents, etc.*, without taking any notes or considering an interpretation; perhaps at the end jot down a few general notes about what struck you as especially interesting, important, or significant.
- *Do it again*. Read through your data again, but this time begin to make marginal notes about significant remarks or observations. Make as many as possible. Initially, they will be very basic—perhaps keywords used by your respondents, names that you give to themes in the data. When you do this you are *coding*—generating an index of terms that will help you to interpret and theorize in relation to your data.
- *Review your codes*. Begin to review your codes, possibly in relation to your transcripts. Are you using two or more words or phrases to describe the same phenomenon? If so, remove one of them. Do some of your codes relate to concepts and categories in the existing literature? If so, might it be sensible to use these instead? Can you see any connections between the codes? Is there some evidence that respondents believe that one thing tends to be associated with or caused by something else? If so, how do you characterize and therefore code these connections?
- *Consider more general theoretical ideas in relation to codes and data*. At this point, you should be beginning to generate some general theoretical ideas about your data. Try to outline connections between concepts and categories you are developing. Consider in more detail how they relate to the existing literature. Develop hypotheses about the linkages you are making and go back to your data to see if they can be confirmed.
- Remember that *any one item or slice of data can and often should be coded in more than one way*.
- *Do not worry about generating what seem to be too many codes*—at least in the early stages of your analysis; some will be fruitful and others will not—the important thing is to be as inventive and imaginative as possible; you can worry about tidying things up later.
- *Keep coding in perspective*. Do not equate coding with analysis. It is part of your analysis, albeit an important one. It is a mechanism for thinking about the meaning of your data *and* for reducing the vast amount of data that you are facing (Huberman and Miles 1994). Miles and Huberman (1984) have developed several techniques for the display of data that have been coded through content analysis as a way of overcoming the difficulty of representing the complexity of qualitative analysis. One of the most important of these is the matrix format, which identifies constructs along one axis and occurrences along the other. This technique introduces an element of quantification into the qualitative analysis by drawing attention to the frequency of occurrences in the data. Another data display mechanism described by Gersick (1994) in her study of a new business venture is the timeline; this is used to represent the company's history, including major events and decisions, the time period over which they were implemented, and the eventual outcome of the actions. Whatever data display techniques you use, you must still interpret your findings. This means attending to issues like the significance of your coded material for the lives of the people you are studying, forging interconnections between codes, and reflecting on the overall importance of your findings for the research questions and the research literature that have driven your data collection.



## Telling it like it is
## Forming pre-analytical categories

From his literature review Chris had identified three main categories of explanation that women used to make sense of the unequal distribution of career opportunities between men and women. 'I classed them as individual, organizational, or societal. Individual reasons being for example: "I shouldn't" and "I'm not good enough". Organizational reasons being "well, you know, women shouldn't do that" and societal reasons such as saying "women have children, therefore they don't get on".' Chris's research questions were based on these three categories of explanation. This made the analysis of data a relatively straightforward task of categorizing interviewee responses. He explained that 'it was interesting hearing the responses to the questions. I was always able to go "right, that goes there and that goes there".'



*To hear more about Chris's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbre3e/***

## Turning data into fragments

The coding of such materials as interview transcripts has typically entailed writing marginal notes on them and gradually refining those notes into codes. In this way, portions of transcripts become seen as belonging to certain names or labels. In the past, this process was accompanied by cutting and pasting in the literal sense of using scissors and paste. It entailed cutting up one's transcripts into files of chunks of data, with each file representing a code. The process of cutting and pasting is useful for data retrieval, though it is always important to make sure that you have ways of identifying the origins of the chunk of text (for example, name, position, date). Word-processing programs allow this to be done in a way that does not rely on your DIY skills so much through the use of the 'find' function. Nowadays CAQDAS software is increasingly being used to perform these tasks (see Chapter 23).

There is no one correct approach to coding your data. As Key concept 22.4 suggests, grounded theory conceives of different types of code. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) point to different levels of coding. These levels can be related to the passage from an interview that was previously encountered in Chapter 18 about the study of visitors to Disney theme parks. Tips and skills 'Coded text from the Disney project' shows some coded text from the Disney project, illustrating three coding levels.



### Tips and skills
## Coded text from the Disney project

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Interviewer* | OK. What were your views or feelings about the presentation of different cultures, as shown in, for example, Jungle Cruise or It's a Small World at the Magic Kingdom or in World Showcase at Epcot? | | |
| *Wife* | Well, I thought the different countries at Epcot were wonderful, but I need to say more than that, don't I? | uncritical enthusiasm | |
| *Husband* | They were very good and some were better than others, but that was down to the host countries themselves really, as I suppose each of the countries represented would have been responsible for their own part, so that's nothing to do with Disney, I wouldn't have thought. | not critical of Disney | aesthetic critique |
| | I mean some of the landmarks were hard to recognize for what they were supposed to be, but some were very well done. Britain was OK, but there was only a pub and a Welsh shop there really, whereas some of the other pavilions, as I think they were called, were good ambassadors for the countries they represented. China, for example, had an excellent 360 degree film showing parts of China and I found that very interesting. | content critique | |
| *Interviewer* | Did you think there was anything lacking about the content? | | |
| *Husband* | Well I did notice that there weren't many black people at World Showcase, particularly the American Adventure. Now whether we were there on an unusual day in that respect I don't know, but we saw plenty of black Americans in the Magic Kingdom and other places, but very few if any in that World Showcase. And there was certainly little mention of black history in the American Adventure presentation, so maybe they felt alienated by that, I don't know, but they were noticeable by their absence. | visitors' ethnicity<br>visitors' ethnicity | ethnicity critique |
| *Interviewer* | So did you think there were any special emphases? | | |
| *Husband* | Well thinking about it now, because I hadn't really given this any consideration before you started asking about it, but thinking about it now, it was only really representative of the developed world, you know, Britain, America, Japan, world leaders many of them in technology, and there was nothing of the Third World there. Maybe that's their own fault, maybe they were asked to participate and didn't, but now that I think about it, that does come to me. What do you think, love? | nationality critique | |
| *Wife* | Well, like you, I hadn't thought of it like that before, but I agree with you. | | |

- First there is a very basic coding, which, in the passage in Tips and skills 'Coded text from the Disney project', could be in terms of liking or disliking the Disney theme parks. However, such a coding scheme is unlikely to get us very far from an analytical vantage point.
- A second level comprises much more awareness of the content of what is said. Themes reflect much more the language the interviewee uses. We see much more the kinds of issues with which the interviewee is concerned. Examples might be 'developed world', 'black people', and 'black history'.
- A third level moves slightly away from a close association with what the respondent says and towards a concern with broad analytic themes. This is the way that the passage in Tips and skills 'Coded text from the Disney project' has been coded. Here the passage has been coded in terms of such features as whether a response is uncritically enthusiastic ('uncritical enthusiasm') or is not critical of the Disney Corporation ('not critical of Disney'); reveals comments made about typical visitors ('visitors' ethnicity'); and makes critical comments ('aesthetic critique'; 'ethnicity critique'; 'nationality critique'). Interestingly, the passage also reveals the potential for a code employed by Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 43–5) in relation to one of their examples—namely, the use of a 'contrastive rhetoric'. This occurs when a person makes a point about something by comparing it to something else. This feature occurs when the husband makes a point about the representation of British culture, which in fact he regards as poor, by comparing it to that of China, which he regards as good. The poor showing of Britain is brought out by comparing it in a negative light to China. However, this coding category was not employed in relation to this research.

As Coffey and Atkinson (1996) observe, following Strauss and Corbin's account (1990) of grounded theory, codes should not be thought of purely as mechanisms for the fragmentation and retrieval of text. In other words, they can do more than simply manage the data you have gathered. For example, if we ask about the properties and interconnections between codes, we may begin to see that some of them may be dimensions of a broader phenomenon. For example, as shown in the next chapter (see especially Figure 23.1), 'ethnicity critique' came to be seen as a dimension of 'ideology critique', along with 'class critique' and 'gender critique'. In this way, we can begin to map the more general or formal properties of concepts that are being developed.



## Telling it like it is
## A simple way to code

Angharad's supervisor recommended a fairly straightforward method for coding interview data that did not involve the use of computer-assisted qualitative analysis software, which would have been time-consuming to learn to use. He recommended that she should use a software program with which she was already very familiar. She said, 'It was actually really clever the idea that my tutor gave me, which was open up a Word document for different things that you can see across your data and cut and paste your data into it so that you can see what you've got basically and how much you've got in each for each idea. And some of them got merged and some of them I didn't like. That was a really clever idea and that was how I actually pulled out the themes from the data and then it was just a matter of writing it up.'



*To hear more about Angharad's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

## Problems with coding

One of the most commonly mentioned criticisms of the coding approach to qualitative data analysis is the possible problem of losing the context of what is said. By plucking chunks of text out of the context within which they appeared, such as a particular interview transcript, the social setting can be lost.

A second criticism of coding is that it results in a fragmentation of data, so that the narrative flow of what people say is lost (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Sensitivity to this issue has been heightened by a growing interest in

narrative analysis since the late 1980s (see Chapter 20). Riessman (1993) became concerned about the fragmentation of data that occurs as a result of coding themes when she came to analyse data she had collected through structured interviews on divorce and gender. She writes:

> Some [interviewees] developed long accounts of what had happened in their marriages to justify their divorces. I did not realize these were narratives until I struggled to code them. Applying traditional qualitative methods, I searched the texts for common thematic elements. But some individuals knotted together several themes into long accounts that had coherence and sequence, defying easy categorization. I found myself not wanting to fragment the long accounts into distinct thematic categories. There seemed to be a common structure beneath talk about a variety of topics. While I coded one interview, a respondent provided language for my trouble. As I have thought about it since, it was a 'click moment' in my biography as a narrative researcher . . . (Riessman 1993: p. vi)

Riessman's account is interesting because it suggests several possibilities: that the coding method of qualitative data analysis fragments data; that some forms of data may be unsuitable for the coding method; and that researchers can turn narrative analysis on themselves, since what she provides in this passage is precisely a narrative. Interest in narrative analysis certainly shows signs of growing, and in large part this trend parallels the revival of interest in the life history approach (see Key concept 18.4). Nonetheless, the coding method is unlikely to become less prominent, because of several factors: its widespread acceptance in the research community; not all analysts are interested in research questions that lend themselves to the elicitation of narratives; the influence of grounded theory and its associated techniques; and the growing use and acceptance of computer software for qualitative data analysis, which frequently invites a coding approach.

Regardless of which analytical strategy you employ, what you must not do is simply say: 'This is what my subjects said and did—isn't that incredibly interesting?' It may be reasonably interesting, but your work can acquire significance only when you theorize in relation to it. Many researchers are wary of this—they worry that, in the process of interpretation and theorizing, they may fail to do justice to what they have seen and heard; that they may contaminate their subjects' words and behaviour. This is a risk, but it has to be balanced against the fact that your findings acquire significance in our intellectual community only when you have reflected on, interpreted, and theorized your data. You are not there as a mere mouthpiece.



## Telling it like it is
## Interpreting and theorizing qualitative data

Angharad found the process of analysing her interview data difficult because she was uncomfortable about the way that coding required her to extract themes from their context, thereby lessening the emphasis on each individual's personal story. 'I found analysing the data quite hard because I did not like breaking down these stories that I'd been told. I felt like I wasn't doing it justice. I didn't like breaking it all up but I knew that I had to do it. Everything that had been said had been said within a context and to pull it out of that and cut bits out which I thought were important in people's stories. I just didn't like it. I did not like breaking down people's stories. It turned it from a story into data I suppose. Taking it out of context didn't do the stories and the women justice. I didn't want to commit and start deciding what was relevant and what wasn't and deciding what themes there were because that meant leaving bits out and I really didn't like leaving bits out. I felt everything I had was important. So it was just actually committing to do it and being ruthless as well. But then it also anonymized them a bit more. I could not have put stories in because the identity of the person would have been so obvious.'

An alternative way of analysing data that Angharad could have used to retain an emphasis on the integrity of each individual as a case is by using the life history method (see Key concept 18.4).

*To hear more about Angharad's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# Secondary analysis of qualitative data

One final point to bear in mind is that this discussion of qualitative data analysis may have been presumed to be solely concerned with the analysis of data in which the analyst has played a part in collecting. However, in recent years, secondary analysis of qualitative data has become a growing focus of discussion and interest. While the secondary analysis of quantitative data has been on the research agenda for many years (see Chapter 13), similar use of qualitative data has only recently come to the fore. The general idea of secondary analysis was addressed in Key concept 13.1.

There is no obvious reason why qualitative data cannot be the focus of secondary analysis, though it is undoubtedly the case that such data do present certain problems that are not fully shared by quantitative data. The study in Research in focus 21.2 provides an example involving the secondary analysis of oral history interviews. The possible grounds for conducting a secondary analysis are more or less the same as those associated with quantitative data (see Chapter 13). With such considerations in mind, Qualidata, an archival resource centre, was created in the UK in 1994. The centre is not a repository for qualitative data (unlike the Data Archive, which does house quantitative data); instead, it is concerned with 'locating, assessing and documenting qualitative data and arranging their deposit in suitable public archive repositories' (Corti, Foster, and Thompson 1995). It has a very useful website:

***www.qualidata.essex.ac.uk*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

and its online catalogue—Qualicat—can be searched at the following address:

***www.qualidata.essex.ac.uk/search/qualicat.asp*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

An example involving secondary analysis of qualitative data is provided by Savage (2005), who analysed field notes that had been collected by Goldthorpe et al. in the *Affluent Worker* studies in the early 1960s (this study was mentioned in Chapter 1), which he accessed through the Qualidata Archive. Savage argues that, although a huge amount of qualitative data was generated through the *Affluent Worker* studies, very little of this part of the research made its way into publication. Instead, the researchers focused on aspects of their data that could be quantified and consistently coded and 'a huge amount of evocative material was "left on the cutting room floor" ' (Savage 2005: 932). Savage (2005) uses the field notes, which contain many verbatim quotes from respondent interviews, to argue that rereading the field notes with a contemporary understanding of issues of money, power, and status indicates that the respondents had different understandings of class from Goldthorpe et al. that the researchers did not pick up on, and this difference of understanding affected how the data were interpreted.

Qualidata's focus is on acquiring data collections created during the course of research projects from ESRC Research Programmes, from mixed methods research (see Chapter 25 for a definition) as well as purely qualitative studies. Qualidata acknowledges certain difficulties with the reuse of qualitative data, such as the difficulty of making settings and people anonymous and the ethical problems involved in such reuse associated with promises of confidentiality. Also, Hammersley (1997) has suggested that reuse of qualitative data may be hindered by the secondary analyst's lack of an insider's understanding of the social context within which the data were produced. This possible difficulty may hinder the interpretation of data but would seem to be more of a problem with ethnographic field notes than with interview transcripts. Such problems even seem to afflict researchers revisiting their own data many years after the original research had been carried out (Mauthner, Parry, and Backett-Milburn 1998: 742). There are also distinctive ethical issues deriving from the fact that the original researcher(s) may not have obtained the consent of research participants for the analysis of data by others. This is a particular problem with qualitative data in view of the fact that it invariably contains detailed accounts of contexts and people that can make it difficult to conceal the identities of institutions and individuals in the presentation of raw data (as opposed to publications in which such concealment is usually feasible). Nonetheless, in spite of certain practical difficulties, secondary analysis offers rich opportunities not least because the tendency for qualitative researchers to generate large and unwieldy sets of data means that much of the material remains under-explored.



# Key points

- The collection of qualitative data frequently results in the accumulation of a large volume of information.
- Qualitative data analysis is not governed by codified rules in the same way as quantitative data analysis.
- There are different approaches to qualitative data analysis, of which grounded theory is probably the most prominent.
- Coding is a key process in most qualitative data analysis strategies, but it is sometimes accused of fragmenting and decontextualizing text.
- Secondary analysis of qualitative data is becoming a more prominent activity than in the past.



# Questions for review

- What is meant by suggesting that qualitative data are an 'attractive nuisance'?

### *General strategies of qualitative data analysis*

- What are the main ingredients of analytic induction?
- What makes it a rigorous method?
- What are the main ingredients of grounded theory?
- What is the role of coding in grounded theory and what are the different types of coding?
- What is the role of memos in grounded theory?
- Charmaz has written that theoretical sampling 'represents a defining property of grounded theory' (2000: 519). Why do you think she feels this to be the case?
- What are some of the main criticisms of grounded theory?

### *More on coding*

- Is coding associated solely with grounded theory?
- What are the main steps in coding?
- To what extent does coding result in excessive fragmentation of data?
- To what extent does narrative analysis provide an alternative to data fragmentation?

### *Secondary analysis of qualitative data*

- How feasible is it for researchers to analyse qualitative data collected by another researcher?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Qualitative Data Analysis.*

# 23

# Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis: using NVivo

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 593

**Is CAQDAS like quantitative data analysis software?** 594

- No industry leader 594
- Lack of universal agreement about the utility of CAQDAS 594

**Learning NVivo** 596

- Coding 597
- Searching text 603
- Memos 606
- Saving an NVivo project 607
- Opening an existing NVivo project 607
- Final thoughts 607

***Key points*** 608

***Questions for review*** 609



## Chapter outline

One of the most significant developments in qualitative research since the middle of the 1980s is the emergence of computer software that can assist in the use of qualitative data analysis. This software is often referred to as computer-assisted (or computer-aided) qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). CAQDAS removes many if not most of the clerical tasks associated with the manual coding and retrieving of data. There is no industry leader among the different programs (in the sense that SPSS holds this position among quantitative data analysis software). This chapter introduces a relatively new entrant that is having a big impact—NVivo. It was developed out of an earlier program—NUD*IST—which is still available. This chapter explores:

- some of the debates about the desirability of CAQDAS;
- how to set up your research materials for analysis with NVivo;
- how to code using NVivo;
- how to retrieve coded text;
- how to create memos;
- basic computer operations in NVivo.

# Introduction

One of the most notable developments in qualitative research in recent years has been the arrival of computer software that facilitates the analysis of qualitative data. Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software, or CAQDAS as it is conventionally abbreviated, has been a growth area in terms of both the proliferation of programs that perform such analysis and the numbers of people using them. The term and its abbreviation were coined by Lee and Fielding (1991).

Most of the best-known programs are variations on the code-and-retrieve theme. This means that they allow the analyst to code text while working at the computer and to retrieve the coded text. Thus, if we code a large number of interviews, we can retrieve all those sequences of text to which a code (or combination of codes) was attached. This means that the computer takes over manual tasks associated with the coding process referred to in the previous chapter. Typically, the analyst would:

- go through a set of data marking sequences of text in terms of codes (coding); and
- for each code, collect together all sequences of text coded in a particular way (retrieving).

The computer takes over the physical task of writing marginal codes, making photocopies of transcripts or field notes, cutting out all chunks of text relating to a code, and pasting them together. CAQDAS does not automatically do these things: the analyst must still interpret his or her data, code, and then retrieve the data, but the computer takes over the manual labour involved (wielding scissors and pasting small pieces of paper together, for example).



# Is CAQDAS like quantitative data analysis software?

One of the comments often made about CAQDAS is that it does not and cannot help with decisions about the coding of textual materials or about the interpretation of findings (Sprokkereef et al. 1995; Weitzman and Miles 1995). However, this situation is little different (if at all) from quantitative data analysis software. In quantitative research, the investigator sets out the crucial concepts and ideas in advance rather than generating them out of his or her data. Also, it would be wrong to represent the use of quantitative data analysis software like SPSS as purely mechanical: once the analyses have been performed, it is still necessary to interpret them. Indeed, the choice of variables to be analysed and the techniques of analysis to be employed are themselves areas in which a considerable amount of interpretative expertise is required. Creativity is required by both forms of software.

CAQDAS differs from the use of quantitative data analysis software largely in terms of the environment within which it operates.

## No industry leader

With quantitative data analysis, SPSS is both widely known and widely used. It is not the only statistical software used by social researchers, but it is certainly dominant. It has competitors, such as Minitab, but SPSS is close to being the industry leader. No parallel situation exists with regard to CAQDAS. Up until the early 1990s, The Ethnograph was probably the best-known and most widely used CAQDAS. Lee and Fielding (1991: 11) report that, between March 1988 and January 1990, 1,600 copies of the software were sold. However, at that time more and more programs were coming onto the market: ten other programs were referred to in an appendix to the book in which Lee and Fielding's (1991) article appeared, and since then further programs have appeared. Seven years later, the situation had changed. The same authors observed that, in the UK, The Ethnograph 'seems . . . to have lost ground to both NUD*IST and Atlas/ti over the last few years. NUD*IST is now probably the package that most people at least know by name' (Fielding and Lee 1998: 15).

NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing) became very popular in the 1990s and has been built upon more recently with the emergence of QSR NUD*IST Vivo, known as **NVivo**. This software is the one featured in this chapter. It draws upon many features in NUD*IST, so that, if you have access to NUD*IST, most of what you read in this chapter will be applicable to you.

Advice on qualitative data analysis software can be found at:
***onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Which_software/what_packages_are_available/index.php*** (accessed 16 July 2010)

## Lack of universal agreement about the utility of CAQDAS

Unlike quantitative data analysis, in which the use of computer software is both widely accepted and to all intents and purposes a necessity, among qualitative data analysts its use is by no means universally embraced. There are several concerns.

- Some writers are concerned that the ease with which coded text can be quantified, either within qualitative data analysis packages or by importing coded information into quantitative data analysis packages like SPSS, will mean that the temptation to quantify findings will prove irresistible to many researchers. As a result, there is a concern that qualitative research will then be colonized by the reliability and validity criteria of quantitative research (Hesse-Biber 1995).
- It has been suggested that CAQDAS reinforces and even exaggerates the tendency for the code-and-retrieve process that underpins most approaches to qualitative data analysis to result in a fragmentation of the textual materials on which researchers work (Weaver and Atkinson 1994). As a result, the narrative flow of interview transcripts and events recorded in field notes may be lost.
- It has also been suggested that the fragmentation process of coding text into chunks that are then retrieved and put together into groups of related fragments risks decontextualizing data (Buston 1997; Fielding and Lee 1998: 74). Having an awareness of context is crucial to many qualitative researchers and the prospect of this element being sidelined is not an attractive one.
- Catterall and Maclaran (1997) have argued on the basis of their experience that CAQDAS is not very

suitable for focus group data because the code and retrieve function tends to result in a loss of the communication process that goes on when this method is used. Many writers view the interaction that occurs in focus groups as an important feature of the method (Kitzinger 1994).

- Stanley and Temple (1995) have suggested that most of the coding and retrieval features that someone is likely to need in the course of conducting qualitative data analysis are achievable through powerful word-processing software. They show how this can be accomplished using Word for Windows. The key point here is that the advantage of using such software is that it does not require a lengthy period of getting acquainted with the mechanics of its operations. Also, of course, if someone already has the necessary word-processing software, the possible cost of a CAQDAS program is rendered unnecessary.
- Researchers working in teams may experience difficulties in coordinating the coding of text when different people are involved in this activity (Sprokkereef et al. 1995).
- Coffey, Holbrook, and Atkinson (1996) have argued that the style of qualitative data analysis enshrined in most CAQDAS software (particularly the more prominent ones such as The Ethnograph, NUD*IST, and NVivo) is resulting in the emergence of a new orthodoxy. This arises because these programs presume and are predicated on a certain style of analysis—one based on coding and retrieving text—that owes a great deal to grounded theory. Coffey et al. argue that the emergence of a new orthodoxy is inconsistent with the growing flirtation with a variety of representational modes in qualitative research, partly as a result of the influence of postmodernism (see Chapter 25 for a discussion of these considerations).

On the other hand, several writers have sought to extol the virtues of such packages on a variety of grounds:

- Most obviously, CAQDAS can make the coding and retrieval process faster and more efficient.
- It has been suggested that new opportunities are offered. For example, Mangabeira (1995) has argued on the basis of her experience with The Ethnograph that her ability to relate her coded text to what are often referred to as 'facesheet variables' (sociodemographic and personal information, such as age, title of job, number of years in school education) offered new opportunities in the process of analysing her data. Thus, CAQDAS may be helpful in the development of explanations.
- It is sometimes suggested that CAQDAS enhances the transparency of the process of conducting qualitative data analysis. It is often noted that the ways in which qualitative data are analysed are unclear in reports of findings (Bryman and Burgess 1994*b*). CAQDAS may force researchers to be more explicit and reflective about the process of analysis.
- CAQDAS, like NVivo, invites the analyst to think about codes that are developed in terms of 'trees' of interrelated ideas. This can be a useful feature, in that it urges the analyst to consider possible connections between codes.
- Writers like Silverman (1985) have commented on the tendency towards anecdotalism in much qualitative research—that is, the tendency to use quotations from interview transcripts or field notes but with little sense of the prevalence of the phenomenon they are supposed to exemplify. CAQDAS invariably offers the opportunity to count such things as the frequency with which a form of behaviour occurred or a viewpoint was expressed in interviews. However, as previously noted, some qualitative researchers perceive risks in the opportunity offered for quantification of findings.

To use or not to use CAQDAS? If you have a very small dataset, it is probably not worth the time and trouble navigating your way around new software. On the other hand, if you think you may use it on a future occasion, taking the time and trouble may be worth it. If you do not have easy access to CAQDAS, it is likely to be too expensive for your personal purchase. It is also worth bearing in mind that learning new software does provide you with useful skills that may be transferable on a future occasion. By and large, we feel it is worthwhile, but you need to bear in mind some of the factors mentioned above in deciding whether or not to use it. It is also striking that the bulk of the references are pre-2000; see also the discussion of CAQDAS debates at:
***onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/Intro_CAQDAS/software_debates.php*** (accessed 16 July 2010)

In large part, this is because CAQDAS has become more accepted and because the main parameters of the debate have not changed significantly.

The rest of this chapter provides an introduction to NVivo. It is based on Bryman's study of visitors to Disney theme parks, where he used NVivo as a tool to assist him in the process of qualitative data analysis.

# Learning NVivo

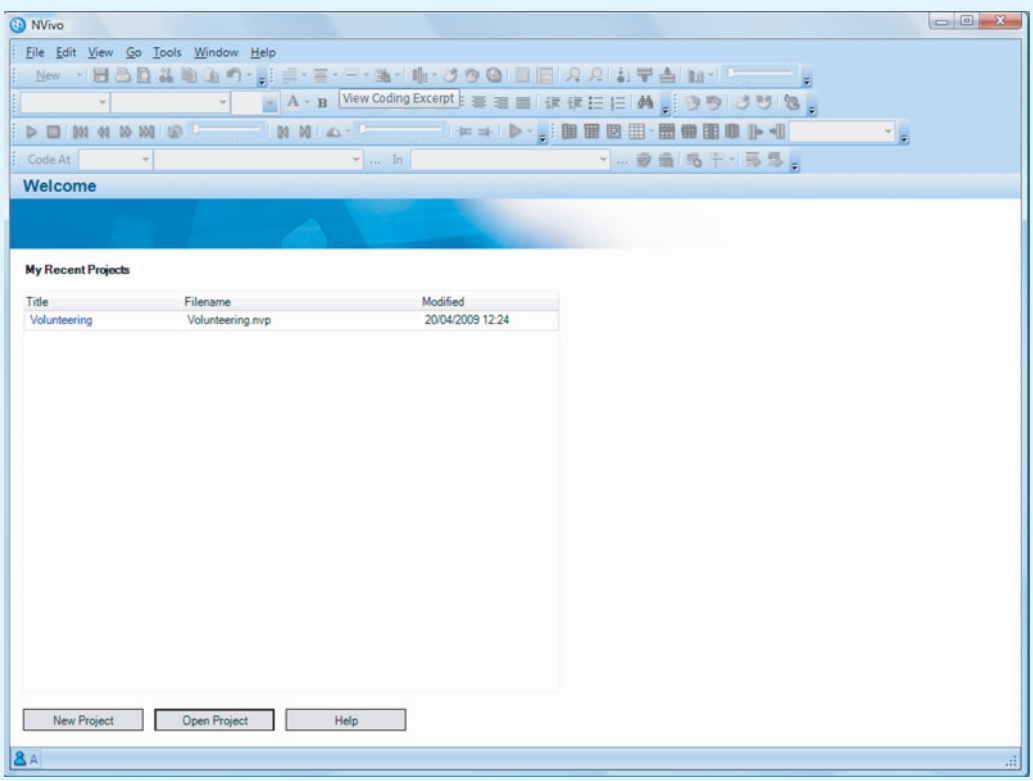
This exposition of NVivo and its functions addresses just its most basic features. There may be features not covered here that you would find useful in your own work, so try to explore it. There is a very good help facility, and tutorials have been included to assist learners. In the following account, as in Chapter 15, → signifies 'click once with the left-hand button of your mouse'—that is, select.

On opening NVivo, you will be presented with a welcome screen (see Plate 23.1). This screen shows any existing NVivo projects and is the springboard for either opening one of the existing projects or starting a new one. If you are starting a new project, as we will be in the example that follows, → **File** → **New Project**. The **New Project** dialog box appears and you are asked to provide a **Title** for your project. For this exercise, the title 'Disney Project1' was chosen. You are also asked to give a **Description** of the project, though this is an optional feature. When you have done this, → **OK**.

You then need to import the documents you want to code. In this case, they will be interview transcripts from the project on visitors to Disney theme parks, referred to in Chapter 22. Other kinds of documents can be imported, such as field notes. Earlier versions of NVivo could not import documents in Microsoft Word format (.doc), so that Word documents had to be converted into rich text format (.rtf) documents. This is not the case with NVivo 8, which is the release used for this chapter. NVivo 8 can accept documents in both rich text and Word formats. To import the documents, → **Internals** (below

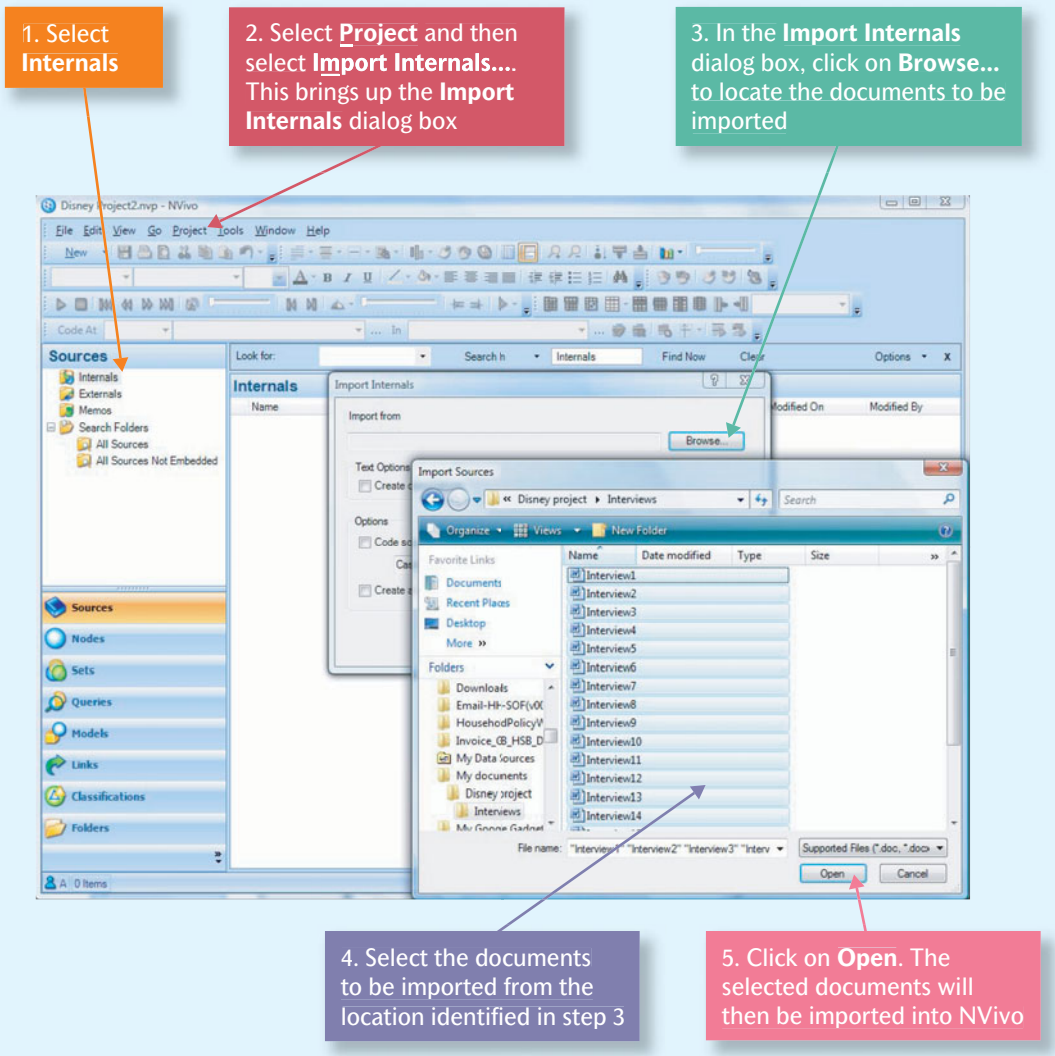
## Plate 23.1

### The opening screen



# Plate 23.2

## Stages in importing documents into NVivo




**Sources**) → **Project** → **Import Internals . . .** [opens the **Import Internals** dialog box] → **Browse** to locate the documents that are to be imported → the documents to be imported (you can hold down the Ctrl key to select several documents or if you want to select all of them hold down the Ctrl key and tap the A key) → **Open**. (See Plate 23.2 for the series of steps.) The documents will then be visible in the Document Viewer. Once the documents have been imported, they can be read and edited. All you need to do is to double-click on the yellow icon to the left of each interview in Viewer.

## Coding

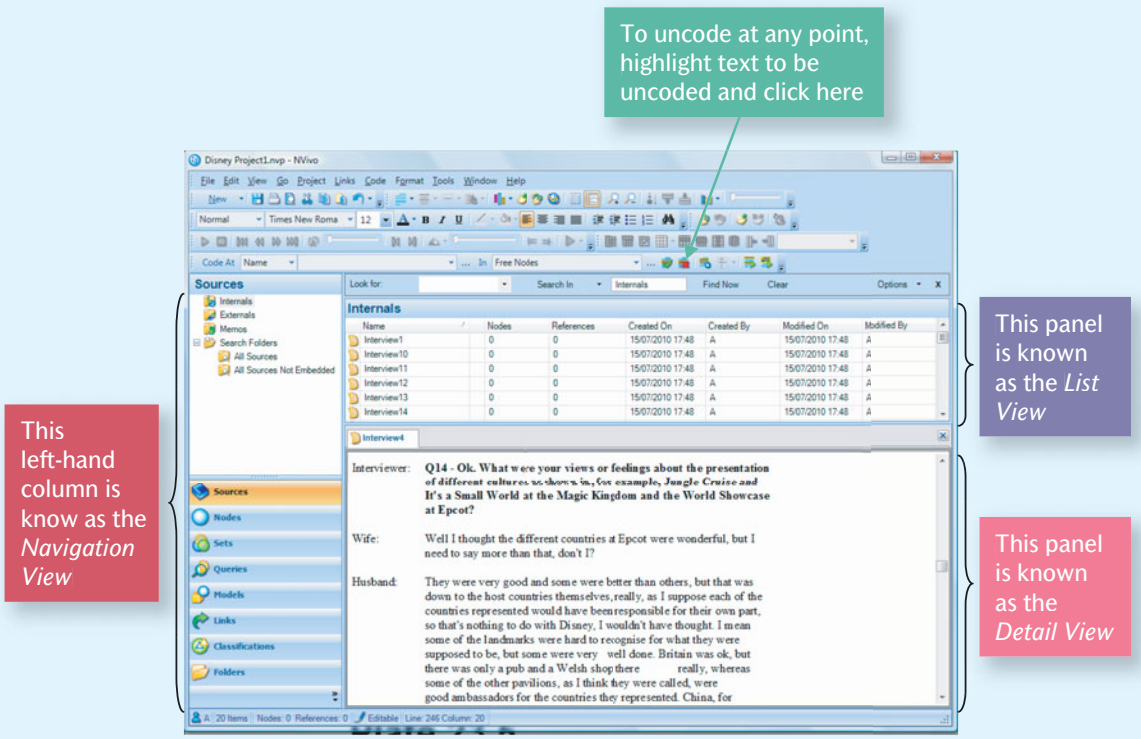
Coding your data is obviously one of the key phases in the whole process of qualitative data analysis. For NVivo, coding is accomplished through *nodes* (see Key concept 23.1).

There are several ways of going about the coding process in NVivo. The approach Bryman took in relation to the coding of the Disney Project was to follow these steps:

1. Bryman read through the interviews both in printed form and in the Document Viewer (see Plate 23.3).

# Plate 23.3

## The NVivo Workspace




2. He worked out some codes that seemed relevant to the documents.
3. He went back into the documents and coded them using NVivo.

An alternative strategy is to code while browsing the documents.

### Creating nodes

The nodes that Bryman used that were relevant to the passage in Tips and skills 'Coded text from the Disney project' (Chapter 22) are presented in Figure 23.1. Notice that there are two *free nodes* and three groups of *tree nodes*. The nodes can be created in the following way.

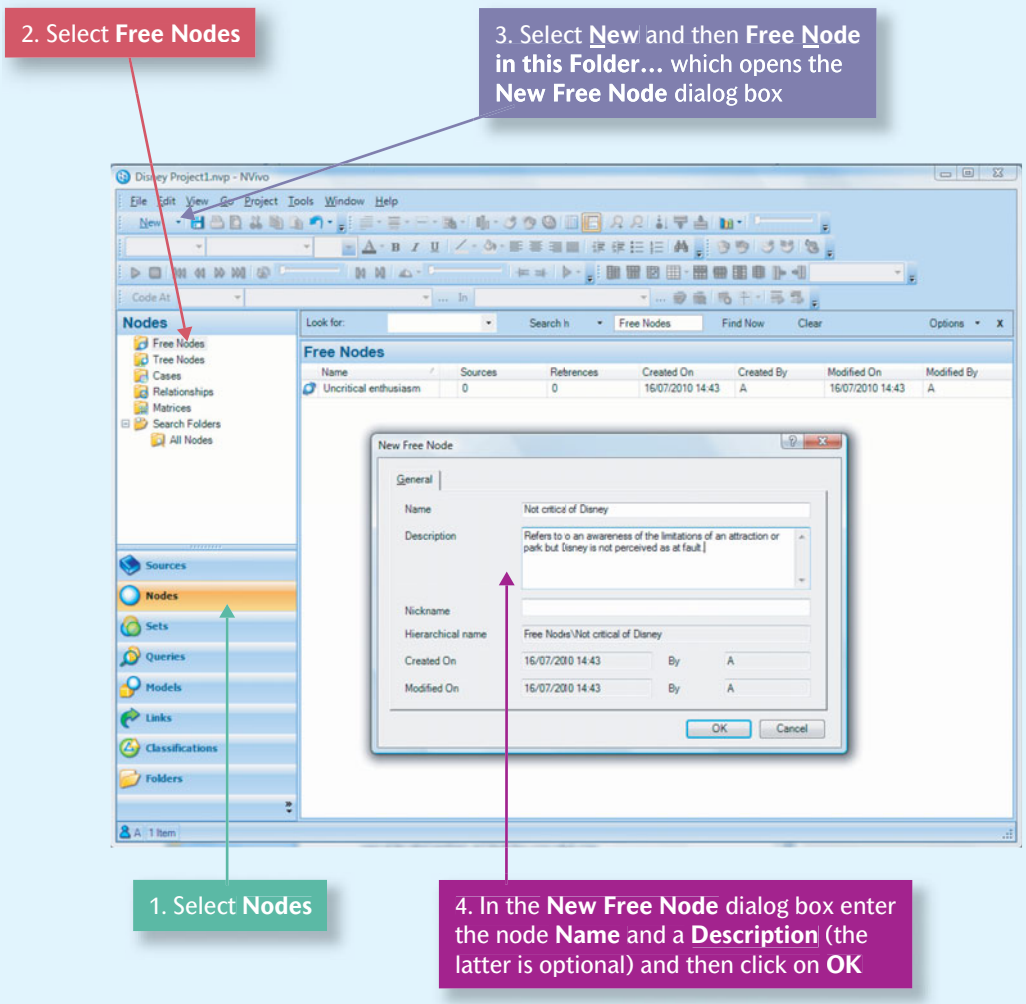


## Key concept 23.1
## What is a node?

NVivo's help system in earlier releases defined coding as 'the process of marking passages of text in a project's documents with *nodes*' (emphasis added). Nodes are, therefore, the route by which coding is undertaken. In turn, a node is defined in the latest release as 'a collection of references about a specific theme, place, person or other area of interest'. When a document has been coded, the node will incorporate references to those portions of documents in which the code appears. Once established, nodes can be changed or deleted. Nodes can take different forms, but only two are covered in this chapter. First, there are *tree nodes*, whereby nodes are held in a treelike structure, implying connections between them. In this way, you can have groups (trees) of related nodes. The other type covered here are *free nodes*, which are independent of any tree.

# Plate 23.4

## Stages in creating a free node




*Creating a free node*

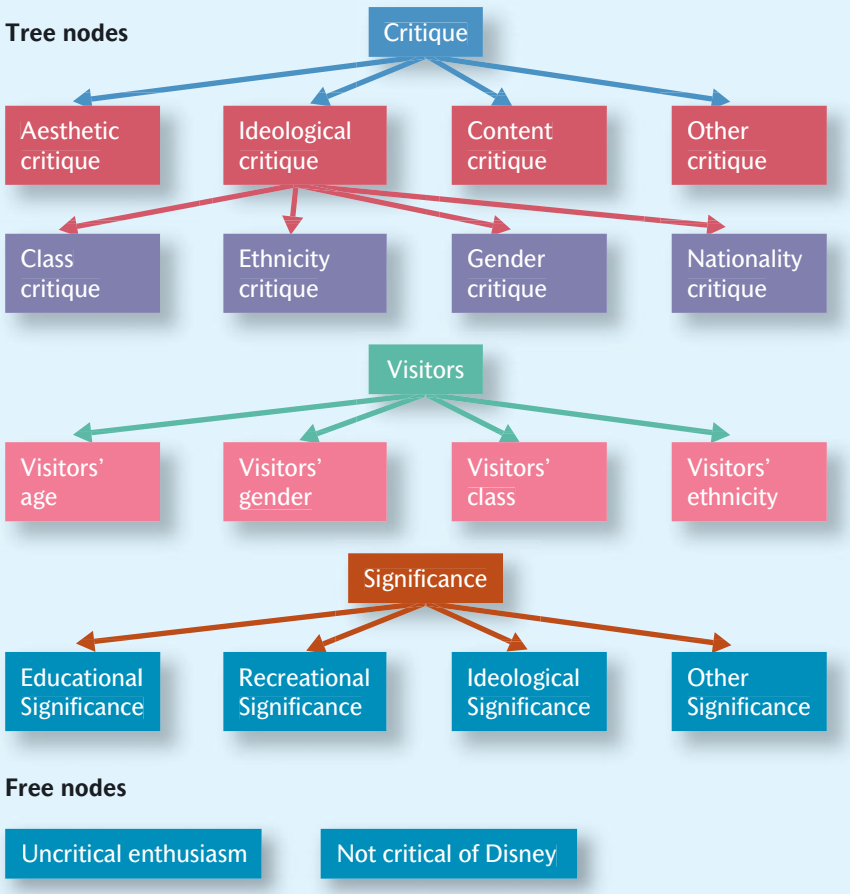
1. While in the **NVivo Workspace** [this is the term used to describe the general screen shown in Plate 23.3] → **Nodes** in the List View
2. → **Free Nodes**
3. → **New** → **Free Node in this Folder . . .** [opens the **New Free Node** dialog box—see Plate 23.4]
4. Enter the node **Name** [***Not critical of Disney***] and a **Description** (the latter is optional)
5. → **OK.**

*Creating tree nodes*

To create a tree node, the initial process is exactly the same as with a free node. In the following example, we will explain how to create the tree node ***Ethnicity critique***, which is a branch of the tree node ***Ideological critique***, which is itself a branch of the tree node ***Critique*** (see Figure 23.1). The following steps will generate this node:

# Figure 23.1

## Nodes used in the Disney project



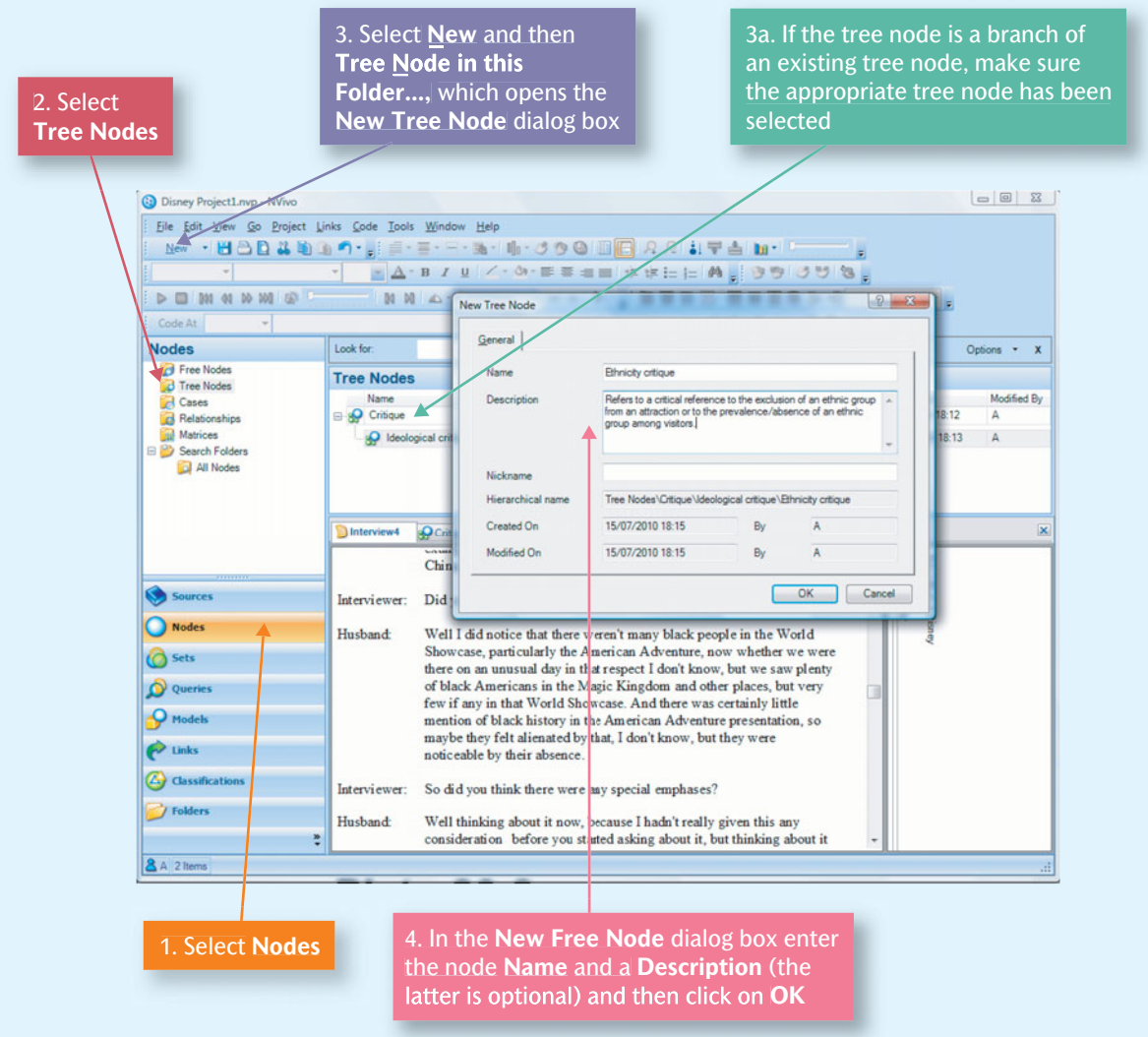

1. While in the **NVivo Workspace** → **Nodes** in the List View
2. Tree Nodes
3. → **New** → **Tree Node in this Folder . . .** [opens the **New Tree Node** dialog box—see Plate 23.5]
4. Enter the node **Name** [***Critique***] and a **Description** (the latter is optional). This node will form the initial root of the tree node.
5. → **OK**
6. → ***Critique*** in the Tree Node viewer
7. → **New** → **Tree Node in this Folder . . .** [opens the **New Tree Node** dialog box]
8. Enter the node **Name** [***Ideological critique***] and a **Description** (the latter is optional). This node will form a branch of the tree node; see Plate 23.5.
9. → ***Ideological critique*** in the Tree Node viewer
10. → **New** → **Tree Node in this Folder . . .** [opens the **New Tree Node** dialog box]
11. Enter the node **Name** [***Ethnicity critique***] and a Description (the latter is optional). This node will form a branch of the tree node ***Ideological critique***.

### Applying nodes in the coding process

Coding is carried out by applying nodes to segments of text. Once you have set up some nodes (and do remember

# Plate 23.5

## Stages in creating a tree node



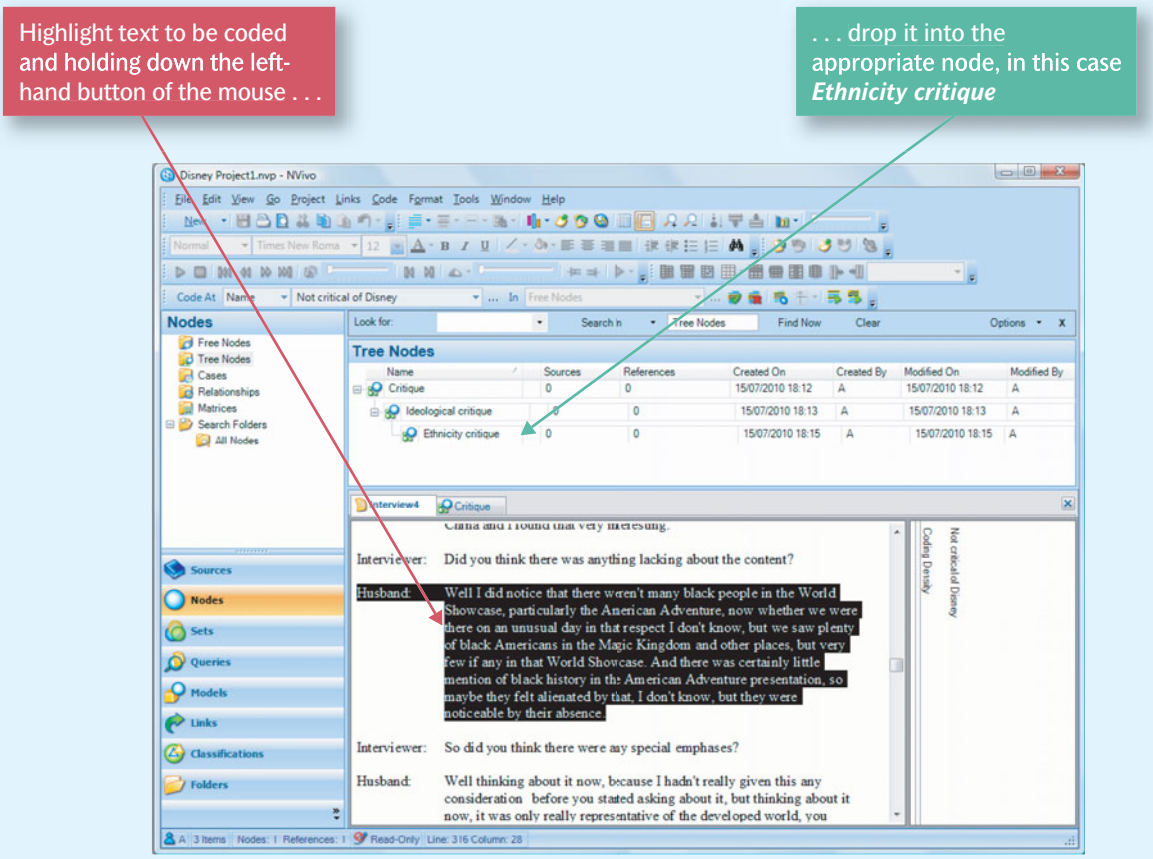

you can add and alter them at any time), assuming that you are looking at a document in the viewer, you can highlight the area of the document that you want to code and then right click on the mouse while holding the cursor over the highlighted text. Then, → **Code Selection at New Node**. This opens the **New Node** dialog box. The default is that it allows you to create a free node, but if you → **Select...** you have the opportunity to create a tree node and to locate it appropriately within a tree structure.

One of the easiest ways of coding in NVivo 8 is to drag and drop text into a node. To do this, highlight the text to be coded and then, holding down the left-hand button, drag the text over to the appropriate node (see Plate 23.6).

An alternative is to highlight the text to be coded, right click over the highlighted text, → **Code** → **Code Selection at Existing Nodes**, which opens the **Select Project Items** dialog box (see Plate 23.7). Tick the node(s) you want to use. If you do not see the node(s) you want (for example,

# Plate 23.6

## Using drag and drop to code




because you want a tree node and only the free nodes are in the dialog box), → the yellow folder that you need. To find a node within a tree, → the ⊞ sign next to a tree node. Thus, in the example in Plate 23.7, the tick by ***Uncritical enthusiasm*** will code the highlighted text at that node. If you also wanted to code it a tree node, you would need to → **the** yellow folder next to **Tree Nodes** and then find the appropriate root node or a branch of it by → the ⊞ sign.

To *uncode* at any point, simply highlight the passage to be uncoded, and → the button with a red cross in it (see Plate 23.3). Alternatively, you can right click on the highlighted text and select **Uncode**.

These instructions apply to the application of both free nodes and tree nodes.

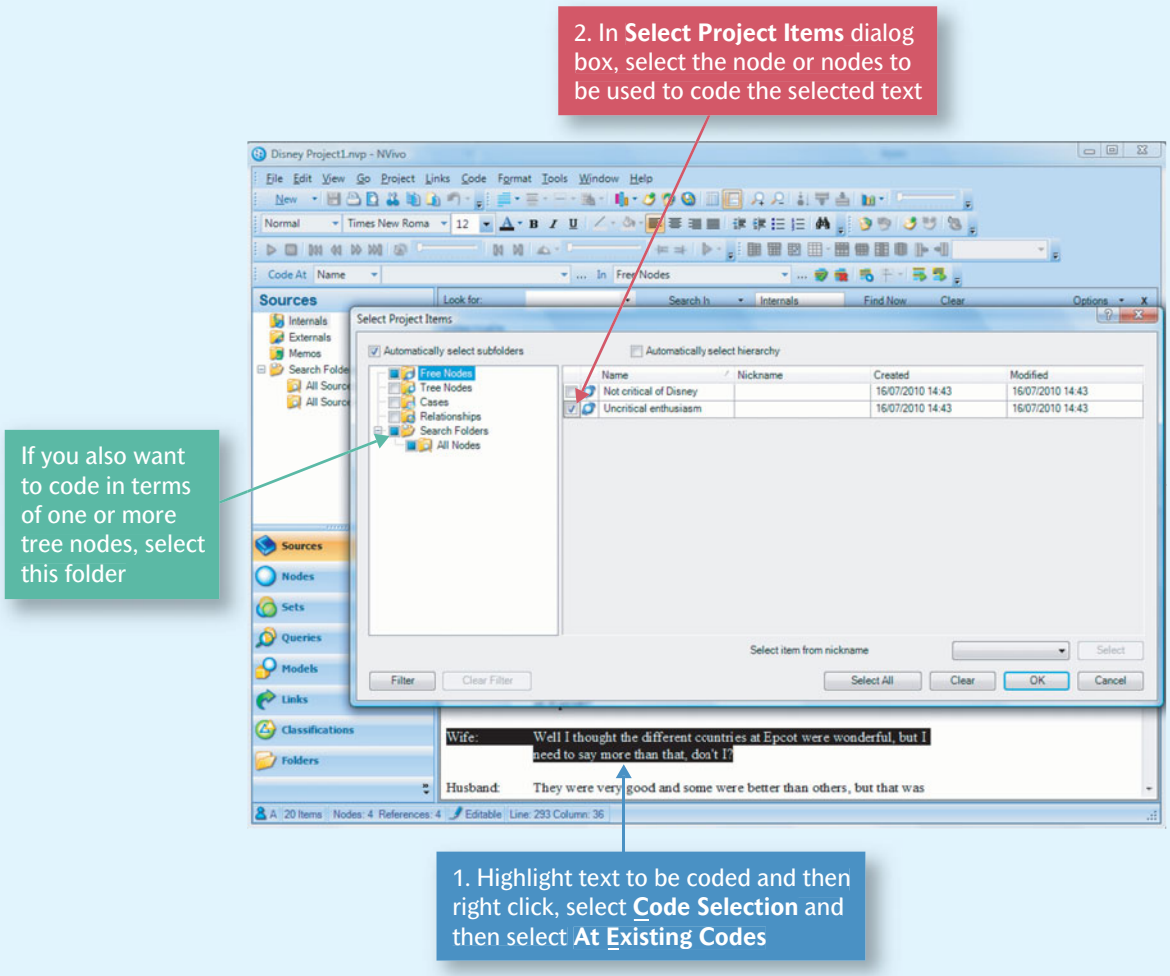
### Coding stripes

It is very helpful to be able to see the areas of text that have been coded and the nodes applied to them. NVivo has a very useful aid to this called *coding stripes*. Selecting this facility allows you to see multicoloured stripes that represent portions of coded text and the nodes that have been used. Overlapping codes do not represent a problem at all.

To activate this facility, → **View** and then → **Coding Stripes** → **Nodes Most Coding**. Plate 23.8 shows these stripes. We can see that some segments have been coded at two or more nodes—such as ***Visitors' ethnicity*** and ***Ethnicity critique***. All the nodes that have been used are clearly displayed.

# Plate 23.7

## Coding in NVivo




## Searching text

Once you have coded your data, however preliminary that may be, you will want to conduct searches of your data at some point. A typical instance is that you are likely to want to retrieve all occurrences in your documents of a particular node. NVivo allows you very rapidly to trawl through all your documents so that you will end up with all text that was coded at a particular node in all of your documents. This is very easy to do in NVivo 8.

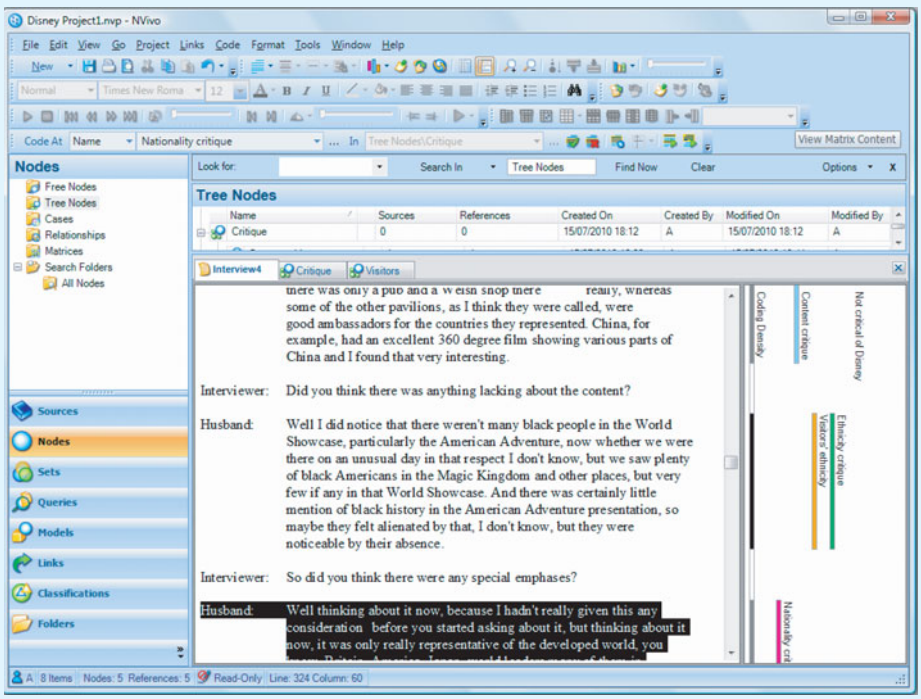
### To search for occurrences of a single node

These steps describe how to conduct a search for sequences of text that have been coded in terms of the node ***Ethnicity critique***. The stages are outlined in Plate 23.9.

1. While in the **Navigation View** → **Nodes** in the List View [this opens the list of node folders in the top left-hand pane of Plate 23.9]
2. → the yellow folder to the left of **Tree Nodes** [this generates a list of all tree nodes as in Plate 23.9]

# Plate 23.8

## Coding stripes




3. → on the ⊞ to the left of ***Critique*** [this brings up a list of all branches of the node ***Critique***]
4. → on the ⊞ to the left of ***Ideological critique*** [this brings up a list of all branches of the node ***Ideological critique***]
5. double-click on ***Ethnicity critique***
6. All instances of coded text at the node ***Ethnicity critique*** will appear at the Detail View as in Plate 23.9.

To search for text coded in terms of a free node, the process is simpler, in that you need to → the **Free Nodes** folder instead of the **Tree Nodes** folder and then double-click on the appropriate free node.

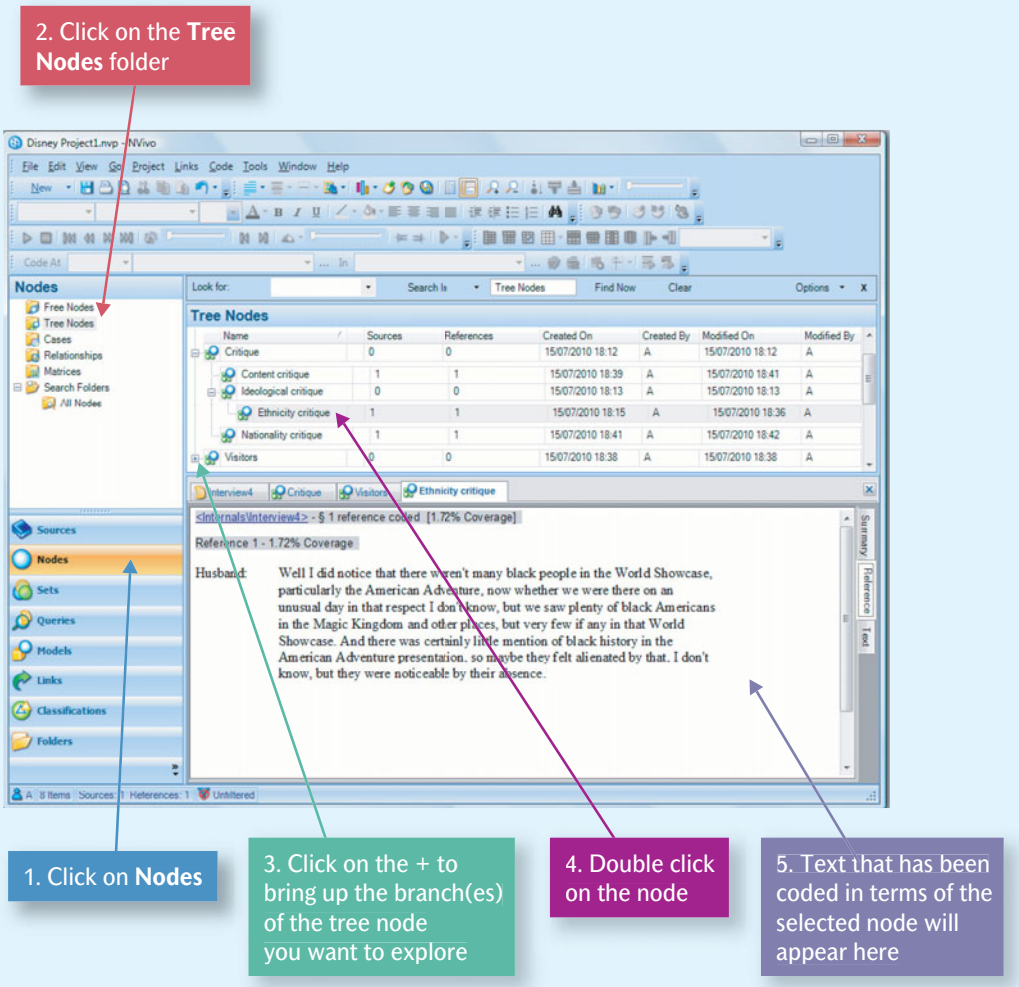
### To search for the intersection of two nodes

This section is concerned with searching for sequences of text that have been coded at two nodes: ***Nationality ctitique*** and ***Visitors' ethnicity***. This type of search is known as a 'Boolean search'. It will locate text coded in terms of the two nodes together (that is, where they intersect), *not* text coded in terms of each of the two nodes. The following steps need to be followed:

1. In the **Navigation View**, → **Queries** button to the bottom left in the List View
2. → **New** button on the toolbar in the top left
3. → **Coding query in this folder** [opens the **Coding Query** dialog box in Plate 23.10]
4. → **Coding Criteria** tab
5. → **Advanced** tab
6. In the **Define more criteria**: panel, → **Coded at** from drop-down menu
7. → **Select . . .** button [opens the **Select Project Items** dialog box]. You then need to choose the two nodes to be analysed. In this case, two tree nodes have

# Plate 23.9

## Stages in retrieving text from a tree node




been selected—***Nationality ctitique*** and ***Visitors' ethnicity***.

8. → Once the nodes have been selected, → **OK** [closes the **Select Project Items** dialog box]. In the **Coding Query** dialog box, → the **Add to List** button [***Nationality ctitique*** and ***Visitors' ethnicity*** will appear in the box below **Search for content matching these criteria**]
9. → **Run** [this button cannot be seen in Plate 23.10 but is to the bottom left of the **Coding Query** dialog box].

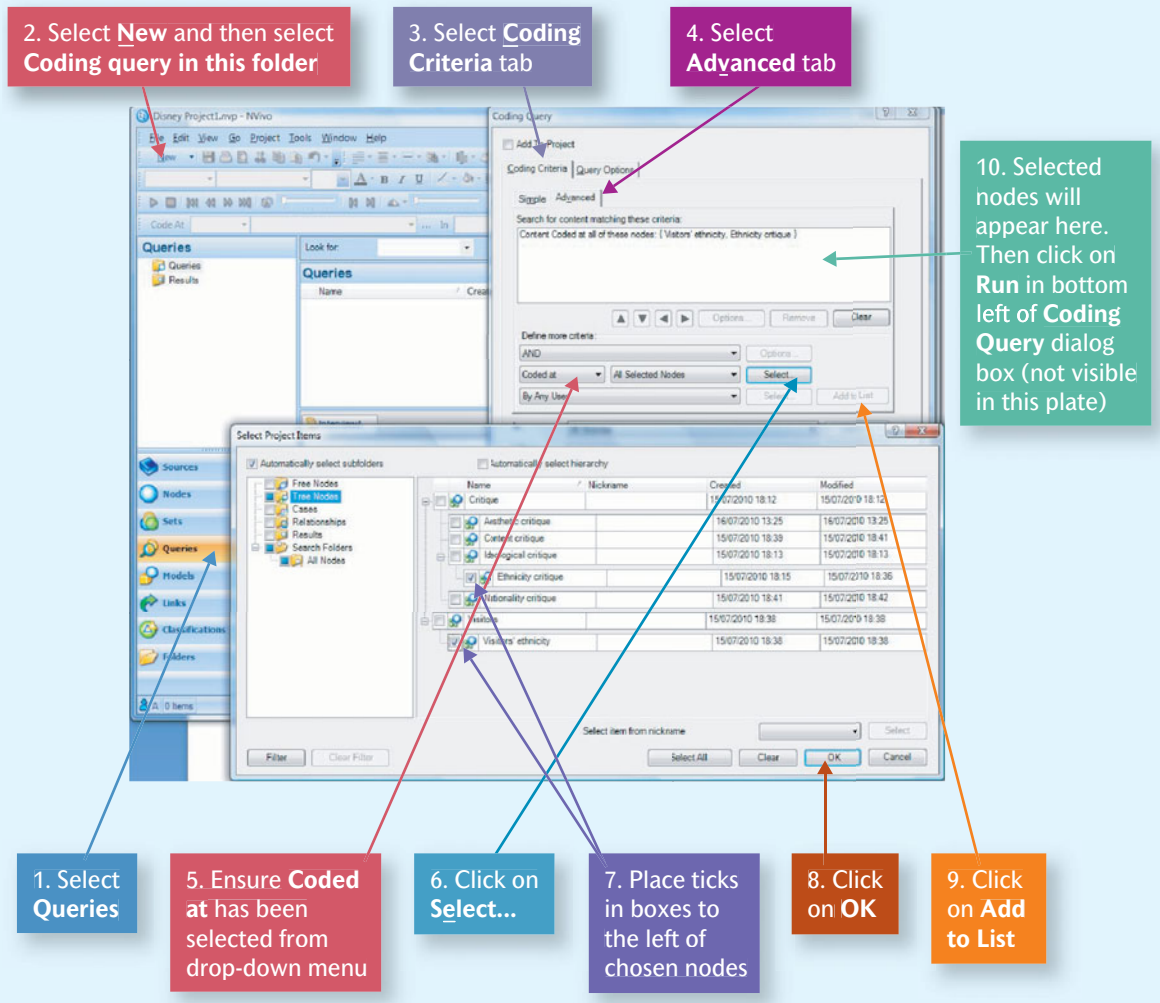
### To search for specific text

NVivo can also perform searches for specific words or phrases, often referred to as 'strings' in computer jargon. For example, to search for **Magic Kingdom**, the following steps would need to be taken:

1. On the menu bar at the top, → **Edit**
2. → **Find** [opens the **Find Content** dialog box in Plate 23.11]
3. Insert **Magic Kingdom** to the right of **Text**

# Plate 23.10

## The **Coding Query** dialog box (searching for the intersection of two nodes)




4. To the right of **Look in**, make sure **Text** has been selected
5. → **Find Next**.

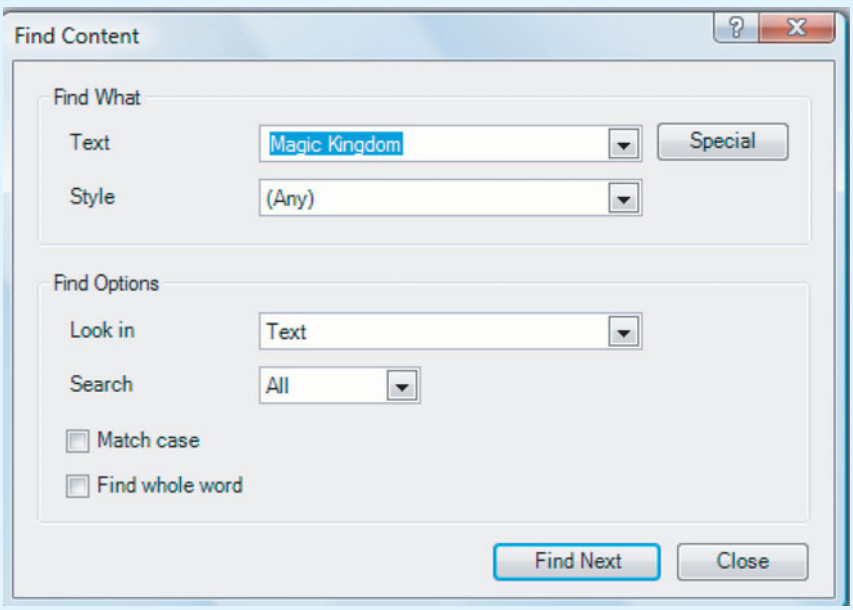
Text searching can be useful for the identification of possible in vivo codes. You would then need to go back to the documents to create nodes to allow you to code in terms of any in vivo codes.

## Memos

In Chapter 22, it was noted that one feature of the grounded theory approach to qualitative data analysis is the use of memos in which ideas and illustrations might be stored. Memos can be easily created in NVivo. The following steps, which are outlined in Plate 23.12, should be followed:

# Plate 23.11

## The Find Content dialog box




1. In the **Navigation View**, → **Sources**
2. Under **Sources** → **Memos**
3. → **New** [opens the **New Memo** dialog box shown in Plate 23.12]
4. After **Name**, type in a name for the document (e.g. **Gender critique memo**). You can also provide a brief description of the document in the window to the right of **Description** as in Plate 23.12
5. → **OK.**

## Saving an NVivo project

When you have finished working on your data, you will need to save it for future use. To do this, on the menu bar at the top, → **File** → **Save Project**. This will save all the work you have done. You will then be given the opportunity to exit NVivo or to create or open a project without worrying about losing all your hard work.

## Opening an existing NVivo project

To retrieve a project you have created, at the Welcome screen, **File** → **Open a Project...**. This opens the **Open Project** dialog box. Search for and then select the project you want to work on. Then → **Open**.

## Final thoughts

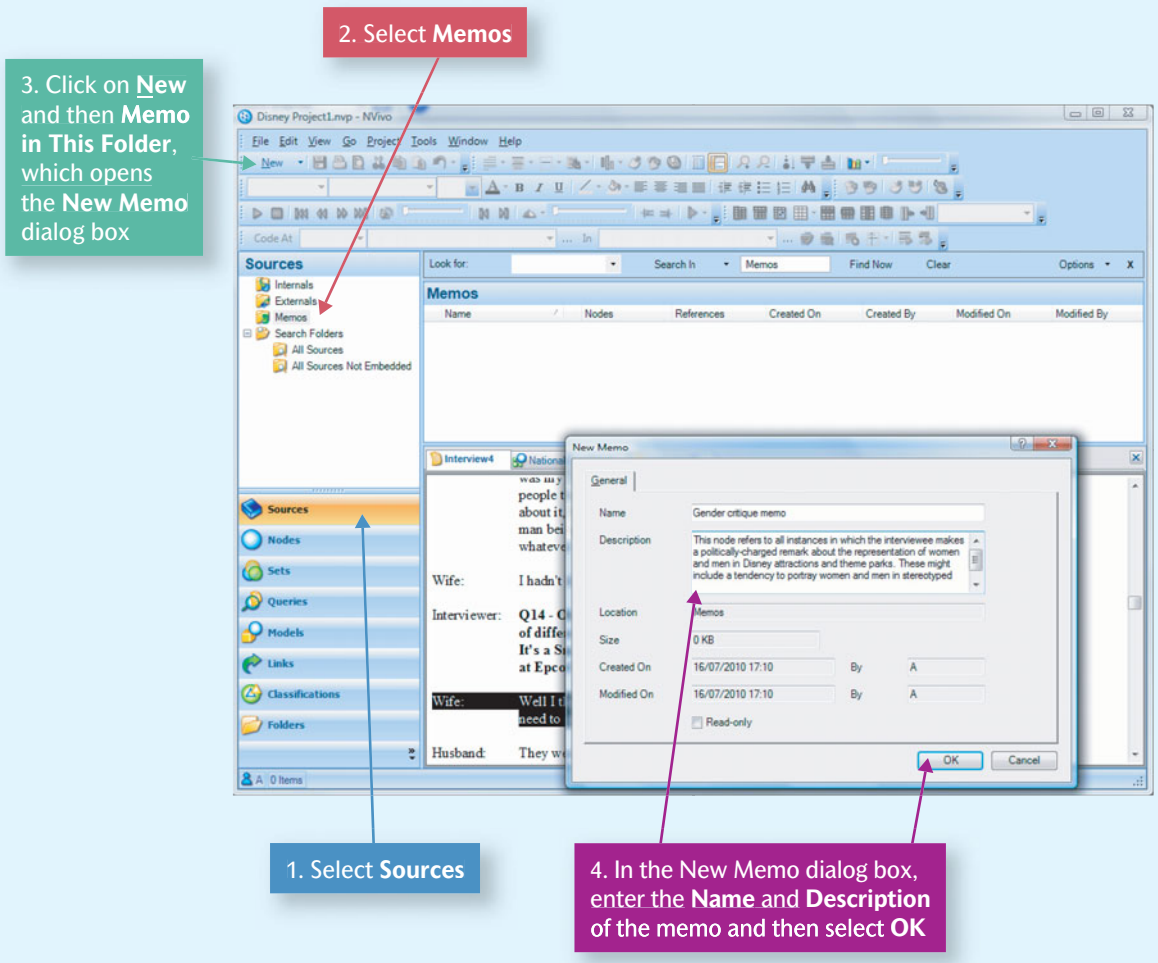
As with the chapter on SPSS (Chapter 15), a short chapter like this can provide help only with the most basic features of the software. In so doing, we hope that it will have given students who may be uncertain about whether CAQDAS is for them an impression of what the software is like and a sense of its capabilities. Doubtless, some readers will decide it is not for them and that the tried-and-tested scissors and paste will do the trick. On the other hand, the software warrants serious consideration because of its power and flexibility.

Some useful online help in the use of NVivo can be found in the website of the publisher, QSR International: *help-nv8-en.qsrinternational.com/NVivo_8_Help.htm* (accessed 16 July 2010)

Also helpful are the Online QDA website and the CAQDAS Networking Project website at:
*onlineqda.hud.ac.uk/* (accessed 16 July 2010)
*caqdas.soc.surrey.ac.uk/* (accessed 16 July 2010)

# Plate 23.12

## Stages in creating a memo




## Key points

- CAQDAS does not and cannot help with decisions about how to code qualitative data or how to interpret findings.
- CAQDAS can make many if not most of the clerical tasks associated with the manual coding and retrieving of data easier and faster.
- If you have a very small dataset, it is probably not worth the time and trouble navigating your way around a new software program.
- If you have a larger dataset, or are intending to use the software skills that you acquire on other research projects in the future, CAQDAS can be an invaluable tool.



# Questions for review

### *Is CAQDAS like quantitative data analysis software?*

- What are the main points of difference between CAQDAS and quantitative data analysis software like SPSS?
- Why is CAQDAS controversial?
- To what extent does CAQDAS help with qualitative data analysis?

### *Learning NVivo*

- What is a node?
- What is the difference between a free node and a tree node?
- What is in vivo coding?
- Do nodes have to be set up in advance?
- What is speed coding?
- In NVivo, what is the difference between a document and a memo?
- How do you go about searching for a single node and the intersection of two nodes?
- Why might it be useful to display coding stripes?
- How do you search for specific text?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis: Using NVivo.*

*This page intentionally left blank*

# Part Four

In Part Four, we will explore areas that transcend the quantitative/qualitative distinction. Chapter 24 invites readers to consider how useful the distinction is. This may seem a contrary thing to do, since the book has been organized around the quantitative/qualitative divide. However, the aim is to show that the distinction is not a hard-and-fast one. Chapter 25 considers the different ways in which quantitative and qualitative research can be combined. Such combinations are referred to as mixed methods *research*. Chapter 26 considers the growing possibilities for e-research and focuses on the use of the Internet both as a source of data and as a research method. Chapter 27 examines issues relating to the writing-up of business research and explores some features of good writing in both quantitative and qualitative research. This final chapter also offers advice to students faced with the often daunting prospect of writing up a small-scale research project. It will also be helpful to those who have to do mini-projects as part of the coursework requirement associated with modules.

These chapters draw together certain issues from previous parts but also address others that have been raised already, this time in much greater depth. In addition, they offer advice for those students who are confronted with the need to produce a lengthy piece of work, which is an increasingly common requirement.

*This page intentionally left blank*

# 24

# Breaking down the quantitative/ qualitative divide

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 614

**The natural science model and qualitative research** 615

**Quantitative research and interpretivism** 617

**Quantitative research and constructionism** 618

**Epistemological and ontological considerations** 619

**Problems with the quantitative/qualitative contrast** 619

- Behaviour versus meaning 619
- Theory tested in research versus emergent from data 620
- Numbers versus words 621
- Artificial versus natural 621

**Reciprocal analysis** 623

- Qualitative analysis of quantitative data 623
- Quantitative analysis of qualitative data 623

**Quantification in qualitative research** 624

- Thematic analysis 624
- Quasi-quantification in qualitative research 624
- Combating anecdotalism through limited quantification 625

***Key points*** 625

***Questions for review*** 626



## Chapter outline

This chapter is concerned with the degree to which the quantitative/qualitative divide should be regarded as a hard-and-fast one. It shows that, while there are many differences between the two research strategies, there are also many examples of research that transcend the distinction. One way in which this occurs is through research that combines quantitative and qualitative research, which is the focus of the next chapter. The present chapter is concerned with points of overlap between them. This chapter explores:

- aspects of qualitative research that can contain elements of the natural science model;
- aspects of quantitative research that can contain elements of interpretivism;
- the idea that research methods are more independent of epistemological and ontological assumptions than is sometimes supposed;
- ways in which aspects of the quantitative/qualitative contrast sometimes break down;
- studies in which quantitative and qualitative research are employed in relation to each other, so that qualitative research is used to analyse quantitative research and vice versa;
- the use of quantification in qualitative research.

# Introduction

With this book structured so far around the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research, it might appear perverse to raise the prospect that the distinction might be overblown at this stage. The distinction has been employed so far for two main reasons:

- There *are* differences between quantitative and qualitative research in terms of research strategy, and many researchers and writers on research methodology perceive this to be the case.
- It is a useful means of organizing research methods and approaches to data analysis.

However, while epistemological and ontological commitments may be associated with certain research methods—such as the often-cited links between a natural science epistemology (in particular, positivism) and survey research, or between an interpretivist epistemology (for example, phenomenology) and qualitative interviewing—the connections are not deterministic. In other words, while qualitative interviews may often reveal a predisposition towards or a reflection of an interpretivist and constructionist position, this is not always the case, as an early example suggested (see the discussion of the study by Hochschild (1983) in Chapter 1). This means that the connections that were posited in Chapter 1 between epistemology and ontology, on the one hand, and research method, on the other, are best thought of as tendencies rather than as definitive connections. Such connections were implied by the suggestion that within each of the two research strategies—quantitative and qualitative—there is a distinctive mix of epistemology, ontology, and research methods (see Table 1.1). However, we cannot say that the use of a structured interview or self-completion questionnaire *necessarily* implies a commitment to a natural scientific model or that ethnographic research *must* mean an interpretivist epistemology. We should not be surprised at this: after all, quantitative research teaches us that it is rarely the case that we find perfect associations between variables. We should not be surprised, therefore, that the practice of business research similarly lacks absolute determinism.

Research methods are much more free-floating than is sometimes supposed. A method of data collection like participant observation can be employed in such a way that it is in tune with the tenets of constructionism, but equally it can be used in a manner that reveals an objectivist

orientation. Also, it is easy to underemphasize the significance of practical considerations in the way in which business research is conducted (though look again at Figure 1.2). Conducting a study of humour and resistance on the shopfloor by postal questionnaire may not be totally impossible, but it is unlikely to succeed in terms of yielding valid answers to questions.

In the rest of this chapter, we will examine a variety of ways in which the contrast between quantitative and qualitative research should not be overdrawn.



## The natural science model and qualitative research

One of the chief difficulties with the links that are frequently forged between issues of epistemology and matters of research method or technique is that they often entail a characterization of the natural sciences as necessarily or inherently positivist in orientation. There are three notable difficulties here.

- There is no agreement on the epistemological basis of the natural sciences. As noted in Chapter 1, writers like Harré (1972) and Keat and Urry (1975) have argued that positivism is but one version of the nature of the natural sciences, *realism* being one alternative account (Bhaskar 1975).
- If we assume that the practices of natural scientists are those that are revealed in their written accounts of what they do (and most of the discussions of the nature of the natural sciences do assume this), we run into a problem because studies by social researchers of scientists' practices suggest that there is often a disparity between their work behaviour and their writings. Research by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) suggested that the ways in which scientists talked about their work frequently revealed a different set of practices from those inscribed in their articles.
- As Platt (1981) has argued, a term like 'positivist' has to be treated in a circumspect way, because, while it does refer to a distinctive characterization of scientific enquiry (see Key concept 1.7), it is also frequently employed in a polemical way. When employed in this manner, it is rarely helpful, because the term is usually a characterization (a negative one) of the work of others rather than of one's own work.

Quite aside from the difficulty of addressing the natural science model and positivism, there are problems with associating them solely with quantitative research. Further, qualitative research frequently exhibits features that one would associate with a natural science model. This tendency is revealed in several ways:

- *Empiricist overtones*. Although empiricism (see Key concept 1.4) is typically associated with quantitative research, many writers on qualitative research display an equal emphasis on the importance of direct contact with social reality as the springboard for any investigation. Thus, writers on qualitative research frequently stress the importance of direct experience of social settings and fashioning an understanding of social worlds via that contact. The very idea that theory is to be grounded in data (see Chapter 22) seems to constitute a manifesto for empiricism, and it is unsurprising, therefore, that some writers claim to detect 'covert positivism' in qualitative research. Another way in which empiricist overtones are revealed is in the suggestion that social reality must be studied from the vantage point of research participants but that the only way to gain access to their interpretations is through extended contact with them, implying that meaning is accessible to the senses of researchers. The empiricism of qualitative research is perhaps most notable in conversation analysis, which was examined in Chapter 20. This is an approach that takes precise transcriptions of talk as its starting point and applies rules of analysis to such data. The analyst is actively discouraged from engaging in speculations about intention or context that might derive from an appreciation of the ethnographic particulars of the social setting.
- *A specific problem focus*. As noted in Chapter 16, qualitative research can be employed to investigate quite specific, tightly defined research questions of the kind normally associated with a natural science model of the research process.
- *Hypothesis- and theory-testing*. Following on from the previous point, qualitative researchers typically discuss hypothesis- and theory-testing in connection with hypotheses or theories generated in the course of conducting research, as in analytic induction or grounded theory. However, there is no obvious reason

why this cannot occur in relation to previously specified hypotheses or theories. A. Scott's (1994) ethnographic study of British workers under HRM, for example, was designed to test the theory that British management was operating according to a 'new' model of industrial relations, based on a unitaristic view of organizational life, where workers and managers are seen to have a similar interest in the success of the firm. Scott wanted to test whether workers and managers in his case study firms actually shared similar interests or if they still adhered to ideas based on an 'old' industrial relations model founded on adversarial relationships. In the event, the research showed a complex picture, concluding that 'any cultural transformation of British management has only been partial, and the embrace of the "new IR" piecemeal' (A. Scott 1994: 131).

- *Realism*. Realism (see Key concept 1.9) is one way in which the epistemological basis of the natural sciences has been construed. It has entered into the social sciences in a number of ways, but one of the most significant of these is Bhaskar's (1989) notion of *critical realism*. This approach accepts neither a constructionist nor an objectivist ontology and instead takes the view that the 'social world is reproduced and transformed in daily life' (1989: 4). Social phenomena are produced by mechanisms that are real, but that are not directly accessible to observation and are discernible only through their effects. For critical realism the task of business research is to construct hypotheses about such mechanisms and to seek out their effects. Within business and management there is increasing interest in this ontological approach, which is undergoing something of an intellectual revitalization at the moment (Reed 1997). Critical realism has also become popular in marketing research because it offers an alternative to the predominantly positivist paradigm in marketing (Easton 2002). Fleetwood (2005) suggests that critical realism offers a more fruitful alternative to postmodernism (see Chapter 27) for organization and management studies because it overcomes the ambiguity associated with postmodernism, which stems from 'ontological exaggeration' of the role of language in determining reality. Critical realists occupy a middle position between positivism and postmodernism by claiming that an entity can exist independently of our knowledge of it, while also asserting that access to the social world is always mediated and thus subjective. Critical realists also believe in the notion of material entities that are said to be real if they have an effect on behaviour. In addition to the empirical domain of observable events, there is a real domain 'in which generative mechanisms capable of producing patterns of events reside' (Tsang and Kwan 1999: 762). Fleetwood concludes: 'As many postmodernists come to realize that *critical* realism is absolutely opposed to the empirical or naïve realism of positivism, they have begun to realize that there may be some common ground between themselves and critical realists' (2005: 217). An example of the application of a critical realist perspective is provided by Research in focus 24.1. Porter's (1993) critical realist ethnography is also interesting in this connection (see Research in focus 24.2), because it demonstrates the use of ethnography in connection with an epistemological position that derives from the natural sciences. It also relates to the previous point in providing an illustration of hypothesis-testing qualitative research.



## Research in focus 24.1
## A critical realist study of a hospital merger

Kowalczyk (2004) carried out a study looking at the effects of a merger involving three hospitals informed by a critical realist perspective. She explains that critical realism enabled her to focus on changes made to the structure over time. Using Archer's (1995) concept of the 'morphogenetic cycle' to reflect the changes that occur when structure and agents interact, she applied this framework to understand how the three hospitals dealt with national guidelines set down by the UK government for the formation of NHS Trusts, which formed part of an attempted introduction of a more business-like culture. This study highlights two of the main benefits associated with critical realism, in enabling longitudinal analysis and allowing structural and cultural conditions to be seen as having an existence independent of social interaction. Agents are thus seen as choosing whether or not to apply the rules, rather than being wholly determined by them.



## Research in focus 24.2
## A critical realist ethnography

A critical realist stance was employed by Porter (1993) in connection with an ethnographic study in a large Irish hospital in which the author was employed for three months as a staff nurse. Porter's interest was in the possible role of racism in this setting. He suggests that racism and professionalism were in operation such that the latter tempered the effects of the former in the context of interactions between doctors and nurses. Thus, racism and professionalism were conceptualized as generative structures—that is, mechanisms—that could be productive of certain kinds of effect. Two hypotheses were proposed: that racism would play some part in the relationships between white staff and those from 'racialized minorities', and that the 'occupational situation would affect the way in which racism was expressed' (1993: 599). Porter found that racism was not a significant factor in relationships between members of racialized minorities and the other staff but did manifest itself behind the backs of the former in the form of racist remarks. Racism did not intrude into work relationships, because of the operation of the greater weight given to people's achievements and performance (such as qualifications and medical skills) rather than their ascriptive qualities (that is, 'race') when judging members of professions. The emphasis on values associated with professionalism counteracted the potential role of those associated with racism. Thus, 'racism can be seen as a tendency that is realised in certain circumstances, but exercised unrealised in others' (1993: 607). In terms of critical realism, one possible structural mechanism (racism) was countered by the operation of another structural mechanism (professional ideology).

In addition, writers on qualitative research sometimes distinguish stances on qualitative research that contain elements of both quantitative and qualitative research. R. L. Miller (2000), in connection with an examination of life history interviews (see Key concept 18.4), distinguishes three approaches to such research. One of these, which he calls 'neo-positivist', uses 'pre-existing networks of concepts . . . to make theoretically based predictions concerning people's experienced lives' (2000: 12). Therefore, one approach to the life history method, which is associated with qualitative rather than quantitative research, would seem to entail a theory-testing approach to the collection and analysis of qualitative data. A further illustration is Charmaz's (2000) suggestion that two approaches to grounded theory can be distinguished: objectivist and constructionist (she uses the term 'constructivist'). She argues that, in spite of the differences that developed between Glaser (1992) and Strauss (e.g. Strauss and Corbin 1998), both held to the view of an objective, external reality. In other words, in the eyes of both the major writers on grounded theory, there is a social world beyond the researcher, whose job it is to reveal its nature and functioning.



# Quantitative research and interpretivism

Qualitative research would seem to have a monopoly of the ability to study meaning. Its proponents essentially claim that it is only through qualitative research that the world can be studied through the eyes of the people who are studied. As Platt (1981: 87) observes, this contention seems rather at odds with the widespread study of attitudes in surveys based on interviews and questionnaires. In fact, it would seem that quantitative researchers frequently address meanings. An example is the well-known concept of 'orientation to work' associated with the *Affluent Worker* research in the 1960s, which sought to uncover the nature and significance of the meanings that industrial workers bring with them to the workplace (Goldthorpe et al. 1968).

The widespread inclusion of questions about attitudes in surveys suggests that quantitative researchers are interested in matters of meaning. It might be objected that survey questions do not really tap issues of meaning because they are based on categories devised by the designers of the interview schedule or questionnaire. Two points are relevant here. First, in the absence of respondent validation exercises, the notion that qualitative research is more adept at gaining access to the point of view of those being studied than quantitative research is invariably assumed rather than demonstrated. Qualitative researchers frequently claim to have tapped into participants' world views because of, for example, their extensive participation in the daily round of those they study, the length of time they spent in the setting being studied, or the lengthy and intensive interviews conducted. However, the explicit demonstration that interpretative understanding has been accomplished—for example, through respondent validation (see Key concept 16.5)—is rarely undertaken. Secondly, if the design of attitude questions is based on prior questioning that seeks to bring out the range of possible attitudinal positions on an issue, as in the research discussed in Research in focus 10.3, attitudinal questions may be better able to gain access to meaning.

Also, as Marsh (1982) has pointed out, the practice in much survey research of asking respondents the reasons for their actions also implies that quantitative researchers are frequently concerned to uncover issues of meaning. For example, R. Stewart's (1967) diary study of how managers use their time (see Research in focus 9.4) focused on recording how much time was spent by each individual on different kinds of activity. However, Stewart followed up the diary study by sending each manager a summary of how he or she had spent his or her time, together with comparative figures for managers in similar jobs. Managers were then asked to comment on any unusual features in their figures and to explain individual and contextual reasons for these differences. Examples such as these further point to the possibility that the gulf between quantitative and qualitative research is not as wide as is sometimes supposed.



## Quantitative research and constructionism

It was noted in Chapter 1 that one keynote of constructionism is a concern with issues of representation, as these play an important role in the construction of the social world. Qualitative content analysis has played an important role in developing just such an understanding, just as discourse analysis has in relation to the social construction of events and meanings in business leaders' speeches and mission statements. However, it is easy to forget that conventional quantitative content analysis can also be useful in this way.

Chen and Meindl's (1991) research into the entrepreneurial leadership of the founder of the low-cost US airline People Express, Donald Burr, referred to in Research in focus 21.6, provides an example of the combined use of quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Much of their understanding of Burr's leadership style was derived from qualitative content analysis, but they also employed a quantitative content analysis, 'identifying leader-charismatic themes, recording frequency, and analyzing trends' (1991: 530) using data from magazine and newspaper articles that focused on the company. However, rather than simply content-analysing the articles themselves, the researchers involved seventy-two undergraduate business students, who were asked to read the new articles and write a description of Burr, as a person and as a CEO, based on the materials they had read. Content analysis was then conducted on the students' descriptions. This showed that the language used by the students to describe Burr changed as the performance of the company varied. Chen and Meindl conclude that images portrayed of Burr in the past interacted with indications of current performance to determine the reconstruction of the leader's image. In other words, instead of being rejected, old themes were modified and injected with new meaning. The second stage of the content analysis was more qualitative in nature. It involved qualitative content analysis of the actual newspaper articles in order to identify the metaphors used to describe Burr. The results of this analysis were broadly consistent with the first, thereby reinforcing the validity of the overall findings. More generally, this example shows how quantitative research can play a significant role in relation to a constructionist stance.

# Epistemological and ontological considerations

If we review the argument so far, it is being suggested that:

- there are differences between quantitative and qualitative research in terms of their epistemological and ontological commitments; *but*
- the connection between research strategy, on the one hand, and epistemological and ontological commitments, on the other, is not deterministic. In other words, there is a tendency for quantitative and qualitative research to be associated with the epistemological and ontological positions outlined in Chapter 1 (for example, in Table 1.1), but the connections are not perfect.

However, some writers have suggested that research methods carry with them a cluster of epistemological and ontological commitments such that to elect to use a self-completion questionnaire is more or less simultaneously and inevitably to select a natural science model and an objectivist world view. Similarly, the use of participant observation is often taken to imply a commitment to interpretivism and constructionism. Such a view implies that research methods are imbued with specific clusters of epistemological and ontological commitments and can be seen in comments of the following kind: 'the choice and adequacy of a method embodies a variety of assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge and the methods through which that knowledge can be obtained, as well as a set of root assumptions about the nature of the phenomena to be investigated' (Morgan and Smircich 1980: 491). The difficulty with such a view is that, if we accept that there is no perfect correspondence between research strategy and matters of epistemology and ontology, the notion that a method is inherently or necessarily indicative of certain wider assumptions about knowledge and the nature of social reality begins to founder.

In business and management research, if Burrell and Morgan's (1979) influential 'four-paradigm' framework were consistently applied, one would expect to see a clear correspondence between the paradigm adopted (see Chapter 1) and the research methods used, in a manner similar to that illustrated by Hassard (see Research in focus 1.17): the functionalist paradigm community using, for example, questionnaire surveys, and the interpretative paradigm community using, for example, ethnographic methods. In fact, research methods are much more 'free-floating' in terms of epistemology and ontology than this proposition suggests, and it is often not possible to uncover an unambiguous pattern linking the grounding of an article in one of the four paradigms with the research methods used. Furthermore, because of the dominance of mixed methods case study research in the business and management field, it is common for several methods to be used within the same research study. In summary, although there is undoubtedly a general tendency for specific paradigm communities to favour certain research methods, the reality is more complex than this picture at first suggests.

# Problems with the quantitative/qualitative contrast

The contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research that were drawn in Chapter 16 suggest a somewhat hard-and-fast set of distinctions and differences (see, in particular, Table 16.1). However, there is a risk that this kind of representation tends to exaggerate the differences between them. A few of the distinctions will be examined to demonstrate this point.

## Behaviour versus meaning

The distinction is sometimes drawn between a focus on behaviour and a focus on meanings. However, quantitative research frequently involves the study of meanings in the form of attitude scales (such as the Likert scaling technique) and other techniques. Qualitative researchers may feel that the tendency for attitude scales to be preformulated and imposed on research participants means that they do not really gain access to meanings (see above). The key point being made here is that at the very least quantitative researchers frequently *try* to address meanings. Also, somewhat ironically, many of the techniques with which quantitative research is associated, most notably survey research based on questionnaires and interviews, have been shown to relate poorly to

people's actual behaviour. Moreover, looking at the other side of the divide, qualitative research frequently, if not invariably, entails the examination of behaviour in context. Qualitative researchers often want to interpret people's behaviour in terms of the norms, values, and culture of the group or organization in question. In other words, quantitative and qualitative researchers are typically interested in both what people do and what they think, but go about the investigation of these areas in different ways. Therefore, the degree to which the behaviour versus meaning contrast coincides with quantitative and qualitative research should not be overstated.

## Theory tested in research versus emergent from data

A further related point is that the suggestion that theory and concepts are developed prior to undertaking a study in quantitative research is something of a caricature that is true only up to a point. It reflects a tendency to characterize quantitative research as driven by a theory-testing approach. However, while experimental investigations probably fit this model well, survey-based studies are often more exploratory than this view implies. Although concepts have to be measured, the nature of their interconnections is frequently not specified in advance. Quantitative research is far less driven by a hypothesis-testing strategy than is frequently supposed. As a result, the analysis of quantitative data from social surveys is often more exploratory than is generally appreciated and consequently offers opportunities for the generation of theories and concepts (see Research in focus 24.3). As one American survey researcher has commented in relation to a large-scale survey he conducted in the 1950s, but that has much relevance today: 'There are so many questions which might be asked, so many correlations which can be run, so many ways in which the findings can be organized, and so few rules or precedents for making these choices that a thousand different studies could come out of the same data' (Davis 1964: 232).

The common depiction of quantitative research as solely an exercise in testing preformulated ideas fails to appreciate the degree to which findings frequently suggest new departures and theoretical contributions.



## Research in focus 24.3
## Inductive theory development using a quantitative dataset

Although deductive theory development based on hypothesis testing (see Chapter 1) is more commonly associated with quantitative research, and inductive theory development is more often associated with qualitative research, there are always exceptions to this general rule. For example, one of the authors worked on a project involving quantitative secondary analysis on a dataset that had been collected by another organization. Since the data, which related to organizations that had been involved with the people management initiative Investors in People, had already been collected, statistical tests had to be run using the variables contained within the database. Fernández, Taylor, and Bell (2005) first decided how to analyse the data that they had negotiated access to—that is, which statistical tests to employ—and then they developed ideas about the likely relationships between variables for which data were available in the dataset. These ideas derived from their existing knowledge about the initiative, which was partly based on their previous qualitative research in this area (Bell, Taylor, and Thorpe 2001, 2002), but it was also driven by the limitations and opportunities offered by the dataset that they had to work with.

More statistical tests were then developed based on interesting patterns that they observed in the data and this informed the authors' theoretical development. For instance, the database contained information about the number of employees in companies involved with the IiP initiative at three stages: initial commitment (when the organization decided to get involved with the initiative), recognition (when they achieved the Standard), and revocation (when they stopped being involved with the Standard). From this they were able to test whether or not companies that 'upsized' (took on more employees) or 'downsized' (shed employees) were more likely to gain the IiP award. They were also able to test for the optimum duration of commitment (the period of time leading up to assessment), as the database is longitudinal. However, they were also constrained by the limitations of the dataset, which contained no information about why companies decide to revoke their involvement with IiP.

As Fernández, Taylor, and Bell (2005) were seeking to draw inferences out of these statistical observations, rather than trying to test theory through their analysis of the data, the research design was more inductive than deductive. This example illustrates that quantitative analysis is not always hypothesis-driven—it can also be led by the process of data analysis, particularly when conducting secondary analysis. Moreover, it also illustrates how quantitative analysis is an interpretative and creative process and statistical testing is not the end of the process, as the results have to be interpreted and understood in relation to other work that the researcher has read.

Initially Fernández, Taylor, and Bell wrote up their research without including any hypotheses, but they received negative responses from journal reviewers and editors because of this. So they rewrote their study to incorporate hypotheses based on the theory they had developed, that fitted the tests they had run. The experience of writing up this study thus illustrates the significance of conventions in research writing (see Chapter 27) that cannot be overlooked. It also suggests that, in writing up quantitative research, readers sometimes expect to see that certain conventions are associated with a deductive research strategy, even if the study entailed an approach where theory was emergent from the data.

Therefore, the suggestion that, unlike an interpretivist stance, quantitative research is concerned solely with the testing of ideas that have previously been formulated (such as hypotheses) fails to recognize the creative work that goes into the analysis of quantitative data and into the interpretation of findings (see Research in focus 24.3 for an example). Equally, as noted above, qualitative research can be used in relation to the testing of theories (see Research in focus 24.3 again for an example).

## Numbers versus words

Even perhaps this most basic element in the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is not without problems. Qualitative researchers sometimes undertake a limited amount of quantification of their data. Silverman (1984, 1985) has argued that some quantification of findings from qualitative research can often help to uncover the generality of the phenomena being described. However, he warns that such quantification should reflect research participants' own ways of understanding their social world. Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994), whose approach is commonly used in business and management research, recommend the use of a contact summary sheet as a means of recording themes that arise during a qualitative interview. Using the interview transcript, the researcher categorizes interview responses by theme, eventually generating a single-page summary of the interview. Not only does the contact summary sheet highlight the main concepts, themes, and issues, it also provides a record of their frequency of occurrence. Figure 24.1 illustrates an example of the contact summary sheet used by P. Stiles (2001) (this study is discussed in Chapter 25). This technique illustrates how qualitative interview data can be analysed in a way that involves a degree of quantification. In any case, it has often been noted that qualitative researchers engage in 'quasi-quantification' through the use of terms like 'many', 'often', and 'some' (see below). All that is happening is that the researcher is injecting greater precision into such estimates of frequency.

## Artificial versus natural

The artificial/natural contrast referred to in Table 16.1 can similarly be criticized. It is often assumed that, because much quantitative research employs research instruments that are applied to the people being studied (questionnaires, structured interview schedules, structured observation schedules, and so on), it provides an artificial account of how the social world operates. Qualitative research is often viewed as more naturalistic (see Key concept 2.4 on naturalism). Ethnographic research in particular would seem to exhibit this quality, because the participant observer studies people in their normal social worlds and contexts—in other words, as they go about normal activities. However, when qualitative research is based on interviews (such as semi- and unstructured interviewing and focus groups), the depiction 'natural' is possibly less applicable. Interviews still have to be arranged and interviewees have to be taken away from activities that they would otherwise be engaged in, even when the interviewing style is of the more conversational kind. We know very little about interviewees' reactions to and feelings about being interviewed. M. Parker (2000), in describing his ethnographic role as a confidant (see Table 17.1), recounts a comment made by one of his interviewees: 'it's nice to have somebody to talk to and moan to you know. I try to talk to my wife like this but she doesn't listen' (2000: 237). While this interviewee clearly enjoyed being interviewed, it is likely that he was very conscious of the fact that he had been

# Figure 24.1

**A contact summary sheet to show interviewee interpretations of the role of boards of directors**

| Interviewee responses | Frequency |
|---|---|
| 'The role of the board of directors is . . .' | |
| to be involved in strategy | 32 |
| to take responsibility for monitoring the health of the firm | 20 |
| to hire, appraise, and fire executives | 7 |
| to converse with shareholders/stakeholders | 6 |
| to ensure corporate renewal | 5 |
| to develop the corporate vision | 5 |
| to take responsibility for developing an ethical framework | 4 |
| to ensure corporate survival | 3 |
| to determine risk position | 3 |
| to lead strategic change | 2 |
| to review social responsibilities | 2 |
| to act as ambassadors for the firm | 2 |
| to understand current and forthcoming legislation | 1 |
| TOTAL | 92 |

*Source*: adapted from P. Stiles (2001).

engaged in an interview rather than a conversation. The interview was clearly valuable in allowing this individual to express his concerns, but the point being made here is that the view that the methods associated with qualitative research are naturalistic is to exaggerate the contrast with the supposed artificiality of the research methods associated with quantitative research. Atkinson and Silverman (1997) have further suggested that qualitative researchers' obsession with the semi-structured interview as a naturalistic form of enquiry reflects a media-led societal trend towards confessional interviewing as a source of truth and meaning. They suggest that descriptive research of this nature is little different from chat shows or human interest journalism.

As noted in Chapter 19, focus group research is often described as more natural than qualitative interviewing because it emulates the way people discuss issues in real life. Natural groupings are often used to emphasize this element. However, whether or not this is how group participants view the nature of their participation is unclear. In particular, when it is borne in mind that people are sometimes strangers, have to travel to a site where the session takes place, are paid for their trouble, and frequently discuss topics they rarely if ever talk about, it is not hard to take the view that the naturalism of focus groups is assumed rather than demonstrated.

In participant observation, the researcher can be a source of interference that renders the research situation less natural than it might superficially appear to be. Whenever the ethnographer is in an overt role, a certain amount of reactivity is possible—even inevitable. It is difficult to estimate the degree to which the ethnographer represents an intrusive element that has an impact on what is found, but once again the naturalism of such research is often assumed rather than demonstrated, although it is admittedly likely that it will be less artificial than the methods associated with quantitative research. However, when the ethnographer also engages in interviewing (as opposed to casual conversations), the naturalistic quality is likely to be less pronounced.

These observations suggest that there are areas and examples of studies that lead us to question the degree to which the quantitative/qualitative contrast is a rigid one. Once again, this is not to suggest that the contrast is unhelpful, but that we should be wary of assuming that in writing and talking about quantitative and qualitative research we are referring to two absolutely divergent and inconsistent research strategies.



# Reciprocal analysis

One further way in which the barriers between quantitative and qualitative research might be undermined is by virtue of developments in which each is used as an approach to analyse the other.

## Qualitative analysis of quantitative data

There has been a growing interest in the examination of the writings of quantitative researchers using some of the methods associated with qualitative research. In part, this trend can be seen as an extension of the growth of interest among qualitative researchers in the writing of ethnography, which can be seen in such work as Van Maanen (1988) and Atkinson (1990). The attention to quantitative research is very much part of this trend because it reveals a concern in both cases with the notion that not only does the written account of research constitute the presentation of findings but it is also an attempt to persuade the reader of the credibility of those findings. This is true of the natural sciences too; for example, in relation to the research by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) mentioned earlier in this chapter, it was shown that scientists employed an empiricist repertoire when writing up their findings. This writing strategy was used to show how proper procedures were followed in a systematic and linear way. However, Gilbert and Mulkay demonstrated that, when the scientists discussed in interviews how they did their research, it is clear that the process was suffused with the influence of factors to do with their personal biographies.

One way in which a qualitative research approach to quantitative research is manifested is through what Gephart (1988: 9) has called *ethnostatistics*, by which is meant 'the study of the construction, interpretation, and display of statistics in quantitative social research'. Gephart shows that there are a number of ways in which the idea of ethnostatistics can be realized, but it is with just one of these—approaching statistics as rhetoric—that we will be concerned here. Directing attention to the idea of statistics as rhetoric means becoming sensitive to the ways in which statistical arguments are deployed to bestow credibility on research for target audiences. More specifically, this means examining the language used in persuading audiences about the validity of research. Indeed, the very use of statistics themselves can be regarded as a rhetorical device because the use of quantification means that business research can bestow upon itself the appearance of a natural science and thereby achieve greater legitimacy and credibility by virtue of that association (McCartney 1970; John 1992). Some of the rhetorical strategies identified by analysts are presented in Key concept 27.3. However, the chief point being made here is that the nature of quantitative research can be illuminated by being approached from the vantage point of qualitative research.

## Quantitative analysis of qualitative data

In Chapter 12, the research by Hodson (1996), which was based on the content analysis of workplace ethnographies, was given quite a lot of attention (see Research in focus 12.9). Essentially, Hodson's approach was to apply a quantitative research approach—in the form of content analysis—to qualitative research. This is a form of research that may have potential in other areas of business research in which ethnography has been a popular method, and as a result a good deal of ethnographic evidence has been built up. Hodson (1999) suggests that the study of social movements may be one such field; managerial fads and fashions may be yet another. Hodson's research is treated as a solution to the problem of making comparisons between ethnographic studies in a given area. One approach to synthesizing related qualitative studies is *meta-ethnography*, which is a qualitative research approach to such aggregation (Noblit and Hare 1988). However, whereas the practice of meta-ethnography is meant to be broadly in line with the goals of qualitative research, such as a commitment to interpretivism and a sensitivity to the social context, Hodson's approach is one that largely ignores contextual factors in order to explore relationships between variables that have been abstracted out of the ethnographies.

Certain key issues need to be resolved when conducting analyses of the kind carried out by Hodson. One relates to the issue of conducting an exhaustive literature search for suitable studies for possible inclusion. Hodson chose to analyse just books, rather than articles, because of the limited amount of information that can usually be included in the latter. Even then, criteria for the inclusion of a book needed to be stipulated. Hodson employed

three: 'The criteria for inclusion were (*a*) the book had to be based on ethnographic methods of observation over a period of at least 6 months, (*b*) the observations had to be in a single organization, and (*c*) the book had to focus on at least one clearly identified group of workers . . .' (1999: 22). The application of these criteria resulted in the exclusion of 279 out of 365 books uncovered. A second crucial area relates to the coding of the studies, which was briefly covered in Research in focus 12.9. Hodson stresses the importance of having considerable knowledge of the subject area, adopting clear coding rules, and pilot testing the coding schedule. In addition, he recommends checking the *reliability* of coding by having 10 per cent of the documents coded by two people. The process of coding was time-consuming, in that Hodson calculates that each book-length ethnography took forty or more hours to code.

The approach has many attractions, not the least of which is the impossibility of a quantitative researcher being able to conduct investigations in such a varied set of organizations. Also, it means that more data of much greater depth can be used than can typically be gathered by quantitative researchers. It also allows hypotheses deriving from established theories to be tested, such as the 'technological implications' approach, which sees technologies as having impacts on the experience of work (Hodson 1996). However, the loss of a sense of social context is likely to be unattractive to many qualitative researchers.

However, of particular significance for this discussion is the remark that 'the fundamental contribution of the systematic analysis of documentary accounts is that it creates an analytic link between the in-depth accounts of professional observers and the statistical methods of quantitative researchers' (Hodson 1999: 68). In other words, the application of quantitative methods to qualitative research may provide a meeting ground for the two research strategies.



# Quantification in qualitative research

As noted in Chapter 16, the numbers versus words contrast is perhaps the most basic in many people's minds when they think about the differences between quantitative and qualitative research. After all, it seems to relate in a most fundamental way to the very terms used to denote the two approaches that seem to imply the presence and absence of numbers. However, it is simply not the case that there is a complete absence of quantification in qualitative research. As we will see in the next chapter, when qualitative researchers incorporate research methods associated with quantitative research into their investigations, a certain amount of quantification is injected into the research.

Quite aside from the issue of combining quantitative and qualitative research, three observations are worth making about quantification in the analysis and writing-up of qualitative data.

## Thematic analysis

In Chapter 22, it was observed that one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis is undertaking a search for themes in transcripts or field notes. However, as Bryman and Burgess (1994*b*: 224) point out, the criteria employed in the identification of themes are often unclear. One possible factor that these authors suggest may be in operation is the frequency of the occurrence of certain incidents, words, phrases, and so on that denote a theme. In other words, a theme is more likely to be identified the more times the phenomenon it denotes occurs in the course of coding. This process may also account for the prominence given to some themes over others when writing up the fruits of qualitative data analysis. In other words, a kind of implicit quantification may be in operation that influences the identification of themes and the elevation of some themes over others.

## Quasi-quantification in qualitative research

It has often been noted that qualitative researchers engage in 'quasi-quantification' through the use of terms such as 'many', 'frequently', 'rarely', 'often', and 'some'. In order to be able to make such allusions to quantity, the qualitative researcher should have some idea of the relative frequency of the phenomena being referred to. However, as expressions of quantities, they are imprecise, and it is often difficult to discern why they are being used at all. The alternative would seem to be to engage in a limited amount of quantification when it is appropriate, such as when an expression of quantity can bolster an argument. This point leads directly on to the next section.

## Combating anecdotalism through limited quantification

One of the criticisms that is often levelled against qualitative research is that the publications on which it is based are often anecdotal, giving the reader little guidance as to the prevalence of the issue to which the anecdote refers. The widespread use of brief sequences of conversation, snippets from interview transcripts, and accounts of encounters between people provides little sense of the prevalence of whatever such items of evidence are supposed to indicate. There is the related risk that a particularly striking statement by someone or an unexpected activity may have more significance attached to it than might be warranted in terms of its frequency.

Perhaps at least partly in response to these problems, qualitative researchers sometimes undertake a limited amount of quantification of their data. Numbers can be used to give a fairly straightforward indication of the scale of the research project. Casey (1995), for example, explains that she interviewed sixty people during the course of her ethnographic study. However, numbers can also be used to interpret the significance of qualitative data. For example, in their research on concepts of leadership employed by British police officers, Bryman, Stephens, and A Campo (1996) counted the frequency with which certain leadership styles were cited in interview transcripts. This exercise allowed them to demonstrate that the kind of leadership preferred by police officers was different from what was in vogue among theorists of leadership at the time. Similarly, Gabriel (1998) describes how he studied organizational culture in a variety of organizations by collecting, during interviews, stories about the organizations in question. Computers and information technology were a particular focus of the stories elicited. Altogether 377 stories were collected in the course of 126 interviews in 5 organizations. Gabriel shows that the stories were of different types, such as: comic stories (which were usually a mechanism for disparagement of others); epic stories (survival against the odds); tragic stories (undeserved misfortune); gripes (personal injustices); and so on. He counted the number of each type: comic stories were the most numerous at 108; then epic stories (82); tragic stories (53); gripe stories (40); and so on. Themes in the stories were also counted, such as when they involved a leader, a personal trauma, an accident, and so forth. In all these cases, the types of stories and the themes could have been treated in an anecdotal way, but the use of such simple counting conveys a clear sense of their relative prevalence.

Exercises like these can be used to counter the suggestion that is sometimes made that the approach to presenting qualitative data can be too anecdotal, so that readers are given too little sense of the *extent* to which certain beliefs are held or a certain form of behaviour occurs. All that is happening in such cases is that the researcher is injecting greater precision into estimates of frequency than can be derived from quasi-quantification terms. Moreover, it is not inconceivable that there might be greater use of limited amounts of quantification in qualitative research in the future as a result of the use of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Most of the major software programs include a facility that allows the analyst to produce simple counts of such things as the frequency with which a word or a coded theme occurs. In many cases, they can also produce simple cross-tabulations—for example, relating the occurrence of a coded theme to gender. Writing when CAQDAS was used far less than it is today, Ragin and Becker (1989) concluded their review of the impact of microcomputers on sociologists' 'analytic habits' with the following remark: 'Thus, the microcomputer provides important technical means for new kinds of dialogues between ideas and evidence and, at the same time, provides a common technical ground for the meeting of qualitative and quantitative researchers' (1989: 54). Weaver and Atkinson (1994) further suggest that the introduction of CAQDAS may be bound up with attempts to make qualitative research more respectable within the scientific community and more acceptable to 'gatekeepers' of research—that is, funding bodies. The greater use of quantification by qualitative researchers may turn out to be one of the more significant areas for this 'meeting'.



## Key points

- There are differences between quantitative and qualitative research, but it is important not to exaggerate them.
- The connections between epistemology and ontology, on the one hand, and research methods, on the other, are not deterministic.

- Qualitative research sometimes exhibits features normally associated with a natural science model.
- Quantitative research aims on occasions to engage with an interpretivist stance.
- Research methods are more autonomous in relation to epistemological commitments than is often appreciated.
- The artificial/natural contrast that is often an element in drawing a distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is frequently exaggerated.
- A quantitative research approach can be employed for the analysis of qualitative studies, and a qualitative research approach can be employed to examine the rhetoric of quantitative researchers.
- Some qualitative researchers employ quantification in their work.



## Questions for review

### *The natural science model and qualitative research*

- Are the natural sciences positivistic?
- To what extent can some qualitative research be deemed to exhibit the characteristics of a natural science model?

### *Quantitative research and interpretivism*

- To what extent can some quantitative research be deemed to exhibit the characteristics of interpretivism?

### *Quantitative research and constructionism*

- To what extent can some quantitative research be deemed to exhibit the characteristics of constructionism?

### *Epistemological and ontological considerations*

- How far do research methods necessarily carry epistemological and ontological implications?

### *Problems with the quantitative/qualitative contrast*

- Outline some of the ways in which the quantitative/qualitative contrast may not be as hard and fast as is often supposed.

### *Reciprocal analysis*

- How have statistics been used to bestow credibility upon management and business research?
- How might Hodson's approach to the analysis of qualitative data be applied in business and management research?

### *Quantification in qualitative research*

- How far is quantification a feature of qualitative research?



### Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Breaking Down the Quantitative/Qualitative Divide.*

25

# Mixed methods research: combining quantitative and qualitative research

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 628

**The argument against mixed methods research** 629

- The embedded methods argument 629
- The paradigm argument 629

**Two versions of the debate about quantitative and qualitative research** 630

**The rise of mixed methods research** 630

**Approaches to mixed methods research** 631

- The logic of triangulation 631
- Qualitative research facilitates quantitative research 634
- Quantitative research facilitates qualitative research 635
- Filling in the gaps 636
- Static and processual features 637
- Research issues and participants' perspectives 637
- The problem of generality 638
- Qualitative research may facilitate the interpretation of the relationship between variables 639
- Studying different aspects of a phenomenon 640
- Solving a puzzle 643

**Reflections on mixed methods research** 643

***Key points*** 645

***Questions for review*** 645



## Chapter outline

This chapter is concerned with mixed methods research—that is, research that combines quantitative and qualitative research. While this may seem a straightforward way of resolving and breaking down the divide between the two research strategies, it is not without controversy. Moreover, there may be practical difficulties associated with mixed methods research. This chapter explores:

- arguments against the combination of quantitative and qualitative research; two kinds of argument are distinguished and are referred to as the embedded methods and paradigm arguments;
- the suggestion that there are two versions of the debate about the possibility of combining quantitative and qualitative research: one that concentrates on methods of research and another that is concerned with epistemological issues;
- the different ways in which mixed methods research has been carried out;
- the need to recognize that mixed methods research is not inherently superior to research that employs a single research strategy.

# Introduction

So far throughout the book an emphasis has been placed on the strengths and weaknesses of the research methods associated with quantitative and qualitative research. One possible response to this kind of recognition is to propose combining them. After all, such a strategy would seem to allow the various strengths to be capitalized upon and the weaknesses offset somewhat. However, not all writers on research methods agree that such integration is either desirable or feasible. On the other hand, it is probably the case that the amount of combined research has been increasing since the early 1980s, and in business and management research combined research is particularly popular. Therefore, in discussing the combination of quantitative and qualitative research, this chapter will be concerned with three main issues:

1. an examination of the arguments against integrating quantitative and qualitative research;
2. the different ways in which quantitative and qualitative research have been combined;
3. an assessment of combined research, which asks if it is necessarily superior to investigations relying on just one research strategy and if there are any additional problems deriving from it.

The term *mixed methods research* is used as a simple shorthand to stand for research that integrates quantitative and qualitative research within a single project. Of course, there is research that, for example, combines structured interviewing with structured observation or ethnography with semi-structured interviewing. However, these instances of the combination of research methods are associated with just one research strategy. By mixed methods research we are referring to research that combines research methods that cross the two research strategies. In the earlier edition of this book, we used the term **multi-strategy research** to describe investigations combining quantitative and qualitative research. However, 'mixed methods research' has increasingly become the preferred term, and in many ways better expresses the fact that, in many cases, using both quantitative and qualitative research should involve a mixing of the research methods involved and not just using them in tandem. In other words, the quantitative and the qualitative data deriving from mixed methods research should be mutually illuminating (Bryman 2006*a*, *b*). Indeed, mixed methods research has become something of a growth industry since the first edition of this book. Since *Business Research Methods* was first published, there have been numerous discussions of the approach, a handbook on it has been published (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003), and a *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* has begun life.



# The argument against mixed methods research

The argument against mixed methods research tends to be based on either, and sometimes both, of two kinds of argument:

- the idea that research methods carry epistemological commitments; and
- the idea that quantitative and qualitative research are separate *paradigms*.

These two arguments will now be briefly reviewed.

## The embedded methods argument

This first position, which was outlined in Chapter 24, implies that research methods are ineluctably rooted in epistemological and ontological commitments. Such a view of research methods can be discerned in statements like the following:

> every research tool or procedure is inextricably embedded in commitments to particular versions of the world and to knowing that world. To use a questionnaire, to use an attitude scale, to take the role of participant observer, to select a random sample, to measure rates of population growth, and so on, is to be involved in conceptions of the world which allow these instruments to be used for the purposes conceived. (Hughes 1990: 11)

According to such a position, the decision to employ, for example, participant observation is not simply about how to go about data collection but also a commitment to an epistemological position that is inimical to positivism and that is consistent with interpretivism.

This kind of view of research methods has led some writers to argue that mixed methods research is not feasible or even desirable. An ethnographer may collect questionnaire data to gain information about a slice of social life that is not amenable to participant observation, but this does not represent an integration of quantitative and qualitative research, because the epistemological positions in which the two methods are grounded constitute irreconcilable views about how social reality should be studied. J. K. Smith (1983) for example, argues that each of the two research strategies 'sponsors different procedures and has different epistemological implications', and therefore counsels researchers not to 'accept the unfounded assumption that the methods are complementary' (1983: 12, 13). Smith and Heshusius (1986) criticize the integration of research strategies, because it ignores the assumptions underlying research methods and transforms 'qualitative inquiry into a procedural variation of quantitative inquiry' (1986: 8).

The chief difficulty with the argument that writers like Smith present is that, as was noted in Chapter 24, the idea that research methods carry with them fixed epistemological and ontological implications is very difficult to sustain. They are capable of being put to a wide variety of tasks.

## The paradigm argument

The paradigm argument was introduced in Chapter 1 in order to categorize some of the ontological and epistemological assumptions that are made in business research. It conceives of quantitative and qualitative research as *paradigms* (see Key concept 1.16) in which epistemological assumptions, values, and methods are inextricably intertwined and are incompatible between paradigms (e.g. Guba 1985; D. L. Morgan 1998*b*). Therefore, when researchers combine participant observation with a questionnaire, they are not really combining quantitative and qualitative research, since paradigms are incommensurable—that is, they are incompatible: the integration is only at a superficial level and within a single paradigm.

The problem with the paradigm argument is that it rests, as with the embedded methods argument, on contentions about the interconnectedness of method, and epistemology in particular, that cannot—in the case of business research—be demonstrated. Moreover, while Kuhn (1970) certainly argued that paradigms are incommensurable, it is by no means clear that quantitative and qualitative research are in fact paradigms. As suggested in Chapters 1 and 24, there are areas of overlap and commonality between them.



# Two versions of the debate about quantitative and qualitative research

There would seem to be two different versions about the nature of quantitative and qualitative research, and these two different versions have implications in writers' minds about whether or not the two can be combined.

- An *epistemological version*, as in the embedded methods argument and the paradigm argument, sees quantitative and qualitative research as grounded in incompatible epistemological principles (and ontological ones too, but these tend not to be given as much attention). According to this version of their nature, mixed methods research is not possible.
- A *technical version*, which is the position taken by most researchers whose work is mentioned in the next section, gives greater prominence to the strengths of the data collection and data analysis techniques with which quantitative and qualitative research are each associated and sees these as capable of being fused. There is a recognition that quantitative and qualitative research are each connected with distinctive epistemological and ontological assumptions, but the connections are not viewed as fixed and ineluctable. Research methods are perceived, unlike in the epistemological version, as autonomous. A research method from one research strategy is viewed as capable of being pressed into the service of another. Indeed, in some instances, as will be seen in the next section, the notion that there is a 'leading' research strategy in a mixed methods investigation may not even apply in some cases.

The technical version about the nature of quantitative and qualitative research essentially views the two research strategies as compatible. As a result, mixed methods research becomes both feasible and desirable. It is in that spirit that we now turn to a discussion of the ways in which quantitative and qualitative research can be combined.



# The rise of mixed methods research

Mixed methods research has become an increasingly used and accepted approach to conducting business research and in the social sciences more generally. Bryman (2009) examined articles based on mixed methods research in the period 1994–2003 and found a threefold increase over that period. It has been the focus of a specialist handbook, which has gone into a second edition (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003, 2010), and specialist journals, such as the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*. In the business research area, a specialist mixed methods journal was due to be launched at the time we were writing this book (*International Journal of Mixed Methods for Applied Business and Policy Research*). In the field of marketing, Hanson and Grimmer (2005) found that nearly 9 per cent of all articles in three major marketing journals in the period 1993–2002 derived from mixed methods research, representing around 14 per cent of all empirical articles. An examination of the research methods used in the *Leadership Quarterly*, a journal that specializes in academic articles concerned with leadership and is based in the USA, found that over the first two decades of its existence (1990–2009), the proportion of empirical articles combining quantitative and qualitative research was around 12–13 per cent (Lowe and Gardner 2000; Gardner et al., 2010). Hummerinta-Peltomäki and Nummela (2006) examined four journals in the international business field. They found that 17 per cent of all empirical articles derived from mixed methods research. Molina-Azorín (2009) found that 17 per cent of all empirical articles published in *Strategic Management Journal* between 1997 and 2006 were based on mixed methods research.

Thus, Bryman's (2009) research shows that there has been an increase in articles based on mixed methods research, while content analyses of the research methods used in such articles in the business and management field reveal that around 12–17 per cent are based on this methodological approach. This is somewhat higher than was found in an examination by Alise and Teddlie (2010) of articles published in journals in the following fields: psychology, sociology, nursing, and education. Alise and Teddlie found that 11 per cent of all empirical articles

were based on mixed methods research, with education having a much larger proportion than the three other fields (24 per cent of all empirical articles, against 7, 5, and 9 per cent, respectively). These findings strongly suggest that mixed methods research has acquired credibility in the field of business studies and that it is being employed on a fairly regular basis as a distinctive research strategy.



## Telling it like it is
## Using a mixed methods case study to overcome practical constraints

Lucie's study of entrepreneurial identity was based on a case study of a single organization, but her research design involved the use of quantitative and qualitative research methods. 'Within the case study I employed many different research methods—I carried out interviews, I participated and observed the courses that I attended and I carried out questionnaires and collected as much documentary data as I could. I thought this was all important to kind of get a fuller picture of how these institutes are run. So that was my research design really. It was a lot of different methods.'

Her choice of a mixed methods research approach was partly determined by practical constraints associated with the timing of her research project, which meant that she could not rely completely on the method of participant observation (see Chapter 17). 'Because of constraints of time I couldn't attend all the courses that had been run over the year because most of them had been carried out during the academic year and I was carrying out my dissertation over the summer so I could only attend about two of the different types of programmes. I wanted to get a feel of all the different types of programmes they run because there's some that are run to help students set up a business and there's some that are run to give them certain skills. So I wanted to kind of get a flavour of all of them. Because I couldn't attend all of them I thought it was important that I had to get the students' perspectives that had attended those programmes. So I had to interview them and send out questionnaires to those students and also try and get the perspective of the institute as well—kind of what they were trying to achieve and what kind of enterprise message they were trying to convey to students.'



*To hear more about Lucie's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# Approaches to mixed methods research

This section will be structured in terms of a classification Bryman developed many years ago of the different ways in which mixed methods research has been undertaken (Bryman 1988*a*, 1992). The classification has been changed slightly from the one presented in his earlier publications. Several other ways of classifying such investigations have been proposed by other authors, and two of these are presented in Thinking deeply 25.1 and Thinking Deeply 25.2.

## The logic of triangulation

The idea of triangulation has been previously encountered in Key concept 13.12 and Key concept 16.6. When applied to the present context, it implies that the results of an investigation employing a method associated with one research strategy are cross-checked against the results of using a method associated with the other research strategy. It is an adaptation of the argument by writers such as Webb et al. (1966) that confidence in the findings



## Thinking deeply 25.1
## Hammersley's classification of approaches to mixed methods research

Hammersley (1996) has proposed three approaches to mixed methods research:

- *Triangulation*. This refers to the use of quantitative research to corroborate qualitative research findings or vice versa.
- *Facilitation*. This approach arises when one research strategy is employed in order to aid research using the other research strategy.
- *Complementarity*. This approach occurs when the two research strategies are employed in order that different aspects of an investigation can be dovetailed.



## Thinking deeply 25.2
## A classification of approaches to mixed methods research

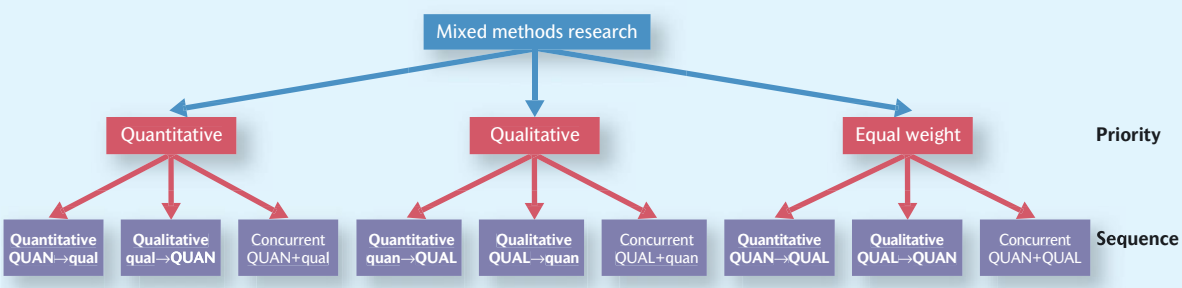
As interest in mixed methods research has grown (see 'The rise of mixed methods research' above), various ways of classifying it have arisen. One approach, which is the one taken in the bulk of this chapter, is in terms of the purposes of mixed methods studies and roles that the quantitative and qualitative components play in such studies (see also Bryman 2006*a*, 2009). However, a further approach has been to classify mixed methods studies in terms of two criteria (see, e.g. D. L., Morgan 1998*b*):

- *The priority decision*. How far is a qualitative or a quantitative method the principal data-gathering tool or do they have equal weight?
- *The sequence decision*. Which method precedes which? In other words, does the qualitative method precede the quantitative one or vice versa or is the data collection associated with each method concurrent?

These criteria yield nine possible types (see Figure 25.1). In this classification, upper case indicates priority,—for example, QUAL indicates that the qualitative component was the main data collection approach; lower case indicates a more subsidiary role—for example, qual. Arrows refer to the sequence—for example, QUAN→qual means that the collection of quantitative data was the main data collection approach and that the collection of these quantitative data was undertaken before the qualitative data, which occupy a subsidiary role. The + simply means that the collection of the quantitative and the qualitative data was conducted more or less concurrently. One difficulty with this and related classifications that embellish it is that it is not always easy to establish issues of priority and sequence when reading the report of a study. However, it is useful as a way of thinking about fundamental aspects of the design of mixed methods studies.

## Figure 25.1

### Classifying mixed methods research in terms of priority and sequence




**Capitals and lower case indicate priority**
**Arrows indicate sequence; + indicates concurrent**

deriving from a study using a quantitative research strategy can be enhanced by using more than one way of measuring a concept. For example, in their longitudinal study of culture in a governmental organization in the USA, Zamanou and Glaser (1994) collected different types of data in order to examine different aspects of organizational reality. By using survey, interview, and observational data, they were able to combine 'the specificity and accuracy of quantitative data with the ability to interpret idiosyncracies and complex perceptions, provided by qualitative analysis' (1994: 478). Ratings on the 190 questionnaires were combined with data from the interviews, 76 of which were conducted before and 94 after the introduction of a communication intervention programme, which was designed to change the organizational culture. One of the researchers also became a participant observer in the organization for a period of two months. Zamanou and Glaser suggest that this triangulated approach enabled the collection of different types of data that related to different cultural elements, from values to material artefacts—something that other cultural researchers have found difficult to achieve.

As mentioned in Key concept 16.6, triangulation can also be associated with a quantitative strategy, as an approach to the development of multiple measures in order to improve confidence in findings (Webb et al. 1966); some writers have suggested that this kind of triangulation is declining in use. This can be demonstrated by reference to an article that has reviewed the methods used within business and management research. Scandura and Williams (2000) analysed all articles published in three top-ranking American journals, *Academy of Management Journal*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, and the *Journal of Management*, over two time periods, 1985–7 and 1995–7. They were particularly interested in tracing changing practice in triangulation of methods and use of different measures of validity. A total of 614 articles was coded for the primary research methodologies they employed. The research showed that, 'to publish in these three top-tier general management journals, researchers are increasingly employing research strategies and methodological approaches that compromise triangulation' (2000: 1259). A further finding indicated that internal, external, and construct validity had also declined during the period. They conclude that 'management research may be moving even further away from rigour' (2000: 1259), limiting the applicability of findings by failing to triangulate, using various designs in a programme of research in order to help counterbalance the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Another illustration of a study that uses a triangulation approach is an investigation by P. Stiles (2001) into the impact of boards of directors on corporate strategy. Stiles used a multi-method research design, which involved the following methods:

- *In-depth semi-structured interviews with 51 main board directors of UK public companies*. This was Stiles's primary means of collecting data. In order to develop a grounded understanding of board activities, he sought to allow directors 'to reveal their perceptions' (2001: 632). Pilot interviews, using a schedule based on analysis of existing literature, were carried out with five directors, and these were used to develop the final set of topics. Stiles also carried out a number of supplementary interviews with other stakeholders, which included a city journalist, a representative from the Consumers' Association, and a number of leading academics.
- *A questionnaire survey of 121 company secretaries*. Stiles's quantitative element in his research design relied on a questionnaire, which was sent to 900 members of the Institute of Company Secretaries and Administrators. This generated a response rate of 14 per cent. Had this been the main research method upon which the study relied, the low response rate would have called into question the external validity of the findings. However, Stiles points out that questionnaire results are used 'to support the main findings, which emerged from the qualitative data and . . . are meant to be illustrative rather than definitive' (2001: 633).
- *Four case studies of UK plcs, where several board members were interviewed, and secondary, archival data were collected*. Stiles chose four large UK businesses in which to test findings that emerged from data collected using his two preliminary research methods. The cases were chosen because they had strong reputations but had experienced periods of turbulence and change. Stiles claims that 'this buttressing of the original findings through testing in four different research sites affords a further element of triangulation into the study, with the new data from the case testing the validity and generality of the initial findings' (2001: 634). Validity was also improved through respondent validation (see Key concept 16.5), involving a draft of the findings being sent to the case companies on which individuals were invited to comment.

Stiles's main finding, that multiple perspectives are required in order to understand fully the nature of board

activity, owes something to his research approach, which enabled exploration of the strategy-making role of the board and its multifunctional nature. In this research, the use of a triangulation strategy seems to have been planned by the researcher, and the two sets of results were broadly consistent. However, researchers may carry out mixed methods research for other purposes, but in the course of doing so discover that they have generated quantitative and qualitative findings on related issues, so that they can treat such overlapping findings as a triangulation exercise. Yauch and Steudel (2003: 467) provide an example of unplanned triangulation, in a study that was conducted 'to identify key cultural factors that aided or hindered a company's ability to successfully implement manufacturing cells'. They collected qualitative data in two case study firms that had recently introduced cellular manufacturing and also developed and administered in these firms a questionnaire instrument called the 'Organizational Culture Inventory'. The main goal of using both quantitative and qualitative research was to glean through the latter some of the factors that lay behind the patterns that were uncovered through the questionnaire. However, they also found that, while the two sets of data were congruent for one company, for the other they were not, prompting the researchers to explore possible reasons for the two sets of data to be inconsistent for one of the companies.

Whether planned or unplanned, when a triangulation exercise is undertaken, the possibility of a failure to corroborate findings always exists. This raises the issue of what approach should be taken towards inconsistent results. One approach is to treat one set of results as definitive. However, simply and often arbitrarily favouring one set of findings over another is not an ideal approach to reconciling conflicting findings deriving from a triangulation exercise.

## Qualitative research facilitates quantitative research

There are several ways in which qualitative research can be used to guide quantitative research.

- *Providing hypotheses*. Because of its tendency towards an unstructured, open-ended approach to data collection, qualitative research is often very helpful as a source of hypotheses or hunches that can be subsequently tested using a quantitative research strategy. An example is a study by Tripp et al. (2002) of revenge in the workplace. Initially, eighty-eight working MBA students in the USA were asked to give an account of two incidents in which the student or someone else had sought to gain revenge against another person. The revenge episodes were examined to establish the activities involved in taking revenge. The overriding finding was that symmetry between the initial episode and the revenge should be in line with each other. This symmetry has two elements: symmetry of consequences—the revenge should do the same amount of harm as the original wrongdoing; and symmetry of method—the way in which revenge is exacted should resemble that involved in the initial harm that was done. Drawing on this distinction, the researchers conducted a second study, using an experimental design, to test their prediction, which emerged out of the qualitative study, that 'the symmetry of consequences will influence individual judgments of revenge [and] symmetry of method should shape individual judgments about revenge' (Tripp et al. 2002: 972–3). In fact, the experiment did not entirely support these expectations. When revenge is symmetric in terms of consequences, the experiment showed that the vengeful act is viewed more positively. This was in line with the researchers' expectations. However, symmetry of method operated in a manner contrary to their expectations: vengeful acts were viewed *more* harshly when they were symmetric with the original harmful act.
- *Aiding measurement*. The in-depth knowledge of social contexts acquired through qualitative research can be used to inform the design of survey questions for structured interviewing and self-completion questionnaires. In their study of work relationships in telephone call centres, Deery, Iverson, and Walsch (2002) analysed data from a questionnaire survey of 480 telephone service operators in 5 call centre locations in Melbourne and Sydney, Australia. The questionnaire was constructed following 'site visits and extensive discussions with focus groups of employees and meetings with shop stewards, team leaders and call centre managers' (2002: 481), and this helped the researchers to develop their understanding of the possible negative effects of this kind of work on the psychological well-being of employees. This preliminary, qualitative stage of the research, and the fact that the survey was endorsed both by the company and the union, may have contributed towards the high overall survey response rate of 88 per cent, a further benefit gained from the mixed methods research approach. Another example is given in Research in focus 25.3, where qualitative interviews informed the design of a questionnaire measure of the concept of organizational assimilation.



## Research in focus 25.3
## Using qualitative data to inform quantitative measurement

Myers and Oetzel (2003) report the development and validation of a questionnaire measure of the concept of organizational assimilation using a mixed methods approach. Organizational assimilation is concerned with the degree to which individuals are integrated into the culture of an organization. Their initial research question was to do with establishing the dimensions of organizational assimilation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirteen members of organizations who were asked to describe their experiences of becoming assimilated into their organizations. The analysis of the answers yielded six dimensions:

- familiarity with others: refers to getting to know people and interacting with them;
- acculturation: becoming acquainted with and absorbing the organizational culture;
- recognition: coming to feel that one's work is important in the organization;
- involvement with the organization: making a contribution to the organization through extra effort;
- job competency: becoming competent in one's work;
- adaptation and role negotiation: adapting to their organizational roles and adjusting to organizational expectations.

A questionnaire measure comprising sixty-one Likert-style items was then developed to reflect each of these six dimensions, with the respondent being asked to indicate strength of agreement or disagreement with each statement. For example, one of the items designed to indicate 'recognition' entailed indicating extent of agreement or disagreement with the statement 'My boss listens to my ideas' and for 'acculturation' one of the items was 'I know the values of my organization'. The researchers formulated some hypotheses to assess the construct validity of the measure. For example, they hypothesized that organizational assimilation will be:

- positively correlated with job satisfaction;
- positively correlated with organizational identification;
- negatively correlated with propensity to leave.

The face validity of the questionnaire was established by pre-testing it with two graduate students and two individuals from organizations that had participated in the research. Following some revisions to the wording, the questionnaires in which the measure of organizational assimilation was embedded were administered to individuals in the participating organizations. These hypotheses were confirmed so that the construct validity of the measure was established. In this study, qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviewing was employed to explore the underlying meanings of the concept of organizational assimilation, and a questionnaire was then developed based on some of the insights gleaned from the analysis of the qualitative data.

## Quantitative research facilitates qualitative research

One of the chief ways in which quantitative research can prepare the ground for qualitative research is through the selection of people to be interviewed, or companies to be selected as case studies. For example, Scase and Goffee (1989) used the results of their questionnaire survey of 374 UK managers (see Research in focus 2.15) to generate a smaller, representative sample of 80 managers for in-depth interviews. Similarly, in the research by Storey et al. (2002) on flexible employment (see Research in focus 25.4), the postal questionnaire survey of 2,700 companies provided a basis for selection of 8 case study firms where the survey data had suggested there was an association between innovation and flexible employment. The case studies were then explored using a qualitative research strategy based on in-depth semi-structured interviewing in order to investigate internal sources of knowledge and expertise within the organization.



## Research in focus 25.4
## Using quantitative research to facilitate qualitative research

In a study that examined the relationship between increasing use of 'flexible employment contracts' and the incidence of product and process innovations, Storey et al. (2002) describe their use of two complementary research methods: (*a*) a postal survey and (*b*) eight case studies.

In the postal survey of 2,700 companies, random sampling methods were used to select a representative cross-section of UK private-sector companies. Data collection in the case studies was used to help unpack some of the main findings from the survey. This second part of the research design relied on *theoretical sampling*; from the survey data the researchers identified instances of organizations where there was an association between high performance in innovation and various forms of flexible employment and outsourcing. They then approached these firms on the basis of their emerging theoretical focus and requested case study access, in order to explore some of the processes and rationales surrounding innovation and flexible employment in greater detail.

The case study part of the research then used in-depth semi-structured interviews, which were tape-recorded and transcribed. Interviewees were selected on the basis of snowball sampling, by moving from initial contacts to colleagues who were identified as 'important to the research'. In several cases, the researchers also carried out interviews in supplier and customer organizations in order to investigate external sources of knowledge and expertise. In total, fifty-seven interviews were conducted. However, Storey et al. do not explain how the decision to stop sampling was reached—that is, whether or not this was when theoretical saturation was achieved.

Findings from the large-scale survey suggest that in most firms the rhetoric of the strategic importance of innovation is not reflected by the proportion of resources devoted to it. Findings from both the survey and the case studies show that employers rarely use flexible working as a lever to achieve innovation; instead, the two phenomena are relatively decoupled at an organizational level. They conclude that an increase in the use of flexible labour has occurred in parallel with the greater emphasis on innovation, but that the pursuit of innovation has occurred independently of increased use of flexible employment contracts.

## Filling in the gaps

This approach to mixed methods research occurs when the researcher cannot rely on either a quantitative or a qualitative method alone and must buttress his or her findings with a method drawn from the other research strategy. Its most typical form is when ethnographers employ structured interviewing or possibly a self-completion questionnaire, because not everything they need to know about is accessible through participant observation. This kind of need can arise for several reasons, such as the need for information that is not accessible to observation or to qualitative interviewing (for example, systematic information about social backgrounds of people in a particular setting), or the difficulty of gaining access to certain groups of people. For example, Hochschild (1989) used quantitative analysis of time use in her study of working couples with children to assess levels of participation in everyday domestic work. This formed the basis for her qualitative exploration based on interviews and observation of the gender strategies that working couples use (see Research in focus 25.5). Equally, qualitative methods may be used to provide important contextual information that supplements the findings from a larger quantitative study. For example, Zamanou and Glaser (1994) used semi-structured interviews and participant observation in order to help interpret and place in context the results of statistical analyses of the Organizational Culture Scale (OCS), which formed the basis for their questionnaire survey of culture change in a government organization. They state:

> the results of the OCS provided a quantitative description of the culture of the organization, but the study still lacked an exploration of the deeper, more subjective, and less observable layers of culture. Thus qualitative measures (i.e. interviews, observations) were combined with the questionnaire results to illustrate the quantitative findings and to provide an examination of the depth of the culture. (1994: 479)



## Research in focus 25.5

## Using quantitative data about time use to fill in the gaps in a qualitative study

Hochschild (1989) took a 'naturalistic approach' to understanding the way that working parents deal with the demands of work and home life. Together with her two 'associates', she interviewed fifty couples where both parents were in paid work; two-thirds of them were interviewed several times. She also interviewed forty-five other individuals, including baby-sitters, daycare workers, schoolteachers, traditional couples with small children, and divorcees who had formerly been part of two-job couples. The main part of her study was thus qualitative. However, she first carried out quantitative analysis of her respondents' time use, measuring how much time they spent working and on domestic tasks using a short questionnaire sent to every thirteenth name from the personnel list of a large corporation. This quantitative aspect of Hochschild's research design enabled her to gain information that was not accessible from interview data alone. Although it would have been possible to collect information about time use through observational methods, this would have been very time-consuming. At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked if they were willing to volunteer to be interviewed. This sample then formed the basis for the qualitative aspect of the study.

## Static and processual features

One of the contrasts suggested by Table 16.1 is that, whereas quantitative research tends to bring out a static picture of social life, qualitative research is more processual. The term 'static' can easily be viewed in a rather negative light. In fact, it is very valuable on many occasions to uncover regularities, and it is often the identification of such regularities that allows a processual analysis to proceed. A mixed methods research approach offers the prospect of being able to combine both elements.

For example, Zamanou and Glaser (1994) wanted to explore the impact of a communication intervention programme designed to change the culture of a governmental organization from hierarchical and authoritarian to participative and involved. They argue that the study of organizational culture lends itself to a mixed methods research approach because different methods can be used to capture different cultural elements and processes. In addition, as we mentioned in Chapter 16, a longitudinal research design can enable understanding of events over time (see Research in focus 16.9). The questionnaire survey used by Zamanou and Glaser provided a static picture of the organizational culture prior to the intervention (Time 1) and again after it had ended (Time 2). It was hypothesized that ratings on scales such as teamwork, morale, and involvement would be significantly higher after the intervention than before it. Interviews were then used to explore employees' perceptions of culture in more detail, asking them to describe cultural incidents, events, and stories that had helped to form their perceptions. However, it is not only qualitative research that can incorporate processual analysis. Quantitative diary study research by R. Stewart (1967) analysed the way in which 160 managers spent their time during a four-week period in order to discover similarities and differences in their use of time and the reasons for them (see Research in focus 9.4). In focusing on managerial activity over a period of time, this study provided a dynamic, rather than a static, analysis of what managers actually do.

## Research issues and participants' perspectives

Sometimes, researchers want to gather two kinds of data: qualitative data that will allow them to gain access to the perspectives of the people they are studying; and quantitative data that will allow them to explore specific issues in which they are interested. When this occurs, they are seeking to explore an area in both ways, so that they can both adopt an unstructured approach to data collection in which participants' meanings are the focus of attention and investigate a specific set of issues through the more structured approach of quantitative research. An example of this is Milkman's (1997) study of a General Motors car manufacturing plant in the USA, referred to in Chapter 16.

Milkman was interested in the nature of the labour process in the late twentieth century and whether or not

new factory conditions were markedly different for car workers from the negative portrayals of such work in the 1950s and early 1960s (e.g. Blauner 1964). As such, she was interested in the meaning of industrial work. She employed semi-structured interviews and focus groups with car production workers to elicit data relevant to this aspect of her work. However, in addition she had some specific interests in a 'buyout' plan that the company's management introduced in the mid-1980s after it had initiated a variety of changes to work practices. The plan gave workers the opportunity to give up their jobs for a substantial cash payment. In 1988, Milkman carried out a questionnaire survey of workers who had taken up the company's buyout offer. These workers were surveyed again the following year and in 1991. The reason for the surveys was that Milkman had some very specific interests in the buyout scheme, such as reasons for taking the buyout, how they had fared since leaving General Motors, how they felt about their current employment, and differences between social groups (in particular, different ethnic groups) in current earnings relative to those at General Motors.

## The problem of generality

As noted in Chapter 24, a problem that is often referred to by critics of qualitative research is that the tendency for findings to be presented in an anecdotal fashion is frequently frustrating, since we are given little sense of the relative importance of the themes identified. Silverman (1984, 1985) has argued that some quantification of findings from qualitative research can often help to uncover the generality of the phenomena being described.



### Research in focus 25.6
### A mixed methods case study

Kanter (1977) describes her research at Indsco as a 'case study of a single organization'. Kanter describes how, over a five-year period, she spent time as a consultant, participant-observer, and researcher at Indsco Supply Corporation. Her sources of data included:

- a postal questionnaire survey, taking 2–3 hours to complete, of 205 sales workers and managers out of a population of 350;
- semi-structured interviews with the first 20 women to enter the sales force;
- access to a survey of employees on attitudes towards promotion;
- content analysis of 100 performance appraisal forms;
- group discussions with employees—from managers to secretaries, recorded verbatim;
- participation in meetings;
- participant observation in training programmes;
- internal reports, memoranda, and public documents relating to personnel policies;
- conversations in offices, at social gatherings, or in people's homes.

Overall, Kanter suggests that she spent over 120 personal contact days on-site, and the number of people with whom she held conversations was well over 120. A further 500 people participated in written surveys—the primary source of quantitative data used in the study. Kanter draws attention to the potential for *generalizability* from a single case, by suggesting that 'the case provided material out of which to generate the concepts and flesh for giving meaning to the abstract propositions I was developing' (1977: 332).

Although Kanter does not claim statistical generalizability for her data, she does draw attention to the way that she used the data from the case to generate concepts that could be transferred to other organizational contexts. Hence she states that, after having formulated her initial impressions about Indsco, she had conversations with informants in three other large corporations 'in order to satisfy myself that Indsco . . . was not particularly unique in the relationships I observed. I learned that Indsco, indeed, was typical, and its story could be that of many large corporations' (1977: 332).

In addition, the combined use of qualitative and quantitative research methods represents a common pattern in case study research in business and management, used by researchers in order to enhance the generality of their findings. An illustration of this tendency is given in Research in focus 25.6, where Kanter (1977) describes the diverse range of methods that she used in her case study of a single organization, Indsco Supply Corporation. Even though the fieldwork was undertaken in just one company and the case constituted a focus of interest in its own right, Kanter claims that its findings are typical of other large corporations. However, it is more than coincidental that she makes this claim only after having accounted in some detail for the complex set of methods that were involved in her mixed methods research approach.

Other studies have attempted to counter the criticism of anecdotalism that is levelled at qualitative research by introducing a quantitative aspect into their analysis. These include Bryman, Stephens, and A Campo's (1996) study of leadership in the British police force and Gabriel's 1998 study of organizational culture (see Chapter 24), both of which calculate the frequency of themes in order to provide a sense of their relative importance. However, Silverman warns that such quantification should reflect research participants' own ways of understanding their social world. If this occurs, the quantification is more consistent with the goals of qualitative research.

## Qualitative research may facilitate the interpretation of the relationship between variables

One of the problems that frequently confront quantitative researchers is how to explain relationships between variables. One strategy is to look for what is called an intervening variable, which is influenced by the independent variable but which in turn has an effect on the dependent variable. Thus, if we find a relationship between gender and small business ownership, we might propose that entrepreneurial attitude is one factor behind the relationship implying:

> gender → entrepreneurial attitude → small business ownership.

This sequence implies that the variable gender has an impact on how an individual feels about taking on an entrepreneurial role and becoming committed to the ideals associated with it (for example, belief in economic self-advancement, individualism, self-reliance, and a strong work ethic), which in turn has implications for the kinds of choices they make within the labour market. However, an alternative approach might be to seek to explore the relationship between the variables further by conducting a qualitative investigation of the ways in which entrepreneurial work is situated within gendered processes that are embedded within society (Mirchandani 1999). This would involve challenging the sequence of these variables, drawing attention to the gendered nature of entrepreneurial values.

Truss (2001) argues that more qualitative research is needed in order to increase our understanding of the link between HRM and organizational performance (see Research in focus 25.7). She suggests many existing studies rely on a single informant in each organization and focus on financial performance, rather than on a broader range of outcome variables. In contrast, adopting a mixed methods longitudinal research design, Truss was able to explain how Hewlett-Packard's people management philosophy, known as 'The HP Way', was translated into policies by the HR function.

The questionnaire data enabled comparison with other companies, showing, for example, that employees were significantly more positive regarding the effectiveness of recruitment at HP. Overall, employees received more training and development than in the other high-performance companies, and appraisals were regularly conducted. However, once the researchers attempted to probe beneath the surface, it emerged that 'The HP Way' was open to quite different interpretations. For example, during the first wave of data collection it was found that, prior to the redundancies in the 1980s, employees had believed that 'The HP Way' meant they would have 'jobs for life'. It was also found that the move towards flexible working was having an adverse effect on staff loyalty. In terms of recruitment and selection, the strength of corporate values expressed in 'The HP Way' had given rise to a rather narrow view of the HP employee, and individuals who did not fit this profile were unlikely to survive within the company. These findings suggest that changes in the company's environment, which was becoming increasingly competitive and hostile, were having a negative effect on HRM. In conclusion, the research provides only limited support for the view that effective HRM is the key to achieving sustained competitive advantage, instead suggesting that environmental events and conditions play a significant part. Finally, Truss concludes that these findings are the direct result of the qualitative aspect of the study:



## Research in focus 25.7
## A mixed methods approach to the study of HRM and performance

In her research on the relationship between human resource management (HRM) and performance at Hewlett-Packard, Truss (2001) used a triangulated approach in order to overcome the limitations of research on this topic, which has tended to rely heavily on quantitative methods. She also incorporated a longitudinal element into the research design, by collecting data at two points in time, once in 1994 and again in 1996. Four principal research methods were used on each occasion:

- *questionnaires*: 400 distributed to a random sample of employees at middle-manager level and below, generating a response rate of 56 per cent in 1994 and 52 per cent in 1996; in order to provide an indicative point of comparison with the questionnaire data, Truss also makes reference to data that were collected from six other high-performance organizations at the same time and using the same questionnaire instrument, as part of a larger study with which she was involved;
- *focus groups*: with senior members of the HR department;
- *semi-structured interviews*: with employees from all levels of the firm;
- *secondary data*: from documents on topics such as recruitment and selection, training, career management, appraisal, and reward from within the organization.

This approach results in the generation of an extremely in-depth case study from which it is possible to explore 'not only the "rhetoric" of what the HR group was trying to achieve, but also the reality experienced by employees' (2001: 1128).

> Had we relied on questionnaire data obtained from a single informant (the HR director, as in other studies) and carried out a quantitative analysis linking performance with human resource processes, we would have concluded that this organization was an example of an organization employing 'High Performance Work Practices' to good effect. However, employing a contextualized, case-study method has enabled us to see below the surface and tap into the reality experienced by employees, which often contrasts sharply with the company rhetoric. (2001: 1145)

The quantitative research results could thus be seen as somewhat misleading, in that they reflect the organization's rhetorical position rather than the reality experienced by employees. Truss is suggesting that the latter would not have been exposed without the addition of qualitative methods of investigation. Another mixed methods study in which qualitative findings allowed the authors to arrive at a more rounded picture than the quantitative data alone revealed can be found in Research in focus 1.18. The questionnaire data collected by Holmberg et al. (2008) revealed the general pattern whereby leadership was found to influence the success or failure of the implementation of evidence-based treatment practices for drug abuse and criminal behaviour in Sweden, but the qualitative data brought out the specific significance of leaders being actively interested in the programme and being available for support.

## Studying different aspects of a phenomenon

This category of mixed methods research incorporates two forms Bryman has referred to in earlier work as 'the relationship between "macro" and "micro" levels' and 'stages in the research process', but provides a more general formulation (Bryman 1988*a*: 147–51). The former draws attention to the tendency to think of quantitative research as most suited to the investigation of 'macro' phenomena (such as social mobility) and qualitative research as better suited to 'micro' ones (such as small-group interaction).

In the example shown in Research in focus 25.8, Wajcman and Martin (2002) used quantitative methods in the form of a questionnaire survey to explore the career patterns of male and female managers. However, they also carried out qualitative, semi-structured interviews to explore the way that managers made sense of their career patterns in terms of their identity; their choice of methods was, therefore, determined by the particular aspect of career orientation they were interested in.

Table 16.1 also illustrates this distinction. The category 'stages in the research process' draws attention to the possibility that quantitative and qualitative research may be suited to different phases in a study. However, it now seems to us that these are simply aspects of a more general tendency for quantitative and qualitative researchers to examine different aspects of their area of interest.



## Research in focus 25.8

### Combining survey research and qualitative interviewing in a study of managers

Wajcman and Martin (2002) conducted survey research using a questionnaire on male and female managers (470 in total) in six Australian companies. The authors were interested in career orientations and attitudes. They also conducted semi-structured interviews with 136 managers in each company. The survey evidence showed that male and female managers were generally more similar than different in terms of most variables. Thus, contrary to what many people might have anticipated, women's career experiences and orientations were *not* distinctive. They then examined the qualitative interviews in terms of narratives of identity. Wajcman and Martin found that both male and female managers depicted their careers in 'market' terms (as needing to respond to the requirements of the managerial labour market to develop their skills, experience, and hence career). *But*, whereas, for men, narratives of career meshed seamlessly with narratives of domestic life, for women there was a disjuncture. Female managers found it much harder to reconcile managerial identities with domestic ones. They needed to opt for one. Thus, choices about career and family are still gendered. This research shows how a mixed methods research approach was able to reveal much more than could have been gleaned through one approach alone by collecting evidence on both career patterns and expectations and identities using research methods suited to each issue area.

A further illustration of the use of mixed methods research to explore different aspects of a phenomenon can be found in a study of how people use their time at work conducted by Perlow (1997, 1999), previously encountered in Chapter 16 and Key concept 17.1. Although this study mainly comprised ethnographic methods, which included participant observation and semi-structured interviewing, Perlow also used a time-use diary (see Chapter 9) similar to the one used by R. Stewart (1967; see Research in focus 9.4), to record and measure quantitatively the time that software engineers spent on various activities each day. She explains:

> On randomly chosen days, I asked three or four of the twelve software engineers to track their activities from when they woke up until they went to bed. I asked them to wear a digital watch that beeped on the hour and, at each beep, to write down everything that they had done during the previous hour. I encouraged them to write down interactions as they occurred and to use the beeps as an extra reminder to keep track of their activities. (Perlow 1999: 61)

The ethnographic methods were intended to capture the cultural norms and values held by the software engineers, while the time-use diary was specifically directed towards measurement of their time use. Using this combined approach, Perlow was able to build up a picture of *how* the engineers use their work time (using a quantitative strategy) and an understanding of *why*

they use their work time in this way (using qualitative methods). In this study, mixed methods research was geared to addressing different kinds of research question. After each tracking log had been completed, Perlow conducted a debriefing interview with each engineer, who explained the patterns of interaction recorded on the log sheets. From this Perlow was able to calculate the total time the engineer spent at work and the proportion of that time spent on interactive versus individual activities. Perlow found that, although 60 per cent of the engineers' time was spent on individual activities, and just over 30 per cent was spent on interactive activities, the time spent alone did not occur in one consecutive block.

> Rather, examination of the sequences of individual and interactive activities revealed that a large proportion of the time spent uninterrupted on individual activities was spent in very short blocks of time, sandwiched between interactive activities. Seventy-five percent of the blocks of time spent uninterrupted on individual activities were one hour or less in length, and, of those blocks of time, 60 percent were half an hour or less in length. (1999: 64)

This finding forms the basis for the theoretical conclusions that Perlow is able to draw in relation to the crisis mentality induced by the engineers, work patterns, and the heroic acts that this culture encourages and rewards. In her analysis, she is able to illustrate these themes through presentation of the ethnographic research data. However, it is the *quantitative* analysis of time use that provides the initial impetus for the theoretical conclusions that Perlow is able to draw.

This form of mixed methods research entails making decisions about which kinds of research question are best answered using a quantitative research method and which by a qualitative research method, and about how best to interweave the different elements, especially since, as suggested in the context of the discussion about triangulation, the outcomes of mixtures of methods are not always predictable.



## Research in focus 25.9

## Using mixed methods research to solve a puzzle: the case of displayed emotions in convenience stores

An example of combining quantitative and qualitative research to solve a puzzle is Sutton and Rafaeli's (1988) study of the display of emotions in organizations. Following a traditional quantitative research strategy, based on their examination of studies like Hochschild (1983), Sutton and Rafaeli formulated a hypothesis suggesting a positive relationship between the display of positive emotions to retail shoppers (smiling, friendly greeting, eye contact) and the level of retail sales. In other words, we would expect that, when retail staff are friendly and give time to shoppers, sales will be better than when they fail to do so. Sutton and Rafaeli had access to data that allowed this hypothesis to be tested. The data derived from a study of 576 convenience stores in a national retail chain in the USA.

Structured observation of retail workers provided the data on the display of positive emotions, and sales data provided information for the other variable. The hypothesis implied that there would be a positive relationship—that is, that stores in which there was a more pronounced display of positive emotions would report superior sales. When the data were analysed, a relationship was confirmed, but it was found to be negative; that is, stores in which retail workers were *less* inclined to smile, be friendly, and so on tended to have better sales than those in which such emotions were in evidence. This was the reverse of what the authors had anticipated they would uncover. Sutton and Rafaeli (1992: 124) considered restating their hypothesis to make it seem that they had found what they had expected, but fortunately resisted the temptation!

Instead, they conducted a qualitative investigation of four case study stores to help understand what was happening. This involved a number of methods: unstructured observation of interactions between staff and customers; semi-structured interviews with store managers; brief periods of participant observation; casual conversations with store managers, supervisors, executives, and others; and data gathered through posing as a customer in stores. The stores were chosen in terms of two criteria: high or low sales, and whether or not staff typically displayed positive emotions. The qualitative investigation suggested that the relationship between the display of positive emotions and sales *was* negative, but that sales were likely to be a cause rather than a consequence of the display of emotions. This pattern occurred because, in stores with high levels of sales, staff were under greater pressure and encountered longer queues at checkouts. Staff therefore had less time and inclination for the pleasantries associated with the display of positive emotions. The quantitative data were then re-analysed with this alternative interpretation in mind and it was supported.

Thus, instead of the causal sequence being

display of positive emotions → retail sales

it was

retail sales → display of positive emotions.

This exercise also highlights the main difficulty associated with inferring causal direction from a cross-sectional research design (see Key concept 2.13 and Figure 2.2).

## Solving a puzzle

The outcomes of research are, as suggested by the last sentence, not always easy to anticipate. Although people sometimes cynically suggest that social scientists find what they want to find or that social scientists just convey the obvious, the capacity of the obvious to provide us with puzzling surprises should never be underestimated. When this occurs, employing a research method associated with the research strategy not initially used can be helpful. One context in which this might occur is when qualitative research is used as a salvage operation, when an anticipated set of results from a quantitative investigation fails to materialize (Weinholtz, Kacer, and Rocklin 1995). Research in focus 25.9 provides an interesting illustration of this use of mixed methods research. Another situation arises when questionnaire response rates are too low to be used as the sole data source upon which to base findings. P. Stiles (2001; see Chapter 24), for example, generated only a 14 per cent response rate from the 900 questionnaires that were sent to members of the Institute of Company Secretaries and Administrators. Interview and case study data provided him with alternative data sources upon which to focus.

Like unplanned triangulation, this category of mixed methods research is more or less impossible to plan for. It essentially provides the quantitative researcher with an alternative either to reconstructing a hypothesis or to filing the results away (and probably never looking at them again) when findings are inconsistent with a hypothesis. It is probably not an option in all cases in which a hypothesis is not confirmed. There may also be instances in which a quantitative study could shed light on puzzling findings drawn from a qualitative investigation.



# Reflections on mixed methods research

There can be little doubt that mixed methods research is becoming far more common than when one of us first started writing about it (Bryman 1988*a*). Two particularly significant factors in prompting this development are:

1. a growing preparedness to think of research methods as techniques of data collection or analysis that are not as encumbered by epistemological and ontological baggage as is sometimes supposed; and

2. a softening in the attitude towards quantitative research among feminist researchers, who had previously been highly resistant to its use (see Chapter 16 for a discussion of this point).

Other factors are doubtless relevant, but these two developments do seem especially significant. Yet lingering unease among some practitioners of qualitative research, particularly regarding issues to do with reliability and generalizability of findings, has led to some calls for a consideration of the possible use of quantitative research in tandem with qualitative methods (e.g. Schrøder 1999). However, it is important to realize that mixed methods research is not intrinsically superior to mono-method or mono-strategy research. It is tempting to think that mixed methods research is more or less inevitably superior to research that relies on a single method on the grounds that more, and more varied, findings are inevitably 'a good thing'. Indeed, social scientists sometimes display such a view (Bryman 2007*c*). However, several points must be borne in mind. These reflections are influenced by recent writings concerned with indicators of quality in mixed methods research (e.g. Bryman, Becker, and Sempik 2008; O'Cathain, Murphy and Nicholl 2008).

1. Mixed methods research, like mono-method research, must be competently designed and conducted. Poorly conducted research will yield suspect findings, no matter how many methods are employed.

2. Just like mono-method or mono-strategy research, mixed methods research must be appropriate to the research questions or research area with which you are concerned. There is no point collecting more data simply on the basis that 'more is better'. Mixed methods research has to be dovetailed to research questions, just as all research methods must be. It is, after all, likely to consume considerably more time and financial resources than research relying on just one method.

3. It is best to be explicit about why you have conducted mixed methods research. Providing a rationale for its use gives the reader a better sense of the relationship between the research questions and the research methods and also what the use of two or more methods was meant to achieve in terms of the overall project.

4. Try not to think of mixed methods research as made up of separate components. It is best to consider how the quantitative and qualitative components are related to each other from the outset. There is a feeling among many writers with an interest in such research that many so-called mixed methods projects are not really mixed at all, because the researchers do not adquately integrate their quantitative and qualitative findings. This is particularly evident when researchers present and discuss their quantitative and qualitative findings separately rather than bringing the evidence together. We will return to this issue in Chapter 27.

5. Make sure that you provide a sufficiently detailed account of all of the methodological details of the research for both the quantitative and the qualitative components. Sometimes researchers provide more detail concerning one element or give only a surface treatment of both. So, make sure that information about sampling, design, and administration of research instruments, analysis of the data, and the like are provided for both components.

6. Any research project has limited resources. Employing mixed methods research may dilute the research effort in any area, since resources would need to be spread.

7. By no means all researchers have the skills and training to carry out both quantitative and qualitative research, so that their 'trained incapacities' may act as a barrier to integration (Reiss 1968: 351). However, there is a growing recognition of the potential of mixed methods research, so that this point probably carries less weight than it did when Reiss was writing.

In other words, mixed methods research should not be considered as an approach that is universally applicable or as a panacea. It may provide a better understanding of a phenomenon than if just one method had been used. It may also frequently enhance our confidence in our own or others' findings—for example, when a triangulation exercise has been conducted. It may even improve our chances of access to settings to which we might otherwise be excluded; Milkman (1997: 192), for example, has suggested in the context of her research on a General Motors factory that the promise that she 'would produce "hard", quantitative data through survey research was what secured [her] access', even though she had no experience in this method. But the general point remains: that mixed methods research, while offering great potential in many instances, is subject to similar constraints and considerations as research relying on a single method or research strategy.



## Key points

- While there has been a growth in the amount of mixed methods research, not all writers support its use.
- Objections to mixed methods research tend to be the result of a view that there are epistemological and ontological impediments to the combination of quantitative and qualitative research.
- There are several ways of combining quantitative and qualitative research and of representing mixed methods research.
- The outcomes of combining quantitative and qualitative research can be planned or unplanned.



## Questions for review

- What is mixed methods research?

### *The argument against mixed methods research*

- What are the main elements of the embedded methods and paradigm arguments in terms of their implications for the possibility of mixed methods research?

### *Two versions of the debate about quantitative and qualitative research*

- What are the main elements of the technical and epistemological versions of the debate about quantitative and qualitative research? What are the implications of these two versions of the debate for mixed methods research?

### *The rise of mixed methods research*

- How does the field of business research compare with other areas of the social sciences in terms of the frequency with which it is employed?

### *Approaches to mixed methods research*

- Why might it be helpful to distinguish between different mixed methods research designs in terms of the priority and the sequence of the quantitative and the qualitative components?
- What are the chief ways in which quantitative and qualitative research have been combined?
- What is the logic of triangulation?
- Traditionally, qualitative research has been depicted as having a preparatory role in relation to quantitative research. To what extent do the different forms of mixed methods research reflect this view?

### *Reflections on mixed methods research*

- Why has mixed methods research become more prominent?
- Is mixed methods research necessarily superior to single strategy research?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Mixed Methods Research: Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Research.*

# 26

# E-research: Internet research methods

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 647

**The Internet as object of analysis** 648

**Using websites to collect data from individuals** 651

**Virtual ethnography** 652

**Qualitative research using online focus groups** 655

**Qualitative research using online personal interviews** 659

**Online social surveys** 661

- Email surveys 661
- Web surveys 662
- Mixing modes of survey administration 663
- Sampling issues 663
- Overview 669

**Ethical considerations in e-research** 669

**The state of e-research** 673

***Key points*** 673

***Questions for review*** 674



## Chapter outline

This chapter is concerned with the ways in which the Internet can be used in research. Most readers will be familiar with using the Internet as a means of searching for material on companies or on topics for essays and various other uses. It can be very valuable for such purposes, but this kind of activity is not the focus of this chapter. Instead, we are concerned with the ways in which Internet websites can be used as objects of analysis in their own right and with the ways that the Internet can be used as a means of collecting data, much like the post and the telephone.

# Introduction

There can be little doubting that the Internet and online communication have proliferated since the early 1990s and indeed since the publication of the first edition of this book in 2003. For the UK, it has been estimated that Internet usage between 2000 and 2009 increased by 203 per cent:
*www.internetworldstats.com/stats4.htm#europe*
(accessed 31 March 2010)

Meanwhile, the Office for National Statistics has estimated that in 2009 70 per cent of households had access to the Internet:
*www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?ID=88*
(accessed 31 March 2010)

It would be surprising if this boom did not have implications for the practice of business research, and, as we will show, researchers have been quick to take advantage of the many research possibilities offered by the Internet.

Given this background of Internet expansion, many students are drawn to the Internet as an environment within which to conduct business research. The Internet offers several opportunities in this regard and in this chapter we will focus on:

- the Internet as object of analysis;
- ethnographic study of the Internet;
- qualitative research using online focus groups;
- qualitative research using online personal interviews;
- online social surveys.

The ongoing and burgeoning nature of the Internet and online communication makes it difficult to characterize this field and its impact on business research and its conduct in any straightforward and simple way. In this chapter, we will be concerned with the following areas of e-research:

1. websites and web pages as objects of analysis;
2. using the Internet or online communications as a means of collecting data from individuals and organizations.

In addition, we will address some of the broader implications and ramifications of the Internet for conducting business research.

While the choice of these two areas of online research and their classification is rather arbitrary and they tend to shade into each other somewhat, they provide the basis for a reasonably comprehensive overview in the face of a highly fluid field. This chapter does not consider the use of the Internet as an information resource or as a means of finding references. Some suggestions about the latter can be found in Chapter 4. The Internet is a vast information resource and has too many possible forms to be covered in a single chapter. Moreover, we advise caution about the use of such materials; while the Internet is a cornucopia of data and advice, it also contains a great deal of misleading and downright incorrect information. Healthy scepticism should guide your searches.



# The Internet as object of analysis

Websites and web pages are potential sources of data in their own right and can be regarded as potential fodder for both quantitative and qualitative content analysis of the kind discussed in Chapters 12 and 21. Indeed, in the latter chapter, there is a section on 'virtual documents' that draws attention to websites as a form of document amenable to analysis. Sillince and Brown (2009), for example, examined the Internet websites of all English and Welsh police constabularies for October 2005–March 2006. The websites were analysed using a rhetorical approach of the kind covered in Chapter 20 to explore how the constabularies' organizational identities were rhetorically constructed. Through an analysis of such documents, Sillince and Brown (2009) show that organizational identity was rhetorically constructed through core themes:

1. the constabulary as effective or ineffective;
2. the constabulary as part of the community or as apart from the community;
3. the constabulary as progressive or not progressive.

Within each of these three organizational identity constructions Sillince and Brown identified distinctive rhetorical manœuvres. Thus, with the last of the three themes, the identification of the constabulary as progressive or not progressive, was often placed within a wider narrative of improvement, particularly from being not progressive to progressive. Of particular theoretical significance is the investigation's finding on the basis of the analysis that organizational identity is not unitary but is often conflicting and ambiguous and is designed to support claims to legitimacy for both internal and external audiences.

However, there are clearly difficulties with using websites as sources of data in this way. Four issues were mentioned in Chapter 21. In addition to the issues raised there, the following additional observations are worth considering:

- You will need to find the websites relating to your research questions (see Research in focus 26.1). This is likely to mean trawling the Web using a search engine such as Google. However, any search engine provides access to only a portion of the Web. Dorsey, Steeves, and Porras (2004) used several search engines to find websites that promote ecologically sensitive tourism, and even then there is evidence that the combined use of several search engines will allow access to only just under a half of the total population of websites (Ho, Baber, and Khondker 2002). While this means that the use of several search engines is highly desirable when seeking out appropriate websites, it has to be recognized that not only will they allow access to just a portion of the available websites but also that they may be a biased sample.
- Related to this point, seeking out websites on a topic can only be as good as the keywords that are employed in the search process. The researcher has to be very patient to try as many relevant keywords as possible (and combinations of them—known as Boolean searches) and may be advised to ask other people (librarians, supervisors, etc.) if the most appropriate ones are being used.
- New websites are continually appearing and others disappearing. Researchers basing their investigations on websites need to recognize that their analyses may be based on websites that no longer exist and that new ones may have appeared since data collection was terminated.
- Websites are also continually changing, so that an analysis may be based upon at least some websites that have been quite considerably updated. Thus, while the constabularies in Sillince and Brown's (2009) investigation may still have websites, their content is likely to be significantly different from the content that was available at the time of the research.
- The analysis of websites and web pages is a new field that is very much in flux. New approaches are being developed at a rapid rate. Some draw on ways of interpreting documents that were covered in Chapters 20 and 21, such as discourse analysis and qualitative content analysis. Others have been developed specificially in relation to the Web, such as the examination of hyperlinks between websites and their significance (Schneider and Foot 2004).

Most researchers who use documents as the basis for their work have to confront the issue that it is difficult to determine the universe or population from which they are sampling. Therefore, the problems identified here and in Chapter 21 are not unique to websites. However, the rapid growth and speed of change in the Web accentuate



## Research in focus 26.1
## Conducting an analysis of websites

Gevorgyan and Manucharova (2009) investigated whether Internet users' cultural backgrounds influence their expectations of the form that websites should take. Their focus was upon possible differences between American and Chinese users and they formulated some hypotheses to explore aspects of this issue. They focused upon two of the dimensions of cultural difference examined by Hofstede (1984; see Research in focus 1.12): individualism versus collectivism, and low versus high power distance. Hofstede's research had revealed big differences between American and Chinese managers in terms of these two cultural dimensions. Gevorgyan and Manucharova formulated the following hypotheses after a review of the relevant literature:

> H1a: Compared to American Internet users, Chinese users will report more positive attitudes toward *collectivism- and high power distance-orientated* Web design features.
>
> H1b: Compared to Chinese Internet users, American users will report more positive attitudes toward *individualism- and low power distance-orientated* Web design features.
>
> H2a: American Internet users' favourite Web sites will have stronger *individualistic* and *low power distance* orientation than will Chinese Internet users' favourite sites.
>
> H2b: Chinese Internet users' favourite Web sites will have stronger *collectivistic* and *high power distance* orientation than will American users' favourite sites. (Gevorgyan and Manucharova 2009: 397, all emphases are in the original)

A questionnaire survey was conducted with convenience samples of American and Chinese students following focus groups to refine the measures used. The questionnaires were administered in a conventional offline context in order to test hypotheses H1a and H1b. In the course of the questionnaires, respondents were asked to nominate their 10 favourite websites. A total of 700 websites were identified by the American respondents and 442 websites were identified by the Chinese respondents. In addition, 87 websites were common to both samples and were excluded from the investigation. The resulting 1,055 websites were then content analysed to explore hypotheses H2a and H2b. Collectivism was operationalized through an emphasis on 'group membership and many-to-many forms of communication' (Gevorgyan and Manucharova 2009: 399) such as chat rooms, while individualism was operationalized through an emphasis on user privacy and an ability to tailor retrieval of information to one's own interests. High power distance was indicated by features like vision statements and top-down forms of communication, whereas low power distance was indicated by user control over content and the ability to steer a path through the site. The researchers found that Chinese students' favourite websites did exhibit a greater collectivist orientation than those of the American students, but there were no differences between the two sets of favourite websites in terms of individualism and power distance.



## Tips and skills
## Referring to websites

There is a growing practice in academic work that, when referring to websites, you should include the date you consulted them. This convention is very much associated with the fact that websites often disappear and frequently change, so that, if subsequent researchers want to follow up your findings, or even to check on them, they may find that they are no longer there or that they have changed. Citing the date you consulted the website may help to relieve any anxieties about someone not finding a website you have referred to or finding it has changed. This does mean, however, that you will have to keep a running record of the dates you consulted the websites to which you refer.

these kinds of problems for business researchers, who are likely to feel that the experience is like trying to hit a target that not only continually moves but is in a constant state of metamorphosis. The crucial issue is to be sensitive to the limitations of the use of websites as material that can be analysed, as well as to the opportunities they offer, especially in marketing research (see Research in focus 26.2). Employing both printed and website materials, as Aldridge (1998) did, has the potential to bring out interesting contrasts in such sources and can also provide the basis for cross-validating sources.



## Research in focus 26.2
## Determinants of consumers' attitudes towards corporate websites

The increasing prominence of the Internet as a device for communication, marketing, and distribution has meant that many companies today are concerned with the design of attractive and entertaining websites that appeal to potential consumers and create strong brand identity. Consequently, market researchers are interested in examining the determinants of consumer attitudes towards corporate websites and in exploring patterns of site visiting and usage. Here are three examples of the kind of research that is undertaken to find out about this.

An experiment into the effects of including entertaining and/or interactive content on brand evaluations was carried out by Raney et al. (2003). The study involved research participants visiting and evaluating the websites of four major automotive manufacturers. All the sites included video and audio advertisements related to the product, and one of the sites also contained a 'mini movie', a marketing strategy pioneered by the luxury car-maker BMW, which commissioned well-known film-makers to produce short feature films featuring its products. The study was based on a sample of eighty-seven individuals recruited from undergraduate communication courses at a large university in the south-eastern United States. Each participant was involved in five testing sessions of approximately forty-five minutes. The participants used a laptop computer with wireless Internet connection that was opened to a home page specifically designed for the research. This directed them to each of the websites and enabled them to complete the **Web survey**. The study found that entertaining website content did seem to enhance perception of brands, and this could be interpreted as an indirect predictor of purchase intent.

Supphellen and Nysveen (2001) were concerned with what makes consumers revisit the sites of particular companies. Taking the SAS airline company as a case study, they hypothesized that brand loyalty is a powerful determinant of intentions to revisit a company website. They tested this using a paper-based survey study of 198 passengers at Oslo airport who had visited the SAS website. The results showed that brand loyalty affects attitudes towards and intentions to revisit the site: 'customers with affective bonds to the company will tend to seek out the websites, even though the site as such is not superior to sites for other companies' (2001: 350). This implies that brand loyalty is still developed through traditional channels, such as TV or radio. The authors advise that companies should therefore be wary about transferring resources from traditional media to the Internet, and websites should thus be seen as a vehicle for strengthening the brand rather than establishing it.

A third experimental study by Coyle and Thorson (2001) examined interactivity and vividness in commercial websites. The sixty-eight participants in the study explored four websites that were designed specifically for the study to see if vividness (indicated by the presence of audio and animation) and interactivity (measured by the number of choices and whether there was a clickable image) resulted in more positive and enduring attitudes towards the site. Participants were tested in groups of up to three persons and were given three minutes to explore each website. They then completed an attitudinal measurement questionnaire that used a seven-point Likert scale. The order in which the websites were explored was randomized. As the websites were designed specifically for the study, the degree of vividness and interactivity could be manipulated. The study found that participants who saw sites with high levels of vividness developed stronger attitudes towards the sites, and this helped to create more enduring attitudes. However, no effect on attitudes was found for interactivity.

It is interesting that two of the three studies mentioned here used an experimental design, studies of computer usage being relatively conducive to the creation of controlled conditions.

In addition, it is important to bear in mind the four quality criteria recommended by John Scott (1990) in connection with documents (see Chapter 21). Scott's suggestions invite us to consider quite why a website is constructed. Why is it there at all? Is it there for commercial reasons? Does it have an axe to grind? In other words, we should be no less sceptical about websites than about any other kind of document.

One further point to register is that, just like most documents, websites can be subjected to both qualitative and quantitative forms of analysis. The example in Research in focus 26.1 involve a qualitative approach to the analysis of content, but quantitative content analysis of the kind covered in Chapter 12 is also feasible.

There is yet another kind of material that can be found on the Web that could be construed as a form of document—the postings that are made to discussion forums, chatroom interactions, and other kinds of contribution to online environments. An example can be found in Research in focus 26.4. Such data might be gleaned in real time, in which case they are closer to a form of observation, or they may be archived interactions, in which case they are forms of document. Sometimes chatroom/discussion forum contexts may be ones in which the researcher simply reads and analyses the various postings without any participation (see Research in focus 26.6 for an example to which this feature largely applies). This can often lead to accusations of 'lurking', where the researcher simply reads without participation and without announcing his or her presence; this is often regarded as being dubious in ethical terms, an issue that will be explored in greater detail below. On other occasions, the researcher may be a participant, and in such circumstances the research is much closer to the notion of what is variously called virtual or online ethnography. These considerations demonstrate that, in e-research, the analysis of online documents and virtual/online ethnography easily shade into each other.



## Using websites to collect data from individuals

In this section we examine research methods that entail the use of either the Web or online communications, such as email, as a platform for collecting data from individuals. At the time of writing, the bulk of the discussion concerned with this issue has emphasized four main areas:

1. virtual ethnography or the ethnography of the Internet;
2. qualitative research using online focus groups;
3. qualitative research using online personal interviews;
4. online social surveys.

These types of Internet-based research method do not exhaust the full range of possibilities but they do represent recurring emphases in the emerging literature on this subject. All of them offer certain advantages over their traditional counterparts because:

- they are usually more economical in terms of time and money;
- they can reach large numbers of people very easily;
- distance is no problem, since the research participant need only be accessible by computer—it does not matter whether he or she is in the same building or across the world;
- data can be collected and collated very quickly.

The chief general disadvantages tend to revolve around the following issues:

- Access to the Internet is still nowhere near universal, so that certain people are likely to be inaccessible. Remote regions are still sometimes excluded from broadband access and, even when access is available, bandwidth varies considerably, with consequent implications for download speeds.
- People still vary considerably in their facility with computers, which can have implications for preparedness to be involved in research and the ease with which people can be research participants.
- Invitations to take part in research may be viewed as just another nuisance email.
- There is loss of the personal touch, owing to lack of rapport between interviewer and interviewee, including the inability to pick up visual or auditory cues.
- There are concerns among research participants about confidentiality of replies at a time of widespread anxiety about fraud and hackers.

More specific balance sheets of advantages and disadvantages relating to some of the individual e-research methods will be covered below.

There are two crucial distinctions that should be borne in mind when examining Internet-based research methods.

1. There is a distinction between *Web-based* and *communication-based* methods. The former is a research method whereby data are collected through the Web—for example, a questionnaire that forms a web page and that the respondent then completes. A communication-based research method is one where email or a similar communication medium is the platform from which the data collection instrument is launched.
2. There is a distinction between *synchronous* and *asynchronous* methods of data collection. The former occur in real time. An example would be an interview in which an online interviewer asks a question and the respondent, who is also online, replies immediately, as in a chatroom. An asynchronous method is not in real time so that there is no immediate response from the respondent, who is unlikely to be online at the same time as the interviewer (or, if the respondent is online, he or she is extremely unlikely to be in a position to reply immediately). An example would be an interview question posed by the interviewer in an email that is opened and answered by the respondent some time later, perhaps days or weeks later.

With these distinctions in mind we can now move on to examine the four main forms of online research methods previously identified. However, one final point to note before concluding this section is that the issues discussed above can also be used to collect data from organizations as well as from individuals (see Research in focus 26.3 for an example).



## Research in focus 26.3
### Collecting data about companies: a study of language use on multinational company websites

Tiessen (2004) was interested in the language choices that multinational firms make in designing their websites. Focusing on the websites of 362 non-Japanese companies listed on the 'Fortune Global 500', Tiessen sought to identify factors associated with the companies' decision to use Japanese on their websites. The decision to focus on the Japanese language was made because it is the third most used online language and because Japan is the world's second-largest economy. Japanese language use is also interesting because it has been associated with the country's emergence as a wealthy economy. The study could therefore provide insight into how managers are dealing with the language issues associated with the Internet and globalization. The results showed that business-to-consumer firms were more likely to offer Japanese than those in business-to-business markets because the former were using the Web to target a broader population of consumers who were typically less proficient in English. Firms from Anglo countries were just as likely to offer Japanese as those from non-Anglo nations, suggesting that 'economic necessity tends to overcome ethnocentric approaches to foreign markets' (2004: 187).



## Virtual ethnography

Ethnography may not seem to be an obvious method for collecting data on Internet use. The image of the ethnographer is that of someone who visits places or locations, and, particularly in the context of business research, organizations. The Internet seems to go against the grain of ethnography, in that it seems a decidedly placeless space. In fact, as V. Hine (2000) has observed, conceiving of the Internet as a place—a cyberspace—has been one strategy for an ethnographic study of the Internet, and from this it is just a short journey to the examination of communities in the form of online communities or virtual communities. In this way, our concepts of place and space

that are constitutive of the way in which we operate in the real world are grafted onto the Internet and its use. A further issue is that, as noted in Chapter 17, ethnography entails participant observation, but in cyberspace what is the ethnographer observing and in what is he or she participating? In particular, a virtual ethnography requires getting away from the idea that an ethnography is of or in a place in any traditional sense. It is also an ethnography of a domain that infiltrates other spaces and times of its participants, so that the boundaries of the virtual in a virtual ethnography are problematic to participants and analysts alike.

Markham's (1998) approach to an ethnography of life on the Internet involved interviews. The interviews followed a period of 'lurking' (reading but not participating) in computer-mediated communication forums like chatrooms and multi-user domains (MUDs). The interviews allowed synchronous questioning and answering; in other words, the asking and answering of questions were in real time, rather than the kind of questioning and answering that might occur via email, where a question might be answered several hours or days later. She used an interview guide, and the interviews lasted between one hour and over four hours. Such interviews are a very real challenge for both interviewer and interviewee, because neither party can pick up on visual cues (for example, puzzlement, anxiety) or auditory cues (sighs, groans).

One of Markham's interests lay in the reality or otherwise of online experiences. This can be seen in the following brief online interview sequence (Markham is Annette):

ANNETTE: 'How real are your experiences in the Internet?'

SHERIE: 'How real are experiences off the Internet?'
(Markham 1998: 115)

In fact, Markham notes how her notion of 'real' was different from that of her interviewees. For Markham, 'real' or 'in real life' carried a connotation of genuineness or authenticity, but for her interviewees it was more to do with distinguishing experiences that occur offline. Indeed, Markham increasingly felt that her interviewees were questioning the validity of the dichotomous distinction between the real and the non-real, so far as online interaction was concerned. However, it is likely that these distinctions between life online and life offline will become less significant as younger people who are growing up with the Internet conduct large portions of their lives online. This development would have considerable implications for business researchers, since for many research participants the online world may become very naturalistic.

An interesting question about this research is: 'In what sense is it an ethnography?' At one level, Markham was simply an interviewer who used a semi-structured interview guide to elicit information and the world view of her correspondents. At another level, she was indeed a participant in and observer of life online, although the life that she was participating in and observing was very much a product of her promptings, no matter how open the questions she asked were and no matter how willing she was to allow her interviewees leeway in what they wanted to discuss. In much the same way that her interviewees were questioning the nature of reality, Markham's investigation invites us to question the nature of ethnography so far as research on the Internet is concerned.

Kendall (1999) was probably closer to the traditional concept of the ethnographer in that she describes her research as comprising three years of online participant observation in a MUD, as well as face-to-face interviews and attendance at face-to-face gatherings. Such research is probably closer to the conventional notion of ethnographic research in its use of several methods of data collection and a sense of participation in the lives of those being studied, as well as interviewing them.

A further example of the use of ethnography in relation to the study of online worlds can be found in Research in focus 26.4, which shows how the study of online discussion groups can be revealing about enthusiasms in our era of consumerism and brands.

Miller and Slater's (2000) ethnography of Internet use takes an approach that is rather more redolent of traditional ethnography than Markham's (see Research in focus 26.5). Its location in a particular place (Trinidad), its use of several methods of gathering data, and its commitment to observation (for example, in cybercafés) are probably for many people closer to the traditional meanings of ethnography. As the authors put it: 'For us an ethnography does include participating, which may mean going on a chat line for the eight hours that informants will remain online, or participating in a room full of people playing networked Quake . . .' (Miller and Slater 2000: 22).

Studies like these are clearly inviting us to consider the nature of the Internet as a domain for investigation, but they also invite us to consider the nature and the adaptiveness of our research methods. In the examples discussed in this section, the question of what is and is not ethnography is given a layer of complexity that adds to the considerations about this issue that were referred to in Chapter 17. But these studies are also invariably cases of using Internet-based research methods to investigate Internet use. Future online ethnographic investigations

## Research in focus 26.4
## Netnography

Kozinets (2002, 2010) has coined the term 'netnography' to refer to a marketing research method that investigates computer-mediated communications in connection with market-related topics. As the author points out: 'Online communities are contexts in which consumers often partake in discussions whose goals include attempts to inform and influence fellow consumers about products and brands' (2002: 61). Kozinets illustrates his approach with reference to a study of the meanings surrounding coffee and its consumption. As with most specialized online discussion forums, groups that engage in computer-mediated communications about a certain topic are likely to be knowledgeable enthusiasts. Therefore, they are well placed to provide interesting market-related information about trends and meanings in relation to a consumer topic like coffee. Kozinets began with a search for newsgroups that contained the word 'coffee' and homed in on one—<alt.coffe>—that contained a large amount of traffic. He read hundreds of posted messages but narrowed these down to 179. He followed through particular threads (for example, those to do with Starbucks) in terms of their connection with his research questions. For example, the netnography suggests that, among many of these enthusiasts, Starbucks is seen as having commodified coffee, and, as a result, its 'baristas' lack passion in their craft. There is a sense that the discussion participants felt that this lack of passion was transmitted to the quality of the coffee. Kozinets suggests that his analysis shows that 'coffee marketers have barely begun to plumb the depths of taste, status, and snob appeal that are waiting to be explored by discriminating coffee consumers' (2002: 70).

## Research in focus 26.5
## An ethnography of Internet use in Trinidad

Miller and Slater (2000) conducted ethnographic research on the use of the Internet in Trinidad. Miller had previously conducted research on the unfolding of modernity in Trinidad and drew on his prior research to help appreciate the context of the reception of the Internet in the country; Slater had previously conducted research on computer-mediated communication in the UK. This preamble is significant because it forms part of the authors' justification for describing their investigation as ethnographic. For Miller and Slater, an important component of ethnography is that it entails protracted involvement with the people one studies. In fact, the authors spent just five weeks in Trinidad for this study, so their prior experiences are invoked as a way of legitimizing the label 'ethnography'. Further, the authors consulted Internet websites on their return and interviewed Trinidadians in London and New York. They also maintained contact with informants after their return through email and 'chat'. Overall, the following were the main methods:

1. interviews 'largely devoted to the study of the political economy of the Internet, including businesses, the ISPs [Internet service providers] and government officers' (2000: 22);
2. hanging around 'in cybercafes watching people go online and chatting with them. We also interviewed them more formally' (2000: 22);
3. an exploration with friends of how the Internet had become intertwined with their lives;
4. a house-to-house survey in the same four areas in which Miller had previously conducted a similar investigation to ascertain levels of Internet usage;
5. in-depth interviews with some of those contacted through the survey.

Like Markham, Miller and Slater found that the worlds of the Internet and of everyday life beyond the Internet are highly intertwined.

of issues unrelated to the Internet will give a clearer indication of the possibilities that the method offers. At the same time, both C. Hine (2008) and Garcia et al. (2009) have observed that there is a growing tendency and need for online ethnographers to take into account offline worlds, because even the most committed Internet user has a life beyond the computer. This development means taking into account how the members of the online communities that tend to be the focus of ethnographic studies have lives offline and that the two will have implications for the other. There is a corollary to this observation that, as the Internet becomes increasingly embedded in people's lives, practitioners of what might be thought of as conventional ethnography (in the sense of the ethnographic study of non-virtual lives and communities) will increasingly have to take into account individuals' commitments to life on the Internet. Earlier online/virtual ethnographies tended to emphasize people's involvement and participation in online worlds, perhaps because the relative newness of the Internet and its lack of reach into everyday life during those days meant that the virtual could be treated as a relatively autonomous domain.

One area of debate in recent years regarding online ethnography has been over the status of 'lurking'. This practice is disliked by members of online communities and can result in censure from participants, who are often able to detect the practice. At the same time, online ethnographers sometimes lurk as a prelude to their fieldwork in order to gain an understanding of the setting prior to their participation. Even when websites are used in this way, ethical issues arise (see below), while it has been suggested that 'ethnographers will get a more authentic experience of an online setting if they jump straight into participation' (Garcia et al. 2009: 60).



## Research in focus 26.6
## Using blogs in a study of word of mouth marketing

Kozinets et al. (2010) carried out a netnographic (see Research in focus 26.4) study of word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM), a technique increasingly used by firms who intentionally influence individuals who they believe are likely to communicate positive impressions of a product to others. Word of mouth has been known to be an important factor in influencing whether new products or changes to existing ones will take root. As a marketing device, WOMM is a device for influencing a formerly spontaneous process. A North American specialist WOMM firm (Buzzablog) 'seeded' a new camera-equipped mobile telephone with 90 influential bloggers whom the firm had previously screened and who were known to write about relevant issues and also to receive 400 or more readers per day. The authors did not participate in the study in the sense of contributing to any of the discussion surrounding the blogs, though they did have some discussions with Buzzablog, some of whose managers were interviewed. They focused upon the 83 bloggers whose blogs were maintained for the duration of the study. Their data set comprised 220 postings by the 83 bloggers and around 700 comments from readers. These were divided into postings that were sent before, during, or after the WOMM campaign. Through a qualitative content analysis of the blogs and associated discussions, four communication strategies were identified and were taken to suggest that WOMM does not simply amplify marketing messages. The content and meaning of marketing messages were transformed at the same time that they were being implanted. The authors conclude: 'Word-of-mouth marketing operates through a complex process that transforms commercial information into cultural stories relevant to the members of particular communities' (Kozinets et al. 2010: 86).



# Qualitative research using online focus groups

There is a crucial distinction between synchronous and asynchronous online focus groups. With the former, the focus group is in real time, so that contributions are made more or less immediately after previous contributions

(whether from the moderator or from other participants) among a group of participants, all of whom are simultaneously online. Contributions can be responded to as soon as they are typed (and with some forms of software, the contributions can be seen as they are being typed). As Mann and Stewart (2000) observe, because several participants can type in a response to a contribution at the same time, the conventions of normal turn-taking in conversations are largely sidelined.

With asynchronous groups, focus group exchanges are not in real time. Email is one form of asynchronous communication that is sometimes used (see Research in focus 26.7 for an example). For example, the moderator might ask a question and then send the email containing it to focus group participants. The latter will be able to reply to the moderator and to other group members at some time in the future. Such groups get around the time zone problem and are probably easier than synchronous groups for participants who are not skilled at using the keyboard.



## Research in focus 26.7
## An asynchronous focus group study

Adriaenssens and Cadman (1999) report their experiences of conducting a market research exercise to explore the launch of an online share-trading platform in the UK. Participants were in two groups: one group of active shareholders (twenty participants) and a second group of passive shareholders (ten participants). They were identified through the MORI Financial Services database as 'upmarket shareholders who were also Internet users' (1999: 418–19). The participants who were identified were very geographically spread, so online focus groups were ideal. Questions were emailed to participants in five phases, with a deadline for returning replies, which were then copied anonymously to the rest of the participants. The questions were sent in the body of the email, rather than as attachments, to solve problems of software incompatibility. After each phase, a summary document was produced and circulated to participants for comment, thus injecting a form of respondent validation into the project. The researchers found it difficult to ensure that participants kept to the deadlines, which in fact were rather tight, although it was felt that having a schedule of deadlines that was kept to as far as possible was helpful in preventing drop-outs. The researchers felt that the group of active shareholders was too large to manage and suggest groups of no more than ten participants.

One of the advantages of both types of online focus groups stems from the possibility of using a 'captive population' of people who are already communicating with each other, unlike face-to-face focus groups that are brought together for the purpose of the focus group meeting. This means researchers are often able to take advantage of pre-existing social groups of people who are already communicating with one another online (Stewart and Williams 2005). Online focus groups also enable geographical distances to be overcome. International focus groups can enable cross-cultural discussions at a relatively low cost. However, setting up a time and place for synchronous online focus group discussions between international participants may be problematic because of time zone differences, making it hard to find a time that is convenient to everyone (Stewart and Williams 2005).

Conferencing software is used for synchronous groups and is often used for asynchronous groups as well. This may mean that focus group participants will require access to the software, which can be undesirable if the software needs to be loaded onto their computers. Participants may not feel confident about loading the software and there may be compatibility problems with particular machines and operating systems.

Selecting participants for online focus groups is potentially difficult, not least because they must normally have access to the necessary hardware and software. One possibility is to use questionnaires as a springboard for identifying possible participants, while another possibility is to contact them by email, this being a relatively quick and economical way of contacting a large number of possible participants. For their study of virtual communities concerned with consumption issues, Evans et al. (2001) used a combination of questionnaires (both paper and online) and focus groups made up of respondents to the questionnaires who had indicated a willingness to take further part in the research. The British focus groups were of the face-to-face kind, but, in addition, international respondents to the questionnaire who were

prepared to be further involved in the research participated in an online focus group. Other sources of participants for online focus groups might involve postings on appropriate special interest websites or on such outlets as special interest bulletin boards or chatrooms.

The requisite number of participants is affected by the question of whether the online focus group is being conducted synchronously or asynchronously. Mann and Stewart (2000) advocate that, with the former type, the group should not be too large, because it can make it difficult for some people to participate, possibly because of limited keyboard skills, and they recommend groups of between six and eight participants. Also, moderating the session can be more difficult with a large number. In asynchronous mode, such problems do not exist, and very large groups can be accommodated—certainly much larger ones than could be envisaged in a face-to-face context, although Adriaenssens and Cadman (1999) suggest that large groups can present research management problems.

Before starting the focus group, moderators are advised to send out a welcome message introducing the research and laying out some of the ground rules for the ongoing discussion. There is evidence that participants respond more positively if the researchers reveal something about themselves (Curasi 2001). This can be done in the opening message or by creating links to personal websites.

One problem with the asynchronous focus group is that moderators cannot be available online twenty-four hours a day, although it is not inconceivable that moderators could have a shift system to deal with this limitation. This lack of continuous availability means that emails or postings may be sent and responded to without any ability of the moderator to intervene or participate. This feature may not be a problem, but could become so if offensive messages were being sent or if it meant that the discussion was going off at a complete tangent from which it would be difficult to redeem the situation. Further, because focus group sessions in asynchronous mode may go on for a long time, perhaps several days or even weeks, there is a greater likelihood of participants dropping out of the study. A further problem arises from response rates, which may be lower than for face-to-face focus groups (Stewart and Williams 2005). Even though it is relatively easy for the researcher to contact a large number of possible respondents using email, the response rates of those wishing to participate in an online focus group has been found to be quite low (between 5 and 20 per cent). Further reservations have been expressed about the lack of non-verbal data obtained from online focus groups, such as facial expression.

Online focus groups are unlikely to replace their face-to-face counterparts. Instead, they are likely to be employed in connection with certain kinds of research topic and/or sample. As regards the latter, dispersed or inaccessible people are especially relevant to online focus group research. As Sweet (2001) points out, relevant topics are likely to be ones involving sensitive issues and ones concerned with Internet use—for example, the study discussed in Research in focus 26.7 and studies like O'Connor and Madge (2001).

The discussion in Tips and skills 'Advantages and disadvantages of online focus groups and personal interviews compared to face-to-face interviews in qualitative research' combines focus groups with online personal interviews, which are the subject of the next section, since most of the elements in the balance sheet of advantages and disadvantages are the same.



## Tips and skills

## Advantages and disadvantages of online focus groups and personal interviews compared to face-to-face interviews in qualitative research

Here is a summary of the main advantages and disadvantages of online focus groups and personal interviews compared to their face-to-face counterparts. The two methods are combined because the tally of advantages and disadvantages applies more or less equally well to both of them.

### Advantages

- Online interviews and focus groups are extremely cheap to conduct compared to comparable face-to-face equivalents. They are likely to take longer, however, especially when conducted asynchronously.

- Interviewees or focus group participants who would otherwise normally be inaccessible (for example, because they are located in another country) or hard to involve in research (for example, very senior executives, people with almost no time for participation) can more easily be involved.
- Large numbers of possible online focus group participants can be contacted by email.
- Interviewees and focus group participants are able to reread what they (and, in the case of focus groups, others) have previously written in their replies.
- People participating in the research may be better able to fit the interviews into their own time.
- People participating in the research do not have to make additional allowances for the time spent travelling to a focus group session.
- The interviews do not have to be audio-recorded, thus eliminating interviewee apprehension about speaking and being recorded.
- There is no need for transcription. This represents an enormous advantage because of the time and cost involved in getting recorded interview sessions transcribed.
- As a result of the previous point, the interview transcripts can be more or less immediately entered into a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program of the kind introduced in Chapter 23.
- The transcripts of the interviews are more likely to be accurate, because the problems that may arise from mishearing or not hearing at all what is said do not arise. This is a particular advantage with focus group discussions, because it can be difficult to establish who is speaking and impossible to distinguish what is said when participants speak at the same time.
- Focus group participants can employ pseudonyms so that their identity can be more easily concealed from others in the group. This can make it easier for participants to discuss potentially embarrassing issues or to divulge potentially unpopular views. The ability to discuss sensitive issues generally may be greater in electronic than face-to-face focus groups.
- In focus groups, shy or quiet participants may find it easier to come to the fore.
- Equally, in focus groups overbearing participants are less likely to predominate, but in synchronous groups variations in keyboard skills may militate slightly against equal participation.
- Participants are less likely to be influenced by characteristics such as the age, ethnicity, or appearance (and possibly even gender if pseudonyms are used) of other participants in a focus group.
- The greater remoteness of individuals in Internet interviews and focus groups may make it easier for them to answer sensitive questions than when faced with a face-to-face context and they may be more inclined to disclose difficult information about themselves, especially in asynchronous mode.
- Similarly, interviewees and focus group participants are much less likely to be affected by characteristics of interviewers or moderators respectively, so that interviewer bias is less likely.
- When interviewees and participants are online at home, they are essentially being provided with an 'anonymous, safe and non-threatening environment' (O'Connor and Madge 2001: 11.2), which may be especially helpful to vulnerable groups.
- Similarly, researchers are not confronted with the potentially discomfiting experience of having to invade other people's homes or workplaces, which can themselves sometimes be unsafe environments.

Disadvantages

- Only people with access to online facilities and/or who find them relatively straightforward are likely to be in a position to participate.
- It can be more difficult for the interviewer to establish rapport and to engage with interviewees. However, when the topic is of interest to participants, this may not be a great problem.
- It can be difficult in asynchronous interviews to retain over a longer term any rapport that has been built up.
- Probing is more difficult though not impossible. Curasi (2001) reports some success in eliciting further information from respondents, but it is easier for interviewees to ignore or forget about the requests for further information or for expansion on answers given.

- Asynchronous interviews may take a very long time to complete, depending on cooperativeness.
- With asynchronous interviews, there may be a greater tendency for interviewees to discontinue their participation than is likely to be the case with face-to-face interviews.
- There is less spontaneity of response, since interviewees can reflect on their answers to a much greater extent than is possible in a face-to-face situation. However, this can be construed as an advantage in some respects, since interviewees are likely to give more considered replies (Adriaenssens and Cadman 1999).
- There may be a tendency for refusal to participate to be higher in online personal interviews and from possible online focus group participants.
- The researcher cannot be certain that the people who are interviewed are who they say they are (though this issue may apply on occasion to face-to-face interviews as well).
- In synchronous focus groups, variations in keyboard skills may make equal levels of participation difficult.
- Online interviews and focus groups from home require considerable commitment from interviewees and participants if they have to install software onto their computers and remain online for extended periods of time.
- The interviewer/moderator may not be aware that the interviewee/participant is distracted by something and in such circumstances will continue to ask questions as if he or she had the person's full attention.
- Online connections may be lost, perhaps because of a server crashing or a respondent's broadband going down, so research participants need to know what to do in case of such an eventuality.
- Interviewers cannot capitalize on body language or other forms of non-verbal data that might suggest puzzlement, or in the case of focus groups a thwarted desire to contribute to the discussion.

*Sources*: Clapper and Massey (1996); Adriaenssens and Cadman (1999); Tse (1999); Mann and Stewart (2000); Curasi (2001); O'Connor and Madge (2001); Sweet (2001); Hewson and Laurent (2008); ***www.geog.le.ac.uk/orm/interviews/inttypes.ht*** (accessed 23 July 2010).



# Qualitative research using online personal interviews

The issues involved in conducting online personal interviews for qualitative research are essentially the same as those to do with conducting online focus groups. In particular, the researcher must decide whether the interviews should take place in **synchronous** or asynchronous mode. The factors involved in deciding which to use are largely the same as with focus groups, although issues to do with variable typing speed or computer-related knowledge among focus group participants will not apply. Hewson and Laurent (2008) point out that research on the synchronous versus asynchronous issue seems to imply that interviews in the latter mode tend to generate richer, more thorough, and more thoughtful data than synchronous ones, which often produce data they describe as 'playful' as well as less detailed. Such research would seem to imply that asynchronous interviews are likely to be the preferred mode of administration, especially in view of the greater sophistication on the part of both researchers and their participants that is required for the use of the software platforms that are necessary for synchronous interviews. Interestingly, O'Connor et al. (2008) maintain that the adoption of synchronous interviews and focus groups has been low, perhaps because of greater understanding of what can be gleaned from asynchronous interviews and because of the perceived difficulty of implementing the software platforms.

Although online interviews run the risk relative to face-to-face interviews that the respondent is somewhat more likely to drop out of the exchange (especially in asynchronous mode, since the interviews can sometimes be very protracted), Mann and Stewart (2000: 138–9) suggest that in fact a relationship of mutual trust can be built up. This kind of relationship can make it easier for a longer-term commitment to the interview to be maintained, but also makes it easier for the researcher to go back to his or her interviewees for further information or reflections, something that is difficult to do with the face-to-face personal interview. The authors also suggest that

it is important for interviewers to keep sending messages to respondents to reassure them that their written utterances are helpful and significant, especially since interviewing through the Internet is still an unfamiliar experience for most people.

A further issue for the online personal interviewer to consider is whether to send all the questions at once or to interview on the basis of a question followed by a reply. The problem with the former tactic is that respondents may read all the questions and then reply only to those that they feel interested in or to which they feel they can make a genuine contribution, so that asking one question at a time is likely to be more reliable.

There is evidence that prospective interviewees are more likely to agree to participate if their agreement is solicited prior to sending them questions and if the researcher uses some form of self-disclosure, such as directing the person being contacted to the researcher's website, which contains personal information, particularly information that might be relevant to the research issue (Curasi 2001; O'Connor and Madge 2001). The argument for obtaining prior agreement from interviewees before sending them questions to be answered is that unsolicited emails, often referred to as 'spamming', are regarded as a nuisance among online users and receiving them can result in an immediate refusal to take the message seriously.

Curasi (2001) conducted a comparison in which twenty-four online interviews carried out through email correspondence (and therefore asynchronous) were contrasted with twenty-four parallel face-to-face interviews. The interviews were concerned with shopping on the Internet. She found the following:

- Face-to-face interviewers are better able than online interviewers to maintain rapport with respondents.
- Greater commitment and motivation are required for completing an online interview, but, because of this, replies are often more detailed and considered than with face-to-face interviews.
- Online interviewers are less able to have an impact on whether the interview is successful or not because they are more remote.
- Online interviewees' answers tend to be more considered and grammatically correct, because they have more time to ponder their answers and because they can tidy them up before sending them. Whether this is a positive feature is debatable: there is the obvious advantage of a 'clean' transcript, but there may be some loss of spontaneity.
- Follow-up probes can be carried out in online interviews, as well as in face-to-face ones.

On the other hand, Curasi also found that the worst interviews in terms of the amount of detail forthcoming were from online interviews. It may be that this and the other differences are to do with the fact that, whereas a qualitative face-to-face interview is *spoken*, the parallel online interview is *typed*. The full significance of this difference in the nature of the respondent's mode of answering has not been fully appreciated.

It is very clear from many of the discussions about online interviews by email that a significant problem for many interviewers is that of keeping respondents involved in the interview when questions are being sent one or two at a time. Respondents tend to lose momentum or interest. However, Kivits (2005) has shown that recontacting interviewees on regular occasions and adopting an accessible and understanding style can not only help to maintain momentum for many interviewees but also bring some who have lost interest or forgotten to reply back into the research.

Thus far, most of the discussion of online personal interviewing assumes that the exchange is conducted entirely in a textual context (particularly by email). However, the webcam may offer further possibilities for synchronous online personal interviews should the technology become widespread. Such a development would make the online interview similar to a telephone interview, in that it is mediated by a technology, but also similar to an in-person interview, since those involved in the exchange would be able to see each other. However, one of the main advantages of the online interview would be lost, in that the respondent's answers would need to be transcribed, as in traditional qualitative interviewing.

The possibilities associated with conducting online focus groups have probably attracted greater attention than online personal interviews, perhaps because the potential advantages are more evident with the former. For example, with focus groups, a great deal of time and administration can be saved by online focus groups, whereas there is less comparable saving with online personal interviews unless a great deal of travel is involved.

An interesting issue with asynchronous personal interviews in particular is whether it is appropriate to describe them as interviews at all and indeed whether they are experienced by research participants as interviews. Given that the process of answering questions in an **asynchronous online interview** entails writing, particularly if there is minimal interaction with the researcher, it may be experienced by the 'interviewee' as more akin to answering open questions in a self-administered questionnaire.



# Online social surveys

There has been a considerable growth in the number of **surveys** being administered **online**. It is questionable whether the research instruments should be regarded as structured interviews (see Chapter 8) or as self-completion questionnaires (see Chapter 9); in a sense they are both. So far as online social surveys are concerned, there is a crucial distinction between surveys administered by email (email surveys) and surveys administered via the Web (Web surveys). In the case of the former, the questionnaire is sent via email to a respondent, whereas, with a Web survey, the respondent is directed to a website in order to answer a questionnaire. Sheehan and Hoy (1999) suggest that there has been a tendency for email surveys to be employed in relation to 'smaller, more homogeneous on-line user groups', whereas Web surveys have been used to study 'large groups of on-line users'.

## Email surveys

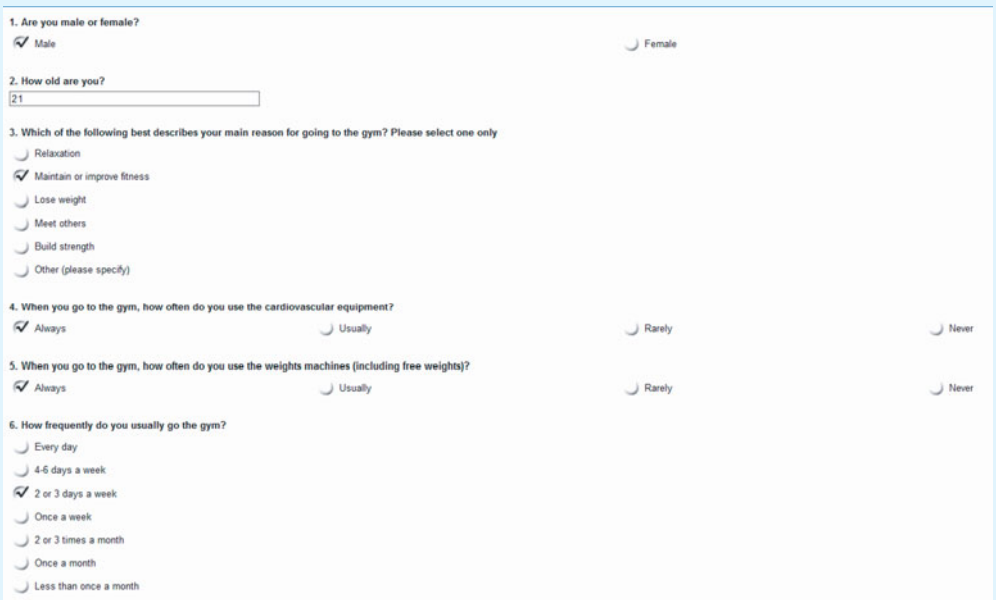
With email surveys it is important to distinguish between embedded and attached **email surveys**. In the case of the embedded questionnaire, the questions are to be found in the body of the email. There may be an introduction to the questionnaire followed by some marking that partitions the introduction from the questionnaire itself. Respondents have to indicate their replies using simple notations, such as an 'x', or they may be asked to delete alternatives that do not apply. If questions are open, they are asked to type in their answers. They then simply need to select the reply button to return their completed questionnaires to the researcher. With an attached questionnaire, the questionnaire arrives as an attachment to an email that introduces it. As with the embedded questionnaire, respondents must select and/or type their answers. To return the questionnaire, it must be attached to a reply email, although respondents may also be given the opportunity to fax or send the completed questionnaire by postal mail to the researcher (Sheehan and Hoy 1999).

The chief advantage of the embedded questionnaire is that it is easier for the respondent to return to the researcher and it requires less computer expertise. Knowing how to read and then return an attachment requires a certain facility with handling online communication that is still not universally applicable. Also, the recipients' operating systems or software may present problems with reading attachments, while many respondents may refuse to open the attachment because of concerns about a virus. On the other hand, the limited formatting that is possible with most email software, such as using bold, variations in font size, indenting, and other features, makes the appearance of embedded questionnaires rather dull and featureless, although this limitation is rapidly changing. Furthermore, it is slightly easier for the respondent to type material into an attachment that uses well-known software like Microsoft Word, since, if the questionnaire is embedded in an email, the alignment of questions and answers may be lost.

Dommeyer and Moriarty (2000) compared the two forms of email survey in connection with an attitude study. The questionnaire that was attached was given a much wider range of embellishments in terms of appearance than was possible with the embedded one. Before conducting the survey, undergraduate students were asked about the relative appearance of the two formats. The attached questionnaire was deemed to be better looking, easier to complete, clearer in appearance, and better organized. The two formats were then administered to two random samples of students, all of whom were active email users. The researchers found a much higher response rate with the embedded than with the attached questionnaire (37 per cent versus 8 per cent), but there was little difference in terms of speed of response or whether questions were more likely to be omitted with one format rather than the other. Although Dommeyer and Moriarty (2000: 48) conclude that 'the attached e-mail survey presents too many obstacles to the potential respondent', it is important to appreciate that this study was conducted during what were still early days in the life of online surveys. It may be that, as prospective respondents become more adept at using online communication methods and as viruses become less of a threat (for example, as virus-checking software improves in terms of accessibility and cost), the concerns that led to the lower response rate for the attached questionnaire will be less pronounced. Also, the researchers do not appear to have established a prior contact with the students before sending out the questionnaires; it may be that the reaction to such an approach, which is frowned upon in the online community, may have been more negative in the case of the attached questionnaire format.

# Plate 26.1

## Gym survey in Web survey format



1. Are you male or female?
- [x] Male
- [ ] Female

2. How old are you?
21

3. Which of the following best describes your main reason for going to the gym? Please select one only
- [ ] Relaxation
- [x] Maintain or improve fitness
- [ ] Lose weight
- [ ] Meet others
- [ ] Build strength
- [ ] Other (please specify)

4. When you go to the gym, how often do you use the cardiovascular equipment?
- [x] Always
- [ ] Usually
- [ ] Rarely
- [ ] Never

5. When you go to the gym, how often do you use the weights machines (including free weights)?
- [x] Always
- [ ] Usually
- [ ] Rarely
- [ ] Never

6. How frequently do you usually go the gym?
- [ ] Every day
- [ ] 4-6 days a week
- [x] 2 or 3 days a week
- [ ] Once a week
- [ ] 2 or 3 times a month
- [ ] Once a month
- [ ] Less than once a month

## Web surveys

Web surveys operate by inviting prospective respondents to visit a website at which the questionnaire can be found and completed online. The Web survey has an important advantage over the email survey in that it can use a much wider variety of embellishments in terms of appearance. Plate 26.1 presents part of the questionnaire from the gym survey from Chapter 14 in a Web survey format and answered in the same way as in Tips and skills 'A completed and processed questionnaire' (Chapter 14). There are also greater possibilities than with paper-based questionnaires in terms of the use of colour and variety in the format of closed questions. With open questions, the respondent is invited to type directly into a boxed area (for example, question 2 in Plate 26.1).

However, the advantages of the Web survey are not just to do with appearance. The questionnaire can be designed so that, when there is a filter question (for example, 'if yes go to question 12, if no go to question 14'), it skips automatically to the next appropriate question. The questionnaire can also be programmed so that only one question ever appears on the screen or so that the respondent can scroll down and look at all questions in advance. Finally, respondents' answers can be automatically programmed to download into a database, thus eliminating the daunting coding of a large number of questionnaires. One of the chief problems with the Web survey is that, in order to produce the attractive text and all the other features, the researcher will either have to be highly sophisticated in the use of HTML or will need to use one of a growing number of software packages that are designed to produce questionnaires with all the features that have been described.

Plate 26.1 was created using Survey Monkey: ***www.surveymonkey.com/MySurveys.aspx*** (accessed 6 July 2010)

With commercial websites such as these, you can design your questionnaire online and then create a Web address to which respondents can be directed in order to complete it. The questions in Plate 26.1 were created using the software's basic features, which are free of charge. There is a fee for using this software if more advanced features are required. The fee will be affected by the number of respondents who complete the questionnaire and the length of time that the questionnaire is active. Each respondent's replies are logged, and the entire dataset can be retrieved once you have decided that the data collection phase is complete. This means that there is no coding of replies (other than with open questions) and entering of data into your software. Not only does this

save time; it also reduces the likelihood of errors in the processing of data.

Potential respondents need to be directed to the website containing the questionnaire. Research in focus 26.8 provides an example of the kind of approach that might be used. Where there are possible problems to do with restricting who may answer the questionnaire, it may be necessary to set up a password system to filter out people for whom the questionnaire is not appropriate.

## Mixing modes of survey administration

The example in Research in focus 26.8 concerns a case in which a Web survey is combined with a conventional self-administered questionnaire. When this occurs, there are two different modes of administration of the research instrument in operation. Mixed modes of administering a survey raise the question of whether the mode of administration matters; in other words, do you get different results when you administer a questionnaire online from when you administer it offline (for example, by handing a questionnaire or mailing it to respondents)? Obviously, it would not be desirable to aggregate data from two different modes of administration if part of the variation in respondents' replies could be attributed to the way they received and completed the questionnaire. Equally, researchers using solely a Web-based questionnaire need to know how far their findings are different from conventional modes of administration.

Experiments with different modes of administration are quite reassuring on this point, because the differences may not always be large. In a study of American students' attitudes to various aspects of college experience, respondents were found to reply more positively when answering questions online than when using paper questionnaires. However, with the exception of one of the scales, the differences were not large (Carini et al. 2003). Fleming and Bowden (2009) conducted a travel cost questionnaire survey by mail and the Web of visitors to Fraser Island, Australia. They found the results from the two modes of administration to be similar and that, in particular, the estimates of the 'consumer surplus' (the amount the tourist would be willing to spend on the visit less the amount actually spent) were similar between the two. In spite of the fact that there is some evidence of differences in response between modes of survey administration, mixing postal and online questionnaires is often recommended as a survey approach (Van Selm and Jankowski 2006).

Given that the differences between modes of administration in surveys that combine a Web-based mode with a conventional mode (such as a paper-based self-completion questionnaire) do not appear to be great, there is often a good case to be made for offering respondents an online option. A covering letter might draw prospective respondents' attention to a Web-based option along with the necessary instructions for accessing it, so that those who prefer to work online are not put off responding to the questionnaire.



### Research in focus 26.8
### Combining a paper survey with a Web survey

As part of their research into virtual communities concerned with consumption issues, Evans et al. (2001) carried out a survey using two methods of administration: first, a paper-based questionnaire, which was distributed at various locations at the University of Bristol and the University of West of England, Bristol, and at three cybercafés; secondly, a Web survey, hosted by the Bristol Business School, which was linked via BBC Bristol Online and a cybercafé. The authors write: 'Invitations to respond to the on-line questionnaire were posted on several electronic lists within the two Bristol universities, and several international discussion lists' (2001: 152). As a result of these two strategies, over 300 questionnaires were returned.

## Sampling issues

Anyone who has read Chapter 7 must be wondering how the sampling principles described there might apply to online surveys. A major issue and limitation is that not everyone in any nation is online and has the technical ability to handle questionnaires online in either email or Web formats. Certain other features of online communications make the issue more problematic.

- Many people have more than one email address.
- Email addresses tend to be much more fleeting than postal addresses.

- Many people use more than one Internet service provider (ISP).
- A household may have one computer but several users.
- Internet-users are a biased sample of the population, in that they tend to be better educated, wealthier, younger, and not representative in ethnic terms (Couper 2000).
- Few sampling frames exist of the general online population and most of these are likely to be expensive to acquire, since they are controlled by ISPs or may be confidential.

Such issues make the possibilities of conducting online surveys using probability sampling principles difficult to envisage. This is not to say that online surveys should not be considered. Indeed, for researchers in the field of business and management, there may be more opportunities than for researchers in other areas. For example, in many organizations, most if not all non-manual workers are likely to be online and to be familiar with the details of using email and the Internet, so that a suitable sampling frame of email addressees is available or can relatively easily be compiled. In such circumstances, surveys can be conducted using essentially the same probability sampling procedures as those outlined in Chapter 7. For certain kinds of business research, such as investigations involving surveys of organizational members, email-based surveys may present sampling problems that differ little from offline modes of administration, other than the possibility of higher levels of non-response. Similarly, surveys of members of commercially relevant online groups can be conducted using probability sampling principles. C. B. Smith (1997) conducted a survey of Web presence providers (people or organizations that are involved in creating and maintaining Web content). She acquired her sample from a directory of providers, which acted as her sampling frame. A further example of the use of a directory to generate a probability sample can be found in Research in focus 26.9.



## Research in focus 26.9
## Sampling for an online survey

Cobanoglu, Ward, and Moreo (2001) report the results of a study in which three different modes of survey administration were used: post, fax, and online. The questionnaires were administered to 300 hospitality professors in the USA, who had been randomly sampled from the online directory of the Council on Hotel, Restaurant, and Institutional Education. The sampling was carried out only from those who had an email address. The 300 professors were randomly assigned to one of the three modes of survey administration. The authors write:

> For the web-based survey, an email message was sent to the professors along with a cover letter and the website address. The respondents were informed that they could request a paper copy of the survey should they have problems accessing the survey online. A unique website address was created for each respondent . . . (2001: 447)

Compared with the postal administration of the questionnaire, the online administration achieved a higher response rate (26 per cent versus 44 per cent) and a faster response speed, and was cheaper.

As Couper (2000) notes of surveys of populations using probability sampling procedures:

> Intra-organizational surveys and those directed at users of the Internet were among the first to adopt this new survey technology. These restricted populations typically have no coverage problems . . . or very high rates of coverage. Student surveys are a particular example of this approach that are growing in popularity. (2000: 485)

Hewson and Laurent (2008) suggest that, when there is no sampling frame, which is normally the case with samples to be drawn from the general population, the main approach taken to generating an appropriate sample is to post an invitation to answer a questionnaire on relevant newsgroup message boards, to suitable mailing lists, or on web pages. The result will be a sample of entirely unknown representativeness, and it is impossible to know what the response rate to the questionnaire is, since the size of the population is also unknown. On the other hand, given that we have so little knowledge and understanding of online behaviour and attitudes relating to online issues, it could reasonably be argued that some

information about these areas is a lot better than none at all, provided that the limitations of the findings in terms of their generalizability are appreciated.

A further issue in relation to sampling and sampling-related error is the matter of *non-response* (see Key concept 7.5). There is growing evidence that online surveys typically generate lower response rates than postal questionnaire surveys (Tse 1998; Sheehan 2001). In the early years, in the late 1980s, response rates for email surveys were quite encouraging (Sheehan and Hoy 1999), but since the mid-1990s they have been declining and are at lower levels than those for most postal questionnaires (Sheehan 2001), though there are clear exceptions to this tendency (for example, see Research in focus 26.9). Two factors may account for this decline: the novelty of email surveys in the early years and a growing antipathy towards unsolicited emails among online communities. However, response rates can be boosted by following two simple strategies.

1. Contact prospective respondents before sending them a questionnaire. This is regarded as basic 'netiquette'.
2. As with postal questionnaire surveys, follow up non-respondents at least once.

The case for the first of these two strategies in boosting response rates is not entirely clear (Sheehan 2001), but seems to be generally advisable. However, as previously noted, with many online surveys it is impossible to calculate a response rate, since, when participants are recruited through invitations and postings on discussion boards, etc., the size of the population of which they are a sample is almost impossible to determine.

Crawford, Couper, and Lamias (2001) report the results of a survey of students at the University of Michigan that experimented with a number of possible influences on the response rate. Students in the sample were initially sent an email inviting them to visit the website, which allowed access, via a password, to the questionnaire. Some of those emailed were led to expect that the questionnaire would take 8–10 minutes to complete (in fact, it would take considerably longer); others were led to expect that it would take 20 minutes. As might be expected, those led to believe it would take longer were less likely to accept the invitation, resulting in a lower response rate for this group. However, Crawford et al. also found that those respondents who were led to believe that the questionnaire would take only 8–10 minutes were *more* likely to give up on the questionnaire part of the way through, resulting in unusable partially completed questionnaires in most cases. Interestingly, they also found that respondents were most likely to abandon their questionnaires part of the way through when in the middle of completing a series of open questions. The implications of this finding echo the advice in Chapter 9 that it is probably best to ask as few open questions in self-completion questionnaires as possible.

Further evidence regarding this survey suggests that having a progress indicator with a Web survey can reduce the number of people who abandon the questionnaire part of the way through completion (Couper, Traugott, and Lamias 2001). A progress indicator is usually a diagrammatic representation of how far the respondent has progressed through the questionnaire at any particular point. Couper et al. also found that it took less time for respondents to complete related items (for example, a series of Likert items) when they appeared on a screen together than when they appeared singly. Respondents also seemed less inclined to omit related questions when they appeared together on a screen rather than singly.

However, it is important not be too sanguine about some of these findings. One difficulty with them is that the samples derive from populations whose members are not as different from one another as would almost certainly be found in samples deriving from general populations. Another is that it must not be forgotten that, as previously noted, access to the Internet is still not universal, and there is evidence that those with Web access differ from those without, both in terms of personal characteristics and attitudinally. Fricker et al. (2005) compared the administration of a questionnaire by Web survey and by telephone interview among a general US sample. They found that telephone interviewees were much more likely to complete the questionnaire (though it is possible if not probable that the same effect would have been noted if they had compared the Web mode with a self-completion mode). By contrast, telephone interviewees were more likely to omit questions by saying they had 'no opinion' than in the Web administration, probably because respondents were prompted to answer if they failed to answer a question. One difficulty noted by Fricker et al. is that Web respondents were more likely than telephone interviewees to give undifferentiated answers to series of questions like Likert items. In other words, they were more prone to response sets. Some of the questions were open questions inviting respondents to display their knowledge on certain issues. The researchers found that Web respondents took longer to answer the questions and were more likely to provide valid answers than the telephone interviewees. Couper (2008) summarized the results of several studies that compared the use of open questions in both Web-based

and paper-based questionnaire surveys and found that the former were at least as good as the mail questionnaires in terms of both quantity and quality of answers. In fact, in terms of the quantity written, the Web questionnaires were usually superior. More recently, Smyth et al. (2009) report that the quality of answers to open questions in Web surveys can be enhanced by: increasing the size of the space available for answers; drawing attention to the flexibility of the box into which answers are typed; and providing instructions that both clarify what is expected and motivate the respondent (such as pointing out the importance of their replies). A comparison of replies with an earlier equivalent paper-based questionnaire revealed that the quality of Web-based replies was superior in several different ways. Smyth et al. observe that the use of open questions in surveys has declined because of the high costs of administering them and the poor quality of replies, but that, with growing evidence of their potential through a Web-based mode of administration, they may enjoy a renaissance, especially when it is borne in mind that there is no need to transcribe people's sometimes illegible handwriting.

These findings suggest that it is difficult and probably impossible, given their relative newness, to provide a definitive verdict on Web surveys compared to traditional forms of survey administration. For one thing, it is difficult to separate out the particular formats that researchers use when experimenting with modes of administration from the modes themselves. It may be that, if they had displayed Web questions in a different manner, their findings would have been different—with obvious implications for how the Web survey fares when compared with any of the traditional forms. Further, Web surveys seem to work better than traditional survey forms in some respects better than others.

Tips and skills 'Advantages and disadvantages of online surveys compared to postal questionnaire surveys' summarizes the main factors to take into account when comparing online surveys with postal questionnaire surveys, and Table 26.1 compares the different methods of administering a survey.

## Table 26.1

**The strengths of email and Web-based surveys in relation to face-to-face interview, telephone interview, and postal questionnaire surveys**

| Issues to consider | Mode of survey administration | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Face-to-face interview | Telephone interview | Postal questionnaire | Email | Web |
| *Resource issues* | | | | | |
| Is the cost of the mode of administration relatively low? | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ (unless access to low-cost software) |
| Is the speed of the mode of administration relatively fast? | ✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ |
| Is the cost of handling a dispersed sample relatively low? | ✓ (✓✓ if clustered) | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ |
| Does the researcher require little technical expertise for designing a questionnaire? | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| *Sampling-related issues* | | | | | |
| Does the mode of administration tend to produce a good response rate? | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Is the researcher able to control who responds (i.e. the person at whom it is targeted is the person who answers)? | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| Is the mode of administration accessible to all sample members? | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ (because of need for respondents to be accessible online) | ✓ (because of need for respondents to be accessible online) |

# Table 26.1

***Continued***

| Issues to consider | Mode of survey administration | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Face-to-face interview | Telephone interview | Postal questionnaire | Email | Web |
| *Questionnaire issues* | | | | | |
| Is the mode of administration suitable for long questionnaires? | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| Is the mode of administration suitable for complex questions? | ✓✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| Is the mode of administration suitable for open questions? | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| Is the mode of administration suitable for filter questions? | ✓✓✓ (especially if CAPI used) | ✓✓✓ (especially if CATI used) | ✓ | ✓ | ✓✓✓ (if allows jumping) |
| Does the mode of administration allow control over order questions are answered? | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ |
| Is the mode of administration suitable for sensitive questions? | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ |
| Is the mode of administration less likely to result in non-response to some questions? | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓ |
| Does the mode of administration allow the use of visual aids? | ✓✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ |
| *Answering context issues* | | | | | |
| Does the mode of administration give respondents the opportunity to consult others for information? | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ |
| Does the mode of administration minimize the impact of interviewers' characteristics (gender, class, ethnicity)? | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ |
| Does the mode of administration minimize the impact of the social desirability effect? | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ |
| Does the mode of administration allow control over the intrusion of others in answering questions? | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ |
| Does the mode of administration minimize need for respondent to have certain skills to answer questions? | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ (because of need to have online skills) | ✓ (because of need to have online skills) |
| Does the mode of administration enable respondents to be probed? | ✓✓✓ | ✓✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ |
| Does the mode of administration reduce the likelihood of data entry errors by the researcher? | ✓ | ✓ | ✓✓ | ✓ | ✓✓✓ |

*Notes*: Number of ticks indicates the strength of the mode of administration of a questionnaire in relation to each issue. More ticks correspond to more advantages in relation to each issue. A single tick implies that the mode of administering a questionnaire does not fare well in terms of the issue in question. Three ticks imply that it does very well, but two ticks imply that it is acceptable.
CAPI is computer-assisted personal interviewing; CATI is computer-assisted telephone interviewing.

*Sources*: This table has been influenced by the authors' own experience and the following sources: Dillman (1978); Czaja and Blair (1996); ***www.geog.le.ac.uk/orm/questionnaires/quesads.htm*** (accessed 23 July 2010).



## Tips and skills

# Advantages and disadvantages of online surveys compared to postal questionnaire surveys

This box summarizes the main advantages and disadvantages of online surveys compared to postal questionnaire surveys. The tally of advantages and disadvantages in connection with online surveys relates to both email and Web surveys. It should also be made clear that by and large online surveys and postal questionnaires suffer from one disadvantage relative to personal and telephone interviews—namely, that the researcher can never be certain that the person answering questions is who the researcher believes him or her to be. However, it has also been suggested that the remoteness of the Internet means that the problem of social desirability effects is less likely to be pronounced than with surveys conducted by structured interview.

### Advantages

1. *Low cost*. Even though postal questionnaire surveys are cheap to administer, there is evidence that email surveys in particular are cheaper. This is in part due to the cost of postage, paper, envelopes, and the time taken to stuff covering letters and questionnaires into envelopes with postal questionnaire surveys. However, with Web surveys there may be start-up costs associated with the software needed to produce the questionnaire.
2. *Faster response*. Online surveys tend to be returned considerably more quickly than postal questionnaires.
3. *Attractive formats*. With Web surveys, there is the opportunity to use a wide variety of stylistic formats for presenting questionnaires and closed-question answers. Also, automatic skipping when using filter questions and the possibility of immediate downloading of questionnaire replies into a database make this kind of survey quite attractive for researchers.
4. *Mixed administration*. Online surveys can be combined with postal questionnaire surveys, so that respondents have the option of replying by post or online. Moreover, the mode of reply does not seem to make a significant difference to the kinds of replies generated (see Research in focus 26.9).
5. *Unrestricted compass*. There are no constraints in terms of geographical coverage with online surveys. The same might be said of postal questionnaire surveys, but the problems of sending respondents stamped addressed envelopes that can be used in their own countries is overcome.
6. *Fewer unanswered questions*. There is evidence that online questionnaires are completed with fewer unanswered questions than postal questionnaires, resulting in less missing data. However, there is also evidence of little difference between the two modes of administering surveys.
7. *Better response to open questions*. To the extent that open questions are used, they tend to be more likely to be answered online and to result in more detailed replies.
8. *Better data accuracy, especially in Web surveys*. Data entry is automated with online surveys, so that the researcher does not have to enter data into a spreadsheet, and therefore errors in data entry are largely avoided.

### Disadvantages

1. *Low response rate*. Typically, response rates to online surveys are lower than those for comparable postal questionnaire surveys. However, the difficulty that is often encountered with Internet surveys of finding suitable sampling frames means that for many such surveys it is more or less impossible to calculate a response rate.
2. *Restricted to online populations*. Only people who are available online can reasonably be expected to participate in an online survey. This restriction may gradually ease over time, but, since the online population differs in significant ways from the non-online population, it is likely to remain a difficulty. On the other hand, if online populations are the focus of interest, this disadvantage is unlikely to prove an obstacle.
3. *Requires motivation*. Online survey respondents must be online to answer the questionnaire, so, if they are having to pay for the connection and perhaps are tying up their telephone lines, they may need a higher level

of motivation than postal questionnaire respondents. This suggests that the solicitation to participate must be especially persuasive.

4. *Confidentiality and anonymity issues*. It is normal for survey researchers to indicate that respondents' replies will be confidential and that they will be anonymous. The same suggestions can and should be made with respect to online surveys. However, with email surveys, since the recipient must return the questionnaire either embedded within the message or as an attachment, respondents may find it difficult to believe that their replies really are confidential and will be treated anonymously. In this respect, Web surveys may have an advantage over email surveys.
5. *Multiple replies*. With Web surveys, there is a risk that some people may mischievously complete the questionnaire more than once. There is much less risk of this with email surveys.

*Sources*: Based on Schaeffer and Dillman (1998); Tse (1998); Kent and Lee (1999); Sheehan and Hoy (1999); Cobanoglu, Ward, and Moreo (2001); Fricker and Schonlau (2002); Denscombe (2006); ***www.geog.le.ac.uk/orm/questionnaires/quesads.htm*** (accessed 21 April 2010).

## Overview

Online surveys are clearly in their infancy, but they have considerable potential. There is evidence that having a Web survey or even an email option can boost response rates to postal questionnaires (Yun and Trumbo 2000). Several problems have been identified with Web and email surveys, but it is too early to dismiss them because methodologists are only beginning to get to grips with this approach to survey research and may gradually develop ways of overcoming the limitations that are being identified. Moreover, as we have pointed out, for certain kinds of populations and as more and more people and organizations go online, some of the sampling-related problems will diminish. As Yun and Trumbo (2000) observe: 'the electronic-only survey is advisable when resources are limited and the target population suits an electronic survey'.

It is also worth making the obvious point that, when conducting an online survey, you should bear in mind the principles about sampling, interview design, and question construction that were posed in Chapters 7–10 in particular. While online surveys are distinctive in certain ways, they require the same rigorous considerations that go into the design of conventional surveys that are conducted by postal questionnaire or by personal or telephone interview.



# Ethical considerations in e-research

Conducting research by using the Internet as a method of data collection raises specific ethical issues that are only now starting to be widely discussed and debated. Some of these are related to the vast array of venues or environments in which these new forms of communication and possibilities for research occur, including weblogs, listservs, or discussion groups, email, chatrooms, instant messaging, and newsgroups. The behaviour of Internet users is governed by 'netiquette', the conventions of politeness or definitions of acceptable behaviour that are recognized by online communities, as well as by service providers' acceptable use policies and by data protection legislation, and anyone contemplating using the Internet as a method of data collection should start by familiarizing themselves with these and by considering the general ethical principles discussed in Chapter 5. However, this section is concerned with the specific ethical issues raised by Internet research. One of the problems faced by social researchers wanting to use the Internet for data collection is that we are clearly in the middle of a huge growth in the amount of research being conducted in this way (M. Williams 2007). Not only is this trend creating the problem of over-researched populations who suffer from respondent fatigue; many of those involved in doing research with this new technology are not adhering to ethical principles. As a result, fatigue and suspicion are beginning to set in among prospective research participants, creating a less than ideal environment for future Internet researchers.

The Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) (2002) recommends that researchers start by considering the ethical expectations established by the venue. For instance, is there a posted site policy that notifies users that the site is public and specifies the limits to privacy? Or are there mechanisms that users can employ to indicate that their exchanges are private? The more the venue is acknowledged to be public, the less obligation there is on the researcher to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of individuals using the venue, or to seek their informed consent. However, the distinction between public and private space on the Internet is blurred and contested. Hewson et al. (2003) suggest that data that have been deliberately and voluntarily made available in the public Internet domain, such as newsgroups, can be used by researchers without the need for informed consent, provided anonymity of individuals is protected. However, other researchers (Hudson and Bruckman 2004) found that, although certain Internet venues might be considered by some to be public spaces, entering chatrooms and recording the conversation for research purposes provoked an extremely hostile response from chatroom users (see Research in focus 26.10).

Barnes (2004) identifies five types of Internet message each presenting slightly different ethical concerns for anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent.

- *Messages exchanged in online public discussion lists*. A typical forum for these would be discussion or newsgroups. Although most group members see their messages as public, Barnes (2004) found that some consider them as private, despite having been sent statements upon joining the group indicating the public nature of the space. Barnes (2004) recommends as a general principle that the ideas of individuals who share their ideas on public lists should be attributed to their authors in the same way as you would attribute something they had written in a printed text under



## Research in focus 26.10
## Chatroom users' responses to being studied

Hudson and Bruckman (2004) designed an experiment to understand how potential participants react to being invited to participate in an online study. This involved entering a number of online moderated chatrooms and informing the participants that they were recording them and then recording how they responded. They downloaded a list of available chatrooms on 'ICQ Chat' each evening at 9.50 p.m. Dividing the chatrooms by size from very small (2–4 participants) to large (30 or more participants), they then randomly selected sixteen chatrooms from each set, then subdivided these into groups of four. Each group of four chatrooms was sent a different message as follows:

- *no message*: the researchers entered the chatroom using the nickname 'chat study' and said nothing;
- *recording message*: the researchers entered the chatroom as 'chat study' and announced that they were recording the chatroom for a study;
- *opt-out message*: the researchers entered the chatroom in the same way as above but posted a message giving the participants the option not to be recorded;
- *opt-in message*: the researchers entered the chatroom in the same way as before but gave participants the option to volunteer to be recorded.

Based on a sample of 525 chatrooms studied over a two-week period, Hudson and Bruckman found that posting a message about the study resulted in significant hostility, greatly increasing the likelihood of researchers being kicked out of the chatroom by the moderator. Moreover, the likelihood of being kicked out of a chatroom decreased as the number of participants in the chatroom increased. The reasons given for being kicked out included referring to the study as 'spamming' (unwanted electronic communication often involving some form of commercial advertising), objection to being studied, general requests to leave, and insults. When given a chance to opt in, only 4 of the 766 potential respondents actually did so. Hence, even when the option of fully informed consent was given, chatroom participants still objected to being studied. The researchers conclude that 'these results suggest that obtaining consent for studying online chatrooms is impracticable' (Hudson and Bruckman 2004: 135). This example highlights the potential ethical difficulties in intruding on a pre-existing Internet communication venue for research purposes, even if it is considered to be a public space.

traditional copyright law. However, it is a good idea to check the welcoming messages of public discussion lists for guidance on how to cite email messages. Some discussion groups state that researchers must notify the group in advance of any research being undertaken. Barnes advises that, when researching any Internet group, it is a good idea to contact it in advance and to ask for permission to observe the members.

- *Messages exchanged in private discussions between individuals and on private lists*. Barnes (2004) suggests that in this situation the names of the lists and participants should never be revealed. To protect individual identities further, she recommends that messages are combined, all headers and signatures are removed, references to the exact type of forum being studied are not made, and behaviour is described in general terms in a composite personality type rather than by referring to specific messages that could be traced to particular individuals.
- *Personal messages sent to the researcher*. In Barnes's (2004) research, these were sent on to her by a contact who had already deleted the names and email addresses of the original sender, but in any case she suggests that headers and signatures are removed to protect the authors' anonymity.
- *Messages re-posted and passed around the Internet*. This includes messages that people forward on to other people and discussion lists because they think they are interesting. They can contain the name of the original author or can be distributed as anonymous email. If they are distributed anonymously, Barnes (2004) believes it is worth trying to find the original author, so he or she can be properly credited in the research publication. She advises emailing the author and asking for permission to use the message.
- *Messages generated by computer programs.* This refers to messages generated by natural language computer programs that form the basis for interaction with people.

There may also be specific ethical considerations associated with certain types of research, such as virtual ethnography (see Research in focus 26.11).

A further ethical issue relates to the principle of protecting research participants from harm (see Chapter 5) and the related issues of individual anonymity and confidentiality. Stewart and Williams (2005) suggest that complete protection of anonymity is almost impossible in Internet research, since, in computer-mediated communication, information about the origin of a computer-generated message, revealed for instance in the header, is very difficult to remove. It is also more difficult to guarantee confidentiality, because the data are often accessible to other participants. In a similar vein, DeLorme, Zinkhan, and French (2001) suggest that the Internet raises particular ethical concerns for qualitative researchers that arise from the difficulty of knowing who has access to information. For example, a message posted on an Internet discussion group can be accessed by anyone who has a computer and an Internet connection. In addition, some Internet environments enable 'lurkers', people who listen to what is going on without making themselves identifiable. This makes it difficult for researchers to protect the confidentiality of data that they collect. A further concern arises from the potential for individuals to present a 'fake' identity during online interaction. If a research participant does this, it has implications for the validity of the data (see Chapter 16), but there is also potential for the researcher to deceive participants in the expectation that this will encourage them to respond more openly—for example, by pretending to be a man when conducting a focus group with all-male participants. This is thus a form of covert research, which, as discussed in Chapter 5, raises particular ethical issues because of the lack of informed consent.

These concerns have led some researchers to suggest that there is a need for an ethics code for Internet research. DeLorme, Zinkhan, and French (2001) surveyed qualitative researchers to find out whether or not they felt there was a need for an ethics code for qualitative researchers using the Internet and, if so, what kinds of issues it should cover. A majority of respondents thought that there should be an ethics code for qualitative Internet research. When asked what their reasons were for believing this, researchers expressed a rationale based on principles, driven by a professional view of what constitutes good research, and a practical rationale, based on the belief that dishonest practices will discourage Internet users from taking part in future online studies and undermine the reputation of legitimate researchers who use the Internet. DeLorme, Zinkhan, and French (2001) suggest that ethics codes designed by professional associations such as those discussed in Chapter 5 need to be revised to include an addendum that deals with these issues. However, the debates about the ethics of Internet research and the development of guidelines for researchers are ongoing, and, even though traditional ethical guidelines may need to be revised to reflect the ethical issues raised by Internet research, researchers should continue to be guided by the ethical principles discussed in Chapter 5.



## Research in focus 26.11
# Ethical issues in a virtual ethnography of change in the NHS

There have also been some attempts to highlight the ethical considerations associated with particular kinds of Internet research such as virtual ethnography. K. Clegg Smith (2004) was interested in organizational change and the role played by professionals in the NHS. While she was in the process of doing her research, she came across a listserv that was being used by British general practitioners (GPs) as a forum to discuss their feelings about the proposed reforms to the British health-care system and their likely effects. She explains, 'essentially, I had stumbled on a "setting" in which GPs were "talking" among themselves about the significance of the proposed health care reforms for them as individuals, for the wider profession and generally about the future of general practice in Britain' (2004: 225). The geographically dispersed nature of GPs' work meant that the list provided a unique opportunity for them to interact with each other. Smith argues that one of the advantages of such virtual methods is that they provide the opportunity to conduct research with virtually no observer effects (see Research in focus 2.8). Therefore, her strategy was covert because, she explains, 'I anticipated difficulties in informing participants about my research without intruding in the ongoing interaction to an unacceptable extent' (2004: 232), and she feared that this might also arouse hostility because of the way she observed 'spam' messages were received unfavourably. For fifteen months she 'participated' in the list by receiving and reading messages daily without explicitly stating or explaining her presence to the majority of the listserv's members. A further difficulty in seeking informed consent arose from the nature of the list as an unmoderated forum; therefore there was no gatekeeper to whom she could address her request. Added to this, the membership of the list of around 500 members was in constant flux, so any single request for consent would have been impossible. Hence 'the only appropriate way to gain informed consent would be to repeatedly post requests to the entire list. Through my previous exposure to the list, however, I knew that such behaviour was clearly out of line with accepted practice in this domain' (2004: 233).

However, as Smith explains, 'I am aware that in making the decision not to expound my presence on the list, I may face considerable ethical critique. My research appears analogous with the notion of "covert" research so demonized in the usual discussions of research ethics' (2004: 225). One of the ways in which she justifies this is through discussion of the features of her study that distinguish it from other studies of virtual interaction. She notes how her study examined interaction between participants who were not engaged in the kind of 'fantasy interaction' associated with sexual or social virtual interaction. Therefore, Smith argues, her participants were not taking the opportunity to 'engage in behaviour with which they would not be comfortable engaging as part of their "real" lives' (2004: 228). A further ethical justification of her research arises from the extent to which participants saw the list as a public rather than a private space. Hence, the warning posted to each member on subscription and at monthly intervals stated 'MEMBERS ARE ADVISED TO CONSIDER COMMENTS POSTED TO LISTX TO BE IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN' (2004: 229; capitalization in original). In addition, list members received guidelines on the copyright implications of email messages, which stated that comments posted to public lists are comparable to sending letters to a newspaper editor. Smith suggests that this provided justification for her 'electronic eavesdropping', since the ethical guidelines she was working to suggested that it was 'not necessary to explicitly seek permission for recording and analyzing publicly posted messages' because this is 'akin to conducting research in a marketplace, library or other public area, where observers are not necessarily expected to obtain informed consent from all present' (2004: 230).

A final ethical issue arising from the study concerns the principle of anonymity. Initially, Smith assumed she should protect the identity of participants when reporting her research findings, but through her involvement in the list she became aware that 'participants might wish to be "credited" for their postings' (2004: 234) because of the reaction when journalists used list messages without crediting the authors. However, despite this, she felt that, because she had not sought informed consent from all list members, it would be wrong to do this.



## Telling it like it is
## Informed consent in a research project involving the Internet

The rising use of the Internet as a method of data collection raises particular ethical considerations, especially in relation to the issue of informed consent. Tore's dissertation project made use of data that had been collected for the purpose of enabling students to socialize with each other. As part of the process of joining the website, students were required to sign an agreement. Even though Tore did not anticipate using the data for his research at the time of setting up the website, the contract signed by students did include a clause in which they gave their consent for the data to be used for this purpose. Tore himself conceded that it was unlikely that the students had read the ten pages of small print that constituted the terms and conditions of the website, so they were probably not giving their fully informed consent to the use of the data for this purpose. However, since Tore was concerned with patterns of interaction and the profiles of individuals within these social networks and not with the content of the messages that were exchanged, he was able to avoid disclosure of potentially more sensitive aspects of the data and to protect the anonymity of individuals involved. Tore's research project also has implications relating to the data protection legislation, which is the subject of a later section.



*To hear more about Tore's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# The state of e-research

It should be apparent from the discussion above that, at least from a methodological viewpoint, e-research is very much a work in progress. New approaches are being developed, new fields of study are being envisioned, and the platforms for conducting research via software and the Internet are changing. The ethical terrain is changing too, and it is likely that some of the practices that were in evidence in the early years of e-research would be less likely to be considered now. Arriving at definitive statements about the various components of e-research is difficult because it is in fact an assemblage of research methods and approaches, each of which is developing in significantly different ways. The growing awareness of the interpenetration of online and offline worlds compounds the complexity of the issues. However, as we hope is clear from the presentation in this chapter, e-research offers huge opportunities for researchers as both a focus for research and a springboard for doing research. At the same time, a prospective user of e-research has to be aware that, although many methodological conventions have been developed, it is also a fast-developing area of research methodology.



## *Key points*

- The growth in the use of the Internet offers significant opportunities for business researchers in allowing them access to a large and growing body of people.
- Many research methods covered elsewhere in this book can be adapted to online investigations.
- There is a distinction between research that uses websites as objects of analysis and research that uses the Internet to collect data from others.
- Online surveys may be of two major types: Web surveys and email surveys.
- Most of the same considerations that go into designing research that is not online apply to e-research.
- Both quantitative and qualitative research can be adapted to e-research.



# Questions for review

### *The Internet as object of analysis*

- In what ways might the analysis of websites pose particular difficulties that are less likely to be encountered in the analysis of non-electronic documents?

### *Using websites to collect data from individuals*

- What are the chief ways of collecting data from individuals using the Internet and online communications?
- What advantages do they have over traditional research methods for collecting such data?
- What disadvantages do they have in comparison to traditional research methods for collecting such data?
- What is the difference between Web-based and communication-based research methods?

### *Virtual ethnography*

- How does ethnography need to be adapted in order to collect data on the use of the Internet?
- Does the study of the impact of the Internet necessarily mean that we end up as technological determinists?
- Are ethnographies of the Internet really ethnographic?

### *Qualitative research using online focus groups*

- What is the significance of the distinction between synchronous and asynchronous focus groups?
- How different is the role of the moderator in online, as against face-to-face, focus groups?

### *Qualitative research using online personal interviews*

- Can online personal interviews really be personal interviews?
- To what extent does the absence of direct contact mean that the online interview cannot be a true interview?

### *Online social surveys*

- What is the significance of the distinction between email and Web surveys?
- Are there any special circumstances in which embedded email questionnaires will be more likely to be effective than attached questionnaires?
- Do sampling problems render online social surveys too problematic to warrant serious consideration?
- Are response rates in online surveys worse or better than in traditional surveys?

### *Ethical considerations in e-research*

- What ethical issues are raised by using the Internet as a method of data collection?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Internet Research Methods.*

# 27

# Writing up business research

## *Chapter outline*


**Introduction** 676

**Writing up your research** 677
- Start early 677
- Be persuasive 679
- Get feedback 679
- Avoid sexist, racist, and disablist language 681
- Structure your writing 681

**Writing up quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research** 684

**An example of quantitative research** 684
- Introduction 685
- Theory and hypotheses 686
- Methods 686
- Results 687
- Discussion 687
- Lessons 687

**An example of qualitative research** 689
- Introduction 690
- Review of the literature 690
- Methods 691
- Presentation of main themes 691
- Discussion 691
- Implications 691
- Lessons 692

**An example of mixed methods research** 692
- Introduction 694
- The Russian context 694
- Organizational culture and effectiveness 694
- Research questions 695
- Testing the model: a comparative study 695
- Taking a closer look: four case studies 695
- Discussion 696
- Lessons 697

**Postmodernism and reflexivity** 697

**Writing ethnography** 703
- Experiential authority 703
- Typical forms 704
- The native's point of view 705
- Interpretative omnipotence 706
- Ways of writing differently 706

***Checklist*** 708
***Key points*** 710
***Questions for review*** 710



## Chapter outline

It is easy to forget that one of the main stages in any research project, regardless of its size, is that it has to be written up. Not only is this how you will convey your findings, but being aware of the significance of writing is crucial, because your audience must be persuaded about the credibility and importance of your research. This chapter presents some of the characteristics of the writing-up of business research, including writing up a student research project. The chapter explores:

- why writing, and especially good writing, is important to business research;
- how to write up your research for a dissertation project;
- how quantitative and qualitative research are composed, using examples;
- the influence and implications of postmodernism for writing;
- key issues raised by discussions about the writing of ethnography, an area where discussions about different ways of writing have been especially prominent.

# Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine some of the strategies that are employed in writing up business research. As well as providing students with some practical advice on writing up a student research project, we will explore the question of whether or not quantitative and qualitative research reveal divergent approaches. As we will see, the similarities are frequently more striking and apparent than the differences. However, the main point of this chapter is to extract some principles of good practice that can be developed and incorporated into your own writing. This is an important issue, since many people find writing up research more difficult than carrying it out. On the other hand, many people treat the writing-up stage as relatively unproblematic. But no matter how well research is conducted, others (that is, your readers) have to be convinced about the credibility of the knowledge claims you are making. Good writing is, therefore, very much to do with developing your style so that it is *persuasive* and *convincing*. Flat, lifeless, uncertain writing does not have the power to persuade and convince.

In exploring these issues, we will touch on rhetorical strategies in the writing of business research (see Key concept 27.1). As Atkinson (1990: 2) has observed in relation to social research, 'the conventions of text and rhetoric are among the ways in which reality is *constructed*'. This chapter will review some of the ways in which business research is written up in a way that will provide some basic ideas about structuring your own written work if you have to produce something like a dissertation.



## Key concept 27.1
## What is rhetoric?

The study of rhetoric is fundamentally concerned with the ways in which attempts to convince or persuade an audience are formulated. We often encounter the term in a negative context, such as 'mere rhetoric' or the opposition of 'rhetoric and reality'. However, rhetoric is an essential ingredient of writing, because when we write our aim is to convince others about the credibility of our knowledge claims. To suggest that rhetoric should somehow be suppressed makes little sense, since it is in fact a basic feature of writing. The examination of rhetorical strategies in written texts based on business research is concerned with the identification of the techniques in those texts that are designed to convince and persuade.



## Telling it like it is
## Constructing rhetoric from rhetorical interview data

Tom was conscious of the process whereby his interviewees were using rhetoric to make sense of their experience of working in a call centre. 'The interviewees may well have been telling me things that they thought I wanted to hear. They may well have been giving a constructed account of what was going on. I took a mid-way position, I believed the data I collected wasn't simply call handlers giving me an accurate account of what was going on, but on the other hand I wouldn't say it was completely constructed and had no bearing on the sort of reality of the situation. I suppose I'd say that people were giving an account of what was going on, but there were inconsistencies in what they said. So, for example, some call handlers were quite keen to emphasize that when they left the building at 5 o'clock they didn't take any work issues home; they left them behind; but at other times in the interview they might say that at home they would be worrying about a stressful call or an angry call that had happened the previous day or something, so there were kind of inconsistencies in their accounts, which led me to think that they were kind of constructing a story to some extent which they'd like perhaps to believe themselves about their work as well as liking me to believe it.'

Tom's reflections on his interview data are interesting because they make explicit the process of interpretation. Tom is operating from a constructionist rather than an objectivist position (see Chapter 1). Once he had collected his data, he was in the position of having to interpret the rhetoric used by interviewees, looking for inconsistencies and contradictions and using this to inform his own rhetoric in his dissertation. His reflections on this process help to challenge the *interpretative omnipotence* that can be associated with certain types of ethnographic writing (see page 706).



*To hear more about Tom's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



# Writing up your research

It is easy to neglect the writing stage of your work because of the difficulties that you often encounter in getting your research underway. But—obvious though this point is—your dissertation has to be written. Your findings must be conveyed to an audience, something that all of us who carry out research have to face. The first bit of advice is . . .

## Start early

It is easy to take the view that the writing-up of your research findings is something that you can think about after you have collected and analysed your data. There is, of course, a grain of truth in this view, in that you could hardly write up your findings until you know what they are, which is something that you can know only once you have gathered and analysed your data. However, there are good reasons for beginning writing early on, since you might want to start thinking about such issues as how best to present and justify the research questions that are driving your research or how to structure the theoretical and research literature that will have been used to frame your research questions. Students often tend to underestimate the time that it will take to write up their research, so it is a good idea to allow plenty of time for this, especially if you are expecting your supervisor to read and comment on an early draft, since you will also need to allow him or her a reasonable amount of time for this. A further reason why it is advisable to begin writing earlier rather than later is an entirely practical one: many people find it difficult to get started and employ (probably unwittingly) procrastination strategies to put off the inevitable. This tendency can result in the writing being left until the last minute and consequently being rushed. Writing under this kind of pressure is not ideal. How you represent your findings and conclusions is a crucial stage in the research process. If you do not provide a convincing account of your research, you will not do justice to it.



## Telling it like it is
## The benefits of writing up early . . . versus leaving it until later

Tom and Karen both found that there were advantages to having completed writing up their dissertations early so they were able to come back to it after a break before the deadline and make further changes. Tom said: 'The deadline was to hand it in by the end of August, but I had a holiday at the beginning of August and I was going to move house, so I knew I had to finish by the end of July because otherwise it was going to be a nightmare. And that was quite good, because it meant I finished, went off on holiday, then I just let it sort of settle for a couple of weeks and when I came back I was able to look at it with a fresh eye and give it a final kind of tidy up and tweak.'

Karen found that starting her research project early was an advantage in helping her to see her argument more clearly. 'I wanted to give it a lot of time to think about all the different issues. I did one draft and then just left it for four months and then came back to it, which I think was a definite benefit. because then I came back to it with fresh eyes and I'd had a couple of thoughts about different things; it was one of those things that was just constantly at the back of my mind. And I think that's definitely the best way to do it, because I had so many friends who sort of rushed it in the last two weeks, and I think then you lose all of the conceptual thinking and the ability to think more broadly about the topic and you just get a bit bogged down in all the detail.'

Tore was relatively late in starting to write up his research project, as he explained: 'I was maybe the last one to start writing up, I think, among all the students doing a research project. I think it is very important to know what you're writing about before you start writing, because otherwise you just start writing something and then you have to backtrack and change it and in a sense you're anchoring yourself to a certain text if you start writing. So I was actually very late at writing it up, but then it took less than a week to write it all up because I basically knew what I wanted to write. I had my headings and I knew where I was going on each heading. I had the data, I had the formulas, and then I sent it to all my friends to spell check and they questioned what it was all about. So I waited until I knew what I wanted to say and I had all the conclusions in order before I started writing up my results. I know it's kind of wrong to do it that way, but in a sense it made the writing very clear.'

Although Tore's experience might initially seem to contradict what we have said about the importance of starting early, he did have a clear sense of what he was intending to write about and how he was intending to structure his writing well before he started to write this final version. This understanding was derived in part from reading articles in his subject area and realizing that they have a consistent structure. As he explained: 'They go through certain things. They have a results section and then they have a conclusion section, so in a sense the layout is fixed. I just used what others had used before me.' Tore was thus able to replicate elements of the structure of these published articles in his own writing.

However, Lucie was more ambivalent about having left the writing-up of her dissertation towards the end of the time available, feeling that she had not had enough time to really do justice to her complex dataset, which included documentary, interview, participant observational, and statistical data. 'I think I let myself down a little bit at the end. I carried out all this research and it had the potential to be really good and then I kind of ran out of time before having to hand in the dissertation. You know, I didn't write it as well as I could have and didn't include as much as I could have, I don't think, so I was a bit disappointed with my final draft.' This is a particular consideration in mixed methods research that combines different kinds of qualitative data like Lucie's, because the process of analysing such varied data is likely to be complex and more time-consuming than in research designs that use one data collection method.



*To hear more about these students' research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



## Telling it like it is
## The rewards of being a supervisor

Doing a small-scale research project can be a rewarding experience for supervisors as well as for students. Some of the rewards that supervisors we contacted mentioned included:

- reading a well-written dissertation;
- finding out interesting things they did not already know;
- discussing interesting topics with students;
- obtaining additional references for their own research and writing;
- helping students to discover they have become an expert in their sub-field;
- hearing of someone doing well in his or her career after leaving university.

### Be persuasive

This point is crucial. Writing up your research is not simply a matter of reporting your findings and drawing some conclusions. Writing up your research will contain many other features, such as referring to the literature on which you drew, explaining how you did your research, and outlining how you conducted your analysis. But, above all, you must be *persuasive*. This means that you must convince your readers of the credibility of your conclusions. Simply saying 'This is what I found; isn't it interesting?' is not enough. You must persuade your readers that your findings and conclusion are significant and that they are plausible.

### Get feedback

Try to get as much feedback on your writing as possible and respond positively to the points anyone makes about what they read. Your supervisor is likely to be the main source of feedback, but institutions vary in what supervisors are allowed to comment on. Provide your supervisor with drafts of your work to the fullest extent that regulations will allow. Give him or her plenty of time to provide feedback. There will be others like you who will want your supervisor to comment on their work, and, if he or she feels rushed, the comments may be less helpful. Also, you could ask others on the same degree programme to read your drafts and comment on them. They may ask you to do the same. Their comments may be very useful, but, by and large, your supervisor's comments are the main ones you should seek out.



## Tips and skills
## The importance of an argument

One of the things that students can find difficult about writing up their research is the formulation of an argument. The writing-up of research should be organized around an argument that links all aspects of the research process from problem formulation, through literature review and the presentation of research methods, to the discussion and conclusion. Too often, students make a series of points without asking what the contribution of those points is to the overall argument that they are trying to present. Consider what your claim to knowledge is and try to organize your writing to support and enhance it. That will be your argument. Sometimes it is useful to think in terms of telling a story about your research and your findings. Try to avoid tangents and irrelevant material that may mean your readers will lose the thread of your argument. If you are not able to supply a clear argument, you are vulnerable to the 'so what?' question. Ask yourself: 'What is the key point or message that I want my readers to take away with them when they have finished reading my work?' If you cannot answer that question satisfactorily (and it may be worth trying it out on others), almost certainly you do not have an argument. The argument is a thread that runs through your dissertation (see Figure 27.1 for some examples of key phrases that can be used to construct and maintain an argument throughout the dissertation).

# Figure 27.1

## Typical ways of constructing an argument

| Dissertation chapter | | Commony used phrases to make an argument |
|---|---|---|
| **Introduction** | A | In this dissertation I will argue that ...<br>This disseration argues that ...<br>It is often argued that ...<br>It is argued here that ...<br>It could be argued that ... |
| **Literature review** | R<br>G<br>U | In the introduction I argued that ...<br>This argument is illustrated by exploring the concept of ...<br>The argument in this dissertation draws on ...<br>My arguments build on the work of Mintzberg (1973) ...<br>Some would argue that ...<br>Others have argued ...<br>As Bryman (1998) argued .../he suggests ...<br>Bell (1999) argues that .../she claims that ...<br>In this chapter I willl situate my argument in the literature on ... |
| **Research methods** | M | Following the arguments put forward by Willmott (1990) ... |
| **Results/findings/cases** | E<br>N | This shows ...<br>This demonstrates that ...<br>This implies that ...<br>From this I suggest ... |
| **Discussion/analysis** | T | Based on these findings I would argue that ...<br>In an earlier chapter I argued that ... |
| **Conclusion** | | In this dissertation I have argued for ...<br>I conclude that ...<br>In this dissertation I have argured for a more ... |



## Tips and skills
## Non-sexist writing

One of the biggest problems (but by no means the only one) when trying to write in a non-sexist way is avoiding complex his/her formulations. The easiest way of dealing with this is to write in the plural in such circumstances. For example: 'I wanted to give each respondent the opportunity to complete the questionnaire in his or her own time and in a location that was convenient for him or her.' This is a rather tortuous sentence and, although grammatically correct, it could be phrased more helpfully as: 'I wanted to give respondents the opportunity to complete their questionnaires in their own time and in a location that was convenient for them.'

## Avoid sexist, racist, and disablist language

Remember that your writing should be free of sexist, racist, and disablist language. The British Sociological Association provides very good general and specific guidelines on this issue, which can be found at: ***www.britsoc.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/4E70B7F7-58A1-43AB-A414-77F929A954D2/533/EqualityandDiversity_LanguageandtheBSA_SexandGende.doc*** (accessed 23 July 2010)

## Structure your writing

It may be that you have to write a dissertation of around 10,000 to 15,000 words for your degree. How might it be structured? The following is typical of the structure of a dissertation.

### Title page

You should examine your institution's rules about what should be entered here.

### Acknowledgements

You might want to acknowledge the help of various people, such as gatekeepers who gave you access to an organization, people who have read your drafts and provided you with feedback, or your supervisor for his or her advice.

### List of contents

Your institution may have recommendations or prescriptions about the form this should take.

### Abstract

A brief summary of your dissertation. Not all institutions require this component, so check on whether it is required. Journal articles usually have abstracts, so you can draw on these for guidance on how to approach this task.

### Introduction

- You should explain what you are writing about and why it is important. Saying simply that it interests you because of a long-standing personal interest is not enough.
- You might indicate in general terms the theoretical approach or perspective you will be using and why.
- You should also at this point outline your research questions. In the case of dissertations based on qualitative research, it is likely that your research questions will be rather more open-ended than is the case with quantitative research. But do try to identify some research questions. A totally open-ended research focus is risky and can lead to the collection of too much data, and, when it comes to writing up, it can result in a lack of focus.
- The opening sentence or sentences are often the most difficult of all. Becker (1986) advises strongly against opening sentences that he describes as 'vacuous' and 'evasive'. He gives the example of 'This study deals with the problem of careers', and adds that this kind of sentence employs 'a typically evasive manœuvre, pointing to something without saying anything, or anything much, about it. *What* about careers?' (Becker 1986: 51). He suggests that such evasiveness often occurs because of concerns about giving away the plot. In fact, he argues, it is much better to give readers a quick and clear indication of what is going to be meted out to them and where it is going.

### Literature review

More detailed advice on how to go about writing this chapter of your dissertation is given in Chapter 4.

### Research methods

The term 'research methods' is meant here as a kind of catch-all for several issues that need to be outlined: your research design; your sampling approach; how access was achieved, if relevant; the procedures you used (such as, if you sent out a postal questionnaire, if you followed up non-respondents); the nature of your questionnaire, interview schedule, participant observation role, observation schedule, coding frame, or whatever (these will usually appear in an appendix, but you should comment on such things as your style of questioning or observation and why you asked the things you did); problems of non-response; note-taking; issues of ongoing access and cooperation; coding matters; and how you proceeded with your analysis. When discussing each of these issues, you should describe and defend the choices that you made, such as why you used a postal questionnaire rather than a structured interview approach, or why you focused upon a particular population for sampling purposes.

### Results

In this chapter you present the bulk of your findings. If you intend to have a separate Discussion chapter, it is likely that the results will be presented with little commentary in terms of the literature or the implications of your findings. If there will be no Discussion chapter, you will need to provide some reflections on the significance of your findings for your research questions and for the literature. Bear these points in mind.

- Whichever approach you take, remember not to include *all* your results. You should present and discuss only those findings that relate to your research questions. This requirement may mean a rather painful process of leaving out many findings, but it is necessary, so that the thread of your argument is not lost.
- Your writing should point to particularly salient aspects of the tables, graphs, or other forms of analysis you present. Do not just summarize what a table shows; you should direct the reader to the component or components of it that are especially striking from the point of view of your research questions. Try to ask yourself what story you want the table to convey and try to relay that story to your readers.
- Another sin to be avoided is simply presenting a graph or table or a section of the transcript of a semi-structured interview or focus group session without any comment whatsoever, because the reader is left wondering why you think the finding is important.
- When reporting quantitative findings, it is quite a good idea to vary wherever possible the method of presenting results—for example, provide a mixture of diagrams and tables. However, you must remember the lessons of Chapter 14 concerning the methods of analysis that are appropriate to different types of variable.
- A particular problem that can arise with qualitative research is that students find it difficult to leave out large parts of their data. As one experienced qualitative researcher has put it: 'The major problem we face in qualitative inquiry is not to get data, but to get rid of it!' (Wolcott 1990: 18). He goes on to say that the 'critical task in qualitative research is not to accumulate all the data you can, but to "can" (i.e., get rid of) most of the data you accumulate' (Wolcott 1990: 35). You simply have to recognize that much of the rich data you accumulate will have to be jettisoned. If you do not do this, any sense of an argument in your work is likely to be lost. There is also the risk that your account of your findings will appear too descriptive and lack an analytical edge. This is why it is important to use research questions as a focus and to orient the presentation of your findings to them. It is also important to keep in mind the theoretical ideas and the literature that have framed your work. The theory and literature that have influenced your thinking will also have shaped your research questions.
- If you are writing a thesis, for example for an M.Phil. or Ph.D. degree, it is likely that you will have more than one and possibly several chapters in which you present your results. Cryer (1996) recommends showing at the beginning of each chapter the particular issues that are being examined in the chapter. You should indicate which research question or questions are being addressed in the chapter and provide some signposts about what will be included in the chapter. In the conclusion of the chapter, you should make clear what your results have shown and draw out any links that might be made with the next results chapter.

### Discussion

In the Discussion, you reflect on the implications of your findings for the research questions that have driven your research. In other words, how do your results illuminate your research questions? If you have specified hypotheses, the discussion will revolve around whether the hypotheses have been confirmed or not, and, if not, you might speculate about some possible reasons for and the implications of their refutation.

### Conclusion

The main points here are as follows:

- A Conclusion is not the same as a summary. However, it is frequently useful to bring out in the opening paragraph of the Conclusion your argument thus far. This will mean relating your findings and your discussion of them to your research questions. Thus, your brief summary should be a means of hammering home to your readers the significance of what you have done. However, the Conclusion should do more than merely summarize.
- You should make clear the implications of your findings for your research questions.
- You might suggest some ways in which your findings have implications for theories relating to your area of interest.
- You might also suggest some ways in which your findings have implications for practice in the field of business and management.
- You might draw attention to any limitations of your research with the benefit of hindsight, but it is probably best not to overdo this element and provide examiners with too much ammunition that might be used against you!
- It is often valuable to propose areas of further research that are suggested by your findings.
- Two things to avoid are engaging in speculations that take you too far away from your data, or that cannot be substantiated by the data, and introducing issues or ideas that have not previously been brought up.



## Telling it like it is
## The challenges and constraints of length

For many students, the prospect of writing up a single piece of work of between 7,000 and 15,000 words in length may at first seem a daunting prospect. However, the experiences of students interviewed for this book suggest that when it comes down to it the challenge is more often about how to keep within these limits. Chris's comments are typical: 'I'd never done a piece of work like this. You know, 3,000 or 4,000 words was probably as much as I'd written before and, although it was only meant to be 7,000 words, it turned out to be 13,000.' Some students found the need to keep to a word limit a real struggle, particularly when presenting qualitative data. Angharad felt that her problems with the word limit were related to the nature of her data. 'I can't represent interview data in a table like other people might be able to do with their research. So the way that I had to write up the research meant that it was going to be over the word count.' Karen also found that her work exceeded the length guidelines provided by her institution, so she tried to cut it down by putting graphs and tables into the appendices, but this had drawbacks because the reader had constantly to keep checking the appendices, and some supervisors may suspect that the student has done this just to get around the word limit. It is therefore important to plan your work carefully and to edit your work if necessary during the revision process. Editing to meet a word limit can also help you to focus on what you really want to say. For example, Tom realized that his first draft was quite descriptive and therefore he could cut out some of this detail, and this left him more space for the analysis.

Note that institutions vary in the extent that they rigorously enforce a word limit, so check with your supervisor to find out if you have an element of discretion about this. But remember, while word limits may be viewed as a nuisance, especially when you feel that you have a lot to say or some really interesting data, they help ensure a level playing field for students, so that everyone has roughly the same amount of space in which to present their ideas and arguments. It is also worth noting that constraints of length apply to all academics, since the norm of writing in scholarly journals requires you to produce papers that are between 6,000 and 8,000 words in length. So you are being required to conform to similar norms as other business and management researchers.



*To hear more about these students' research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***

### Appendices

In your appendices you might want to include such things as your questionnaire, coding frame, or observation schedule, letters sent to sample members, and letters sent to and received from gatekeepers where the cooperation of an organization was required.

### References

Include here all references cited in the text. For the format of the References section you should follow whichever approach is prescribed by your department. Nowadays, the format is usually a variation of the Harvard method, such as the one employed for this book.

### Finally

Remember to fulfil any obligations you entered into, such as supplying a copy of your dissertation, if, for example, your access to an organization was predicated on providing one, and maintaining the confidentiality of information supplied and the anonymity of your informants and other research participants.



## Tips and skills
## Proofreading your dissertation

Before submitting your dissertation, make sure that it is spellchecked and check it for grammatical and punctuation errors. There are many useful guides and handbooks that can be used for this purpose. It may also be useful to ask someone else, such as a friend or family member, to proofread your work in case there are errors that you have missed. As well as being an important presentational issue, this will affect the ease with which your written work can be read and understood. It therefore has the potential significantly to affect the quality of your dissertation.



# Writing up quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research

In the next three sections, research-based articles that have been published in journals are examined to detect some helpful features. One is based on quantitative research, one on qualitative research, and another on mixed methods research. The presentation of the quantitative and the qualitative research articles raises the question of whether or not practitioners of the two research strategies employ different writing approaches. It is sometimes suggested that they do, though, when Bryman compared two articles based on research in the sociology of work, he found that the differences were less pronounced than he had anticipated on the basis of reading the literature on the topic (Bryman 1998). One difference that we have noticed is that, in journals, quantitative researchers often give more detailed accounts of their research design, research methods, and approaches to analysis than qualitative researchers. This is surprising, because, in books reporting their research, qualitative researchers provide detailed accounts of these areas. Indeed, the chapters in Part Three of this book rely heavily on these accounts. Wolcott (1990: 27) has also noticed this tendency: 'Our [qualitative researchers'] failure to render full and complete disclosure about our data-gathering procedures give our methodologically orientated colleagues fits. And rightly so, especially for those among them willing to accept our contributions if we would only provide more careful data about our data.' Being informed that a study was based on a year's participant observation or a number of semi-structured interviews is not enough to gain an acceptance of the claims to credibility that a writer might be wishing to convey.

However, this point aside, although one article based on quantitative research and one based on qualitative research will be examined in the discussion that follows, we should not be too surprised if they turn out to be more similar than might have been expected. In other words, although we might have expected clear differences between the two in terms of their approaches to writing, the similarities are more noticeable than the differences.

In addition to looking at examples of writing in quantitative and qualitative research, we will examine how mixed methods research can be written up and explore some guidelines that are being proffered by practitioners. The approach to dealing with the mixed methods research article is slightly different from the other two, in that we will begin with some general suggestions for writing up mixed methods research, as this is an area that has not been given much attention.



# An example of quantitative research

To illustrate some of the characteristics of the way quantitative research is written up for academic journals, we will take an article by Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler (2000). We are not suggesting that this article is somehow

exemplary or representative, but rather that it exhibits some features that are often regarded as desirable qualities in terms of presentation and structure. The article is a secondary analysis of data from two surveys conducted in a large local-authority government organization, and it was accepted for publication in one of the most prestigious international journals in business and management—the *Journal of Management Studies*. The article has the following components, aside from the abstract:

1. introduction;
2. theory and hypotheses;
3. methods;
4. results;
5. discussion.

## Introduction

Right at the beginning of the introduction, the opening sentences attempt to grab our attention, to give a clear indication of where the article's focus lies, and to provide an indication of the significance and importance of the subject of study for practitioners, policy-makers, and academics. This is what the authors write:

> The implications of globalization, organizational restructuring and downsizing on employment relations have renewed interest in the concept of the psychological contract. It has captured the attention of policy-makers in their efforts to 'change the deal' in response to increasing pressures to adapt to changing circumstances. For academics, the psychological contract presents another opportunity to re-examine the fundamental aspect of organizational life, the employee–employer relationship. (2000: 903)

This is an impressive start, because, in just over sixty words, the authors set out what the article is about and persuade us of its significance. Let us look at what each sentence achieves.

- The first sentence locates the article's focus as addressing an important aspect of business and management research that is currently the focus of renewed interest.
- The second sentence notes that the concept of the psychological contract has been used by policy-makers in response to pressure to adapt to changing circumstances.
- The third sentence goes on to suggest that this subject has also been of long-standing interest to academics. This sentence also widens the focus of the article by suggesting that the psychological contract is just one way of looking at the employee–employer relationship.

The rest of the paragraph then hints towards current challenges faced in managing the employment relationship, citing two further sources on this subject and hinting that the psychological contract has been proposed as a potential framework for understanding changes in the employee–employer exchange relationship. So, by the end of this paragraph, the contribution that the article is claiming to make to our understanding of the psychological contract has been outlined and situated within an established literature on the topic. This is quite a powerful start to the article, because the reader knows what the article is about and the particular case the authors are making for their contribution to the literature on the subject.

The authors go on to draw attention to the specific organizational context of their study, highlighting changes in the public sector that have led to increased financial and managerial accountability. Then they set out in much more precise terms exactly what this article will achieve, providing a summary of exactly where the researchers claim their contribution to this subject lies:

> In this study, we set out to examine the content and state of the psychological contract from the employer and employee perspective. The inclusion of the employer's perspective goes some way towards counteracting the exclusive emphasis on the employee perspective adopted in the majority of empirical studies undertaken to date. (2000: 904)

Notice how the second sentence aims to persuade us that this really is an important contribution to our understanding of this research area. The authors draw attention to a deficiency in existing knowledge (the tendency towards an 'exclusive emphasis on the employee perspective') and tell us that they are going to correct this situation.

This aim is then broken down into three distinct stages:

1. First, 'we explore employees' and managers' perceptions of employer obligations and how well the employer has fulfilled its obligations to its employees (i.e. contract behaviour)';
2. 'Subsequently, we investigate the consequences of perceived employer contract behaviour on employees' perceived organizational support, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour [OCB]';
3. This then enables examination of 'whether the psychological contract contributes to our understanding of the employee–employer exchange relationship . . .' (2000: 904).

Two important concepts—'contract behaviour' and 'organizational citizenship behaviour [OCB]'—are thereby introduced; the latter is defined as a 'readiness to contribute beyond literal contractual obligations' (Organ 1988: 22, cited in Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2000: 910). The authors then go on to review the literature on the psychological contract, from early contributions to recent developments.

## Theory and hypotheses

Although this is not presented as a separate section of the paper—in fact it forms an extension of the introduction—it is where existing ideas and research on the topic of the psychological contract are presented; it is thus where the theory that the study builds on is introduced. The authors point to a tendency within the literature to downplay the mutuality in the exchange relationship and the 'near exclusive emphasis on the employee perspective' (2000: 905). They treat managers as agents of the organization and suggest 'their interpretation of the psychological contract may provide one way of capturing the employer's perspective' (2000: 907). The authors suggest that capturing the employer's perspective may add to understanding of employer violation or breach of the psychological contract and go on to cite empirical studies that suggest employer violations of the psychological contract are increasing in frequency. Importantly, they point out that none of the empirical studies has 'examined the relationship between employer contract behaviour and perceived organizational support' (2000: 909). Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler's ruminations on this issue lead them to propose the first of three hypotheses.

- *Hypothesis 1*. 'Fulfilment of the psychological contract by the employer will have a positive effect on employees' perceived organizational support' (2000: 909).

This hypothesis stipulates that fulfilment of the psychological contract by the employer has an impact on employee perception concerning the extent to which the organization values their contributions and cares for their well-being. This leads them to suggest two further related hypotheses.

- *Hypothesis 2*. 'Fulfilment of the psychological contract by the employer will have a positive effect on employees' commitment to the organization' (2000: 910).
- *Hypothesis 2b*. 'An employee's perception of who their employer is will moderate the relationship between psychological contract fulfilment and organizational commitment' (2000: 910).

Finally, the authors suggest a third hypothesis:

- *Hypothesis 3*. 'Fulfilment of the psychological contract by the employer will have a positive effect on employees' OCB behaviour' (2000: 911).

These three hypotheses suggest a relationship between fulfilment of the psychological contract by the employer—the dependent variable—and employees' perceived organizational support, commitment to the organization, and OCB behaviour, which constitute the independent variables in this study. We thus end up with very clear research questions, which have been arrived at by reflecting on existing ideas and research in this area.

## Methods

In this section, the authors outline the methods that were used in conducting the research and provide details about the data that they draw on. They begin by describing the case study organization in which the data for the study were collected. The section then gives a general outline of the datasets and provides details of the sample sizes and response rates for the two questionnaire surveys that were conducted, one of managers and the other of employees. Information about the sample is given, including mean organizational and job tenure, mean age, gender proportions, and average earnings. The section also outlines the different ways in which the relationships between the variables might be conceptualized and discusses the control variables included in the study. The control variables are additional variables that may have an influence on the nature of the relationships between the main variables in the study. They then go on

to explain how the main variables in their research were measured using a series of psychological scales.

## Results

In this section, the authors provide a general description of their findings, which are based on factor analysis (see Chapter 6), and then consider whether or not their hypotheses are supported. In fact, it turns out that hypotheses 1 and 2 are supported, but hypothesis 3, which predicted that contract fulfilment would have a positive effect on OCB, is not supported. In fact, the effect of transactional fulfilment on OCB is found to be negative. They then offer a potential explanation that may account for this contrary finding related to the difficulties in conceptualizing OCB, arguing that what is measured in the study as citizenship behaviour and thus discretionary 'may actually be considered in-role behaviours from the employees' viewpoint' (2000: 920). They thus highlight differences in interpretation that OCB is prone to.

## Discussion

In this final section, Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler return to the issues that have been driving their investigation. These are the issues they presented in the introduction and theory sections. They begin this section with a strong statement of their findings:

> Our findings suggest that the majority of employees are experiencing contract breach. Furthermore, managers responding as representatives of the employer broadly support this. The extent of perceived employer contract fulfilment has a significant effect on employees' perceived organizational support, organizational commitment and organizational citizenship behaviour. (2000: 922)

They go on to claim that their results are consistent with other empirical studies that suggest violation of the psychological contract, adding that 'our inclusion of the employer's perspective adds significant weight to the findings' (2000: 922).

In the last few paragraphs of the paper, Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler reflect on the implications of their findings for our understanding of the consequences of employer contract behaviour and the nature of the psychological contract, concluding that, 'overall, this study highlights the importance of employer's contract behaviour regarding the fulfilment of specific obligations in affecting employees' attitudes and behaviour' (2000: 923). After drawing attention to some of the limitations of the study, they then outline possibilities for further research. Finally, they outline some practical implications of the study, suggesting that 'employers need to take steps to understand employees' perceptions of the content of the psychological contract and from this alter the terms of the contract where circumstances permit' (2000: 925).

Many articles have a section called 'conclusion' in which the kinds of discussion that appear in these last few paragraphs are presented. Regardless of whether there is a separate conclusion or not, a presentation of the main conclusions will invariably be provided.

## Lessons

What lessons can be learned from Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler's article? To some extent, these have been alluded to in the course of the above exposition, but they are worth spelling out.

- There is a clear attempt to grab the reader's attention with strong opening statements, which also act as signposts to what the article is about.
- The authors spell out clearly the rationale of their research. This entails pointing to the significance of the psychological contract as a framework for analysis of the employment relationship, highlighting reasons for renewed interest in this concept, along with the neglect of the employer's perspective in most research.
- The research questions are spelled out in a very specific way. In fact, the authors present hypotheses that are a highly specific form of research question. As noted in Chapter 6, by no means all quantitative research is driven by hypotheses, even though outlines of the nature of quantitative research often imply that it is. Nonetheless, Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler chose to frame their research questions in this form.
- The research methods employed, the nature of the data, the measurement of concepts, the sampling, and the approaches to the analysis of the data are clearly and explicitly summarized.
- The presentation of the findings is orientated very specifically to the questions that drive the research.

- The discussion returns to the research questions and spells out the implications of the findings for them and for the theories examined earlier on in the paper. This is an important element. It is easy to forget that you should think of the research process as closing a circle in which you must return unambiguously to your research questions. There is no point inserting extraneous findings if they do not illuminate your research questions. Digressions of this kind can be confusing to readers, who might be inclined to wonder about the significance of the extraneous findings. In this section there is an attempt to consider the limitations of the study, in addition to its strengths, and to identify possibilities for further research. In addition, because business and management are an applied field of research, it is also common at this stage to draw attention to practical implications that arise from the study.

We also see that there is a clear sequential process moving from the formulation of the research questions through the exposition of the nature of the data and the presentation of the findings to the conclusions. Each stage is linked to and follows on from its predecessor (but see Thinking deeply 27.2). The structure used by Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler is based on a common one employed in the writing-up of quantitative research for academic journals in business and management. Sometimes, there is a separate Theory section that appears between the Introduction and the Data sections. Another variation is that issues of measurement and analysis appear in separate sections from the one dealing with research methods. Finally, the structure employed by Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler involved just one final section entitled Discussion, in which the authors drew their conclusions, but in other articles these may be treated as separate sections.



## Thinking deeply 27.2
## An empiricist repertoire?

At this point, it is worth recalling the discussion in Chapter 20 of Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) research on scientists. The authors drew a distinction between an *empiricist repertoire* and a *contingent repertoire*. The former derived from 'the observation that the texts of experimental papers display certain recurrent stylistic, grammatical and lexical features which appear to be coherently related' (1984: 55–6). We should bear in mind that the same is true of papers written for social science journals. These too display certain features that suggest a degree of inevitability to the outcome of the research. In other words, the reader is given a sense that, in following the rigorous procedures outlined in the article, the researchers logically arrived at their conclusions. The contingent repertoire, with its recognition of the role of the researcher in the production of findings, is far less apparent in scientists' published work. Thus, we have to recognize the possibility that the impression of a series of linked stages leading to an inescapable culmination is to a large extent a reconstruction of events designed to persuade referees (who, of course, use the same tactics themselves) of the credibility and importance of one's findings. This means that the conventions about writing up a quantitative research project, some of which are outlined in this chapter, are in many ways an invitation to reconstruct an investigation in a particular way. The whole issue of the ways in which the writing-up of research represents a means of persuading others of the credibility of one's knowledge claims has been a particular preoccupation among qualitative researchers (see below) and has been greatly influenced by the surge of interest in postmodernism. However, in Key concept 27.3, some of the rhetorical strategies involved in writing up quantitative research are outlined. Three points are worth making about these strategies in the present context. First, they are characteristic of the empiricist repertoire. Secondly, while the writing of qualitative research has been a particular focus since the 1980s (see below), some attention has also been paid to quantitative research. Thirdly, when Bryman (1998) compared the writing of quantitative and qualitative research articles, he found they were not as dissimilar in terms of rhetorical strategies as is sometimes proposed. However, he did find greater evidence of a management metaphor (see Key concept 27.3).



## Key concept 27.3
## What is a rhetorical strategy in quantitative research?

The rhetorical strategies used by quantitative researchers include the following:

- There is a tendency to remove the researcher from the text as an active ingredient of the research process in order to convey an impression of the objective nature of the findings—that is, as part of an external reality that is independent of the researcher (Gusfield 1976). Woolgar (1988*a*) refers to this as an externalizing device.
- The researcher surfaces in the text only to demonstrate his or her ingenuity in overcoming obstacles (Bazerman 1987; Bryman 1998).
- Key figures in the field are routinely cited to bestow credibility on the research (McCloskey 1985).
- The research process is presented as a linear one to convey an air of inevitability about the findings that are reached (Gusfield 1976).
- Relatively strict rules are followed about what should be reported in published research and how it should be reported (Bazerman 1987).
- The use of a *management* metaphor is common in the presentation of findings in which the researcher is depicted as ingeniously '"designing" research, "controlling" variables, "managing" data, and "generating" tables' (Bryman 1998: 146). See Shapiro (1985–6) and Richardson (1990) on this point.

Note that the first two are somewhat inconsistent. There is some evidence that disciplines within the social sciences differ in respect of their use of an impersonal style of writing. But it may well also be that it sometimes depends on what the writer is trying to do; for example, sometimes getting across a sense of one's cunning in overcoming practical difficulties can be just as useful as giving a sense of the external nature of the findings. Therefore, sometimes the style of presentation may vary somewhat.



# An example of qualitative research

Now we will look at an example of a journal article based on qualitative research. Again, we are not suggesting that the article is exemplary or representative, but that it exhibits some features that are often regarded as desirable qualities in terms of presentation and structure. The article is one that has been referred to in Chapters 16 and 25 and Key concept 17.1: a study of time use at work by Perlow (1999). The study is based predominantly on ethnographic methods and was published in *Administrative Science Quarterly*, a leading American journal.

The structure runs as follows:

1. introduction;
2. review of the literature;
3. methods;
4. presentation of main themes;
5. discussion;
6. implications.

What is immediately striking about the structure is that it is not dissimilar to Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler's (2000) article. Nor should this be all that surprising. After all, a structure that runs

> Introduction → Literature review → Research design/methods → Results → Discussion → Conclusions

is not obviously associated with one research strategy rather than the other. One difference from quantitative research articles is that the presentation of the results and the discussion of them are frequently rather more

interwoven in qualitative research articles. We will see this in the case of Perlow's article. As with Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler's article, we will examine the writing in terms of the article's structure.

## Introduction

The first two paragraphs give us an immediate sense of what the article is about and where its focus lies. Like Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, Perlow uses the introduction to locate the article in relation to a subject of wide interest to business and management researchers, referring to the tendency for many workers routinely to work extremely long hours and to suffer as a result. She explains: 'The purpose of this paper is to explore what I refer to as their time famine—their feeling of having too much to do and not enough time to do it—and to question whether this famine must exist' (Perlow 1999: 57).

In the second paragraph, Perlow begins simply by stating what type of workers she intends to focus on: 'I chose to study a group of software engineers in a high-tech corporation' (1999: 57).

She then goes on to outline precisely the position that will be taken in the article:

> Several recent books have described with awe the fast-paced, high-pressure, crisis-filled environment in which software engineers work (Kidder 1981; Moody 1990; Zachary 1994). These authors portray the engineers as heroes for their willingness to work extremely long hours and celebrate the engineers' intensity and total devotion to work. I, in contrast, explore the engineers' actual use of time at work and the impact their use of time has on other individuals and the groups to which individuals belong, which reveals the problematic nature of the current way of using time. Ultimately, I therefore challenge the assumption that the current way of using time, which is so destructive to individuals' lives outside of work, is in the corporation's best interests (Perlow 1995, 1997). (1999: 57)

Like Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler's, this is a strong introduction. Although it must be noted that for the purpose of this analysis we have been selective in our direct quotation from these two paragraphs, it is useful to look again at what each of these sentences achieves.

- The first sentence introduces a primary theme, the idea of 'time famine', which is the main subject of this article.
- The second sentence provides a specific research focus—the study of software engineers.
- In the four sentences of the final block of text, however, our attention is jolted by the assertions that the author makes in relation to the existing literature. Like Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, Perlow begins by pointing to a line of research interest in this subject, but interestingly, unlike them, she cites the work of these authors critically, using it to draw the reader's attention to what she is *not* going to do in *this* article. In addition, by highlighting the limitations of the existing literature, Perlow is preparing the reader for delivery of her alternative viewpoint.
- In the penultimate sentence, Perlow claims that, unlike previous studies, this article explores 'engineers' actual use of time', thereby implying her preference for qualitative, ethnographic research.
- The final sentence allows Perlow to elaborate on the argument that she is making, in which she directly contradicts some of the claims made by other writers.

Thus, after around 100 words, the reader has a clear idea of the focus of the research and has been led to anticipate that some of the findings presented within the article are likely to be unsupportive or indeed indirectly critical of existing studies of how people use their time at work. Unlike the previous article by Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, Perlow is more forthright in presenting an argument that is sometimes almost polemical in its criticism of other writers for their tendency to glamourize high-pressure work.

## Review of the literature

This short section reviews existing theory and research on time use at work. Perlow proposes that the theory and research 'on time use contributes to a partial understanding of both how and why individuals do and should spend their time at work' (1999: 57). This point is important because it enables Perlow to acknowledge, yet also to distance her study from, existing literature in order to be able to develop an alternative theoretical position throughout the remainder of the article. Interestingly, even though this section is relatively short, approximately 600 words, it contains 28 references. Many of these are string references—this means that they are grouped together to indicate a theoretical association. In contrast,

there are only two references in the whole of the two subsequent sections.

## Methods

This section covers a number of important issues relating to the methods and the analytical processes used within the study. The author outlines:

- what the organization that the software engineers worked for is like and why it was chosen as the research site for the study;
- how respondents were selected and access negotiated;
- the data sources used, which included participant observation, semi-structured interviews, shadowing and tracking logs (see Key concept 17.1 and Chapter 25), and how the data were collected;
- the approach to analysing the data; this involved an iterative process of generating inferences that were related to emerging themes.

## Presentation of main themes

The chief findings are outlined under separate headings: interdependent work patterns, enactment of work patterns, and effectiveness of work patterns. The presentation of the results is carried out so that there is some discussion of their meaning or significance in such a way as to lead onto the next section, which provides more detailed discussion of them. For example, in the first paragraph of the second main theme, which deals with enactment of work patterns, Perlow writes:

> Two components of the social context help explain why engineers perpetuated this disruptive pattern of interacting. I found that engineers experience both constant pressure to respond to crises and a reward system based on individual heroics. These two components, together, resulted in engineers doing whatever it took to solve the crisis of the moment. When individuals attempted to solve crises at the expense of all else, they frequently interrupted each other, thereby further perpetuating crises and the perceived need for individuals to do whatever it took to solve crises. I refer to this dynamic as the vicious work–time cycle. (1999: 65)

In this way, the presentation of the results is pointing forward to some themes that are taken up in the following sections and this demonstrates the significance of certain findings in relation to some of the previously discussed literature.

## Discussion

This section discusses the findings in the light of the study's research questions about how people use time at work. The results are also related to many of the ideas introduced in the previous sections of the article, in particular to the notions of the 'vicious work–time cycle', which the author suggests is reinforced by 'individual heroics'. However, in this section the author takes these ideas in a more ambitious direction, suggesting that the emerging 'framework' lays the 'foundation' for development of 'a sociology of work time' that 'integrates components from several existing streams of research' (1999: 77). To support this claim she draws on the work of a number of highly regarded sociologists of work time (including D. Roy 1958 and Zerubavel 1981) and calls for a structuration approach (Giddens 1979) to writing work ethnographies (see Research in focus 1.2 for a summary of structuration theory). 'Researchers would consider simultaneously the role that these interdependent patterns play in the work process and both the social and temporal contexts that perpetuate and are perpetuated by these patterns' (Perlow 1999: 77–8).

## Implications

In this section, the author spells out the implications of the research, which are claimed to be practical as well as theoretical in nature. To this end, Perlow suggests that the 'vicious circle' may be changed into a 'virtuous circle' through the actions of managers. She states: 'instead of interruptions perpetuating crises, reactive behaviour, and long work hours, synchronizing individual and interactive activities may minimize crises, perpetuate proactive behaviour, and even reduce the demand for such long work hours' (1999: 79). Thus, similarly to Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler, Perlow rounds off the article by drawing attention to the relevance of the findings for those who manage. The final sentence returns to the primary theme of 'time famine' and reiterates the main findings of the study in order to drive home this point: to mitigate the time famine experienced by employees whose

> work involves both individual and interactive activities a new type of collective time management is needed—one that takes into account individuals' interdependent work patterns, the macro context in which they work, and the interconnections between this context and their work patterns. (1999: 80)

## Lessons

As with Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler's article, it is useful to review some of the lessons learned from this examination of Perlow's article.

- As in the illustration of quantitative research writing, there are strong opening sentences, which attract our attention and give a clear indication of the nature and content of the article.
- The rationale of the research is clearly identified. To a large extent, this revolves around noting the limitations of existing literature that celebrates heroic attitudes towards time use at work and challenging the assumption that this is in either the individual's or the organization's interests.
- Research questions are specified, but they are somewhat more open-ended than in Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler's article, which is in keeping with the general orientation of qualitative researchers. The research questions revolve around the engineers' use of time at work and the impact that this has on other individuals and groups to which the engineers belong.
- The research methods are outlined, and an indication is given of the approach to analysis. The section in which these issues are discussed demonstrates greater transparency than is sometimes the case with articles reporting qualitative research.
- The presentation of main themes is geared to the broad research questions that motivated the researcher's interest in time use at work. However, this section also represents a major opportunity for the idea of the vicious work–time cycle and its dimensions to be articulated. The inductive nature of qualitative research means that the concepts and theories that are generated from an investigation must be clearly identified and discussed, as in this case.
- The discussion section allows concepts and theories to be developed into a more general framework, which is used to characterize the present study in the context of other qualitative studies of work time.
- The implications elucidate in a more specific way the significance of these results for managers, thereby addressing a requirement that is specifically made of business and management researchers to highlight the practical relevance of research findings.



# An example of mixed methods research

Partly because interest in and the practice of mixed methods research has gained momentum only since the turn of the century, it has few if any writing conventions. More particularly, it is difficult to say what an exemplary or model mixed methods research journal article might look like. To a certain extent, it is bound to borrow some of the conventions associated with writing up quantitative and qualitative research in terms of needing to start out with a research focus in the sense of a research problem and/or some research questions. Creswell and Tashakkori (2007: 108), the editors of the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, have suggested that 'good original/empirical mixed methods articles' should be:

- 'well-developed in both quantitative and qualitative components' (2007: 108); and
- 'more than reporting two distinct "strands" of quantitative and qualitative research; these studies must also integrate, link, or connect these "strands" in some way' (2007: 108).

They actually add a third feature of good mixed methods articles—namely, that they contribute to the literature on mixed methods research in some way. This seems a rather tall order for many writers and researchers, so that we would tend to emphasize the other two features.

The first implies that the quantitative and the qualitative components of a mixed methods article should be

at the very least competently executed. This means that, in terms of the fundamental criteria for conducting good quantitative and good qualitative research, mixed methods research should conform to both quantitative and qualitative research criteria. In terms of writing, it means that, for each of the components, it should be clear what the research questions were, how the sampling was done, what the data collection technique(s) was or were, and how the data were analysed.

The second feature implies that a good mixed methods article will be more than the sum of its parts. This issue relates to a tendency that has been identified by some writers (e.g. Bryman 2007*d*; O'Cathain, Murphy, and Nicholl 2007) for some mixed methods researchers not to make the best use of their quantitative and qualitative data, in that they often do not link the two sets of findings so that they extract the maximum yield from their study. As Creswell and Tashakkori (2007) put it:

> The expectation is that, by the end of the manuscript, conclusions gleaned from the two strands are integrated to provide a fuller understanding of the phenomenon under study. Integration might be in the form of comparing, contrasting, building on, or embedding one type of conclusion with the other. (2007: 108)

To some extent, when writing up the results from a mixed methods study, researchers might make it easier for themselves to get across the extra yield associated with their investigations if they make clear their rationales for including both quantitative and qualitative components in their overall research strategy. The issue of rationales for conducting mixed methods research is one that was addressed in Chapter 25.

Further advice on writing up mixed methods research can be found in suggestions in Creswell and Plano Clark's (2007: 161) delineation of a structure for a mixed methods journal article. They suggest that the structure should be along the following lines:

- *Introduction*. This would include such features as: a statement of the research problem or issue; an examination of the literature on the problem/issue; an examination of the problems with the prior literature, which might include indicating why a mixed methods approach would be beneficial, perhaps because much of the previous research is based mainly on just quantitative or qualitative research; and the specific research questions.
- *Methods*. This would include such features as: indicating the rationale for the mixed methods approach; the type of mixed methods design (see, for example, Morgan's classification of approaches to mixed methods research in Thinking deeply 25.2); data collection and data analysis methods; and indications of how the quality of the data can be judged.



## Tips and skills

## Do not separate your quantitative from your qualitative findings

We have noticed that some students who conduct mixed methods investigations treat their quantitative and qualitative findings as separate domains, so that they present one set and then the other. In Ph.D. theses and Master's dissertations, this can take the form of separate chapters labelled something like 'survey findings' and 'qualitative interview findings'. This may not be a problem if the two (or more) sets of findings are then integrated in the Discussion sections or chapters. However, treating findings in this way does tend to encourage a view of the quantitative and the qualitative findings as separate spheres and may therefore militate against integration, which, as writers like Creswell and Tashakkori (2007) imply, is increasingly an expectation in mixed methods studies. Instead, try to think of the quantitative and the qualitative findings thematically across the two sets of results, so that the findings are presented in terms of substantive issues rather than in terms of different methods.

- *Results*. The quantitative and the qualitative findings might be presented either in tandem or sequentially, but, if the latter, they would need to be merged in the Discussion.
- *Discussion*. Summarize and explain results, emphasizing the significance of the mixed methods nature of the research and what is gained from the presence of both quantitative and qualitative findings; draw attention to any limitations of the investigation; and possibly suggest avenues for future research.

In terms of the overall structure, Creswell and Plano Clark's (2007) suggestions are more or less the same as for an article based on quantitative research or an article based on qualitative research (see above). It is in the need to outline the mixed methods nature of the research and to bring the two sets of findings together that the distinctiveness of a mixed methods journal article can be discerned.

Many of these features can be seen in the study of organizational culture in Russia and the USA by Fey and Denison (2003). This article has previously been encountered in Research in focus 9.1. The following examination of the writing of this article is organized in terms of its structure.

## Introduction

The article begins with a very strong and clear statement of the focus of the article:

> Many organizational researchers have examined corporate culture as a source of competitive advantage (Barney 1986, Ott 1989, Pfeffer 1994, Wilkins and Ouchi 1983), but explicit theories are few and empirical evidence is limited (Denison and Mishra 1995). The theories that do exist (Denison 1990, Kotter and Heskett 1992, O'Reilly 1989) have been developed and applied only in the United States. Scholars focusing on the applicability of American management theories abroad (Adler 1991; Boyacigiller and Adler 1991; Hofstede 1980a, 1993; Lammers and Hickson 1979) have asked, 'Is organization science, as it is currently conceived, applicable across countries?' and 'To what extent must organizational theorizing be modified due to national differences?' (Boyacigiller et al. 2003, p. 17.

> This paper contributes to the ongoing debate by presenting a study of organizational culture and effectiveness that focuses on a set of foreign-owned firms operating in Russia. The study also compares the Russian results to results previously obtained in the United States. Russia merits study for several reasons. (Fey and Denison 2003: 686)

This opening passage accomplishes the following:

- It explains more or less immediately what the article is about.
- It makes clear what the contribution of the article will be to our understanding of organizational culture.
- It locates the authors' work within an established literature on its subject matter, including a reference to Hofstede, whose work has been mentioned on several occasions in this book.
- It makes clear why it is important to compare US studies with those of other nations.
- It justifies the use of Russian companies as the point of comparison in the second paragraph.

In the third paragraph, the authors provide an account of the structure of the article that provides a route map for the reader.

## The Russian context

In this section, the authors critically appraise and summarize some of the principal studies that relate to Russia, especially those findings that are particularly relevant to the article's focus on organizational culture.

## Organizational culture and effectiveness

Here, the authors examine some of the literature on the relationship between organizational culture and effectiveness, which entails spelling out a model of organizational culture in which the four 'cultural traits' that they focus on—adaptability, mission, consistency and involvement—are introduced. They also outline the mixed methods nature of the study, explaining that a quantitative study will be conducted to test the model and a qualitative, inductive study will be carried out to 'ground the concepts' (Fey and Denison 2003: 689). They

then provide a clear rationale for their use of a mixed methods approach:

> Using two approaches simultaneously allowed us to go back and forth between them to gain a better understanding of what was 'behind the numbers' and to develop a better picture of areas where the concepts had a different meaning in Russia than in the United States. (2003: 689)

In this way, the reader has a clear sense of why both quantitative and qualitative research are employed in this research and what its contribution might be to understanding the organizational culture-effectiveness relationship.

## Research questions

In this section the authors specify their research questions and how they relate to their use of a mixed methods approach. The research questions are:

> Research Question 1. To what extent are involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission associated with the effectiveness of firms in Russia?. . .
> Research Question 2. What is the specific pattern between the four traits and various criteria of effectiveness in Russia? How does the pattern in Russia differ from the pattern in the United States? Do the traits of adaptability and involvement have a stronger impact in Russia than they do in the United States?. . .
> Research Question 3. What are the patterns of behavior that illustrate the concepts in the model in Russia? Which patterns of behavior are similar to those that might be observed in the United States? Which patterns of behavior are different from those that might be observed in the United States? What are some of the underlying forces that drive these different patterns of behavior? (2003: 689)

The authors explain that the first two research questions are to be examined through a quantitative study of 179 firms, while the third will be examined through 4 case studies.

## Testing the model: a comparative study

This section comprises two distinct subsections: one dealing with the study's research methods for the survey element and the other with the ensuing results.

### Methodology

The authors explain that the population for their survey study was all foreign-owned firms in Russia in October 1997. They explain how the firms were sampled and how questionnaires to the firms were administered. They also observe that the findings are based on 179 usable questionnaires, a response rate of 37 per cent. They tell us about their various measures, in particular that the measures of organizational culture are based on the Denison Organizational Culture Survey. It is precisely because this had been used in studies of US companies that the comparison with Russian findings can be forged.

### Results

The authors analyse the Russian findings and compare these to the US findings. In fact, they find clear differences between the two. In Russia, adaptability and involvement were the cultural dimensions most closely correlated with effectiveness, whereas, among the US firms, it was mission. Involvement was also related to effectiveness in the USA, but this was less pronounced than among the Russian firms.

## Taking a closer look: four case studies

The authors point out that, while the survey data suggest that the cultural traits developed in the US context appear to be broadly relevant, 'it could be a mistake to assume that the concepts have the same *meaning* in the Russian context as they do in the US environment. For example, empowerment [a dimension of involvement] may be important in both contexts, but empowerment may entail very different behaviors in the two contexts' (2003: 695; emphasis in original).

### Case study methods

The authors outline their strategy for selecting the four case study firms. For example, they explain that, in order to control for national culture, they selected the four firms from the thirteen Swedish-owned companies among the sample of 179 firms. They also inform us that ten interviews were conducted in each firm and they

describe the thinking behind the development of the interview guide they employed.

### Four case studies: general background

The authors describe the four firms in terms of their activities and history.

### Grounding the model in the Russian context

The authors begin by presenting the quantitative survey findings for each of the four companies and also some additional survey information collected specifically for the multiple-case study element of the research. Here the authors outline how the four cultural traits were perceived by their Russian interviewees. They note that the qualitative findings mirror the quantitative ones, because their interviewees gave a lot more examples of the significance of adaptability and involvement for their firms' effectiveness than of the other two traits.

### Understanding organizational culture in the Russian context

In this section, the authors note that some qualitative findings had a good fit with the Western-based model they had previously developed for the US context and some had a weaker fit; they then go on to examine what they call the 'cultural dynamics' behind these contrasting results. At the end of this section they make a particularly interesting observation:

> The case studies highlight an interesting distinction between the behaviors that illustrate the concepts in the model and are similar to what one might observe in firms in the West and those behaviors that illustrate the concepts, but are very different from what one might observe in a firm in the West. This distinction is very helpful because it illustrates that the concepts may travel fairly well, helping to account for the quantitative support for the model, but that the specific patterns of behavior that exemplify the concepts may vary quite a bit across cultures. (2003: 701)

In other words, they suggest that the quantitative data tell only part of the story. The meaning of some of the cultural concepts are different for the interviewees in Russia, although the quantitative data suggest that, on the face of it, those same concepts are broadly applicable and relevant. There is a cautionary tale where cross-cultural studies are concerned about assuming 'sameness' when an underlying 'differentness' may be the reality.

## Discussion

The authors begin this final section with a concise summary of their main findings. They gradually move on to discuss some of the broader implications of their findings, drawing attention at one point to the contribution and significance of using both quantitative and qualitative research:

> The novel combination of qualitative and quantitative methods used in this study will also be of interest to organizational researchers. The study began by using an existing model of organizational culture and effectiveness as a starting point for the research. The first part of the study presented a quantitative test of the model and showed that the model was useful in understanding effectiveness, but that the results were somewhat different from the results for a sample of US firms. The quantitative results were used as probes to inform our research questions rather than tools to refute falsifiable hypotheses. The second part of the study selected four firms for in-depth qualitative analysis. These case studies generated a number of examples that served to ground the theoretical concepts in the realities of the Russian context. The case studies offered examples that fit well with the model, but also highlighted themes that were invaluable in understanding the realities of the Russian context but were not fully anticipated by the model. (2003: 701)

In this way, Fey and Denison articulate the contribution made by a mixed methods approach (though they do not use the term) in arriving at a more complete and more nuanced understanding of the relationship between organizational culture and effectiveness in the Russian context. In the last sentence of the article they go further when they write: 'Combining these insights enabled us to both validate the model and to provide a

more complete understanding of the dynamics of organizational cultures in the Russian context' (Fey and Denison 2003: 702). Thus, in their Discussion section, the authors make clear what the contribution of their research is to understanding the relationship between organizational culture; in particular there is an implicit warning that one should be wary of presuming the cultural generalizability of Western models of organizations. The final sentence provides a clear and striking message for the reader to take away. The message is partly substantive—to do with not assuming the applicability of Western models—and partly methodological—to do with the need to employ quantitative and qualitative findings to provide more comprehensive portrayals of complex organizational issues.

## Lessons

One feature of this article that is quite striking is that in terms of structure and overall approach it is quite similar to the quantitative and the qualitative research articles previously examined. Indeed, it was noted that the qualitative research article was not dissimilar to the quantitative one. In large part, these similarities can be attributed to the fact that there are general conventions about how findings should be written up for academic audiences, and these conventions act as a template for, and to some extent restrict, much academic writing. What is striking about the article by Fey and Denison is their inclination to make as much of the mixed methods status and context of their research as possible, as recommended in the guidelines suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark (2007). On the face of it, this article seems to go against the advice in Tips and Skill 'Do not separate your quantitative from your qualitative findings', in that the two sets of results appear to be presented in different sections. However, Fey and Denison do align their qualitative findings to some of their survey data at the beginning of the section in which they present their case study results. Also, they constantly cross-refer between the two sets of results in both the discussion of the case studies and in the Discussion. In fact, the main message of the article is that it would have been misleading if just the survey findings had been at their disposal, since the qualitative case studies strongly suggest that the understanding of the diffusion of the Western model of organizational culture needs to take into account local understandings of cultural traits, and these are best explored through in-depth probing through qualitative research.

While attention to the writing-up of mixed methods research is an area that is in its infancy, the suggestions of writers mentioned above like Creswell and Tashakkori (2007) and Creswell and Plano Clark (2007), along with strong exemplars like the article by Fey and Denison, provide helpful pointers to the ways in which this task should be approached. Fey and Denison meet the emerging expectations of good mixed methods research and writing, as outlined above and in Chapter 25, in that they:

- are explicit about how the different components of the research were executed;
- are clear about why a mixed methods study was conducted;
- explain the nature of their research questions and the connection between these and a mixed method approach;
- show what was gained by doing a mixed methods study;
- integrate the different elements of their research.



# Postmodernism and reflexivity

Postmodernism (see Key concept 27.4) is an extremely difficult idea to pin down. In one sense, it can be seen as a form of sensitivity—a way of seeing and understanding that results in a questioning of the taken-for-granted. It questions the very notion of the dispassionate social scientist seeking to uncover a pre-given external reality. Instead, postmodernists view the social scientist's account as only one among many ways of rendering social reality to audiences. The social world itself is viewed as a context out of which many accounts can be hewn. As a result, 'knowledge' of the social world is relative; any account is just one of many possible ways of rendering social reality. As Rosenau (1992: 8) puts it, postmodernists 'offer "readings" not "observations," "interpretations" not "findings" . . .'.



## Key concept 27.4
## What is postmodernism?

As noted in the main text, postmodernism is extremely difficult to pin down. Part of the problem is that, as an approach, postmodernism is at least two things. One is that it is an attempt to get to grips with the nature of modern society and culture. The other, which is the more relevant aspect for this book, is that it represents a way of thinking about and representing the nature of the social sciences and their claims to knowledge. In particular, it is a distinctive sensitivity regarding the representation of social scientific findings. Postmodernists tend to be deeply suspicious of notions that imply that it is possible to arrive at a definitive version of any reality. Reports of findings are viewed as versions of an external reality, so that the key issue becomes one of the plausibility of those versions rather than whether they are right or wrong in any absolute sense. Typically, writers of a postmodernist persuasion have less to say about data collection issues than about the writing and representation of social science findings, though it is probably the case that they are more sympathetic to qualitative than quantitative research (Alvesson 2002). Indeed, postmodernists have probably been most influential in qualitative research when discussing the nature of ethnographic accounts and questioning the ethnographer's implicit claim that he or she has provided a definitive account of a society.
This thinking can be discerned in Van Maanen's (1988) implicit critique of 'realist tales', as he called them (see Key concept 27.10).

For postmodernists, there can be no sense of an objective reality out there waiting to be revealed to and uncovered by social scientists. That reality is always going to be accessed through narratives in the form of research reports that provide representations. With this shift in orientation came an interest in the language employed in research reports, like written ethnographies, to reveal the devices researchers use to convey the definitiveness of their findings (Delamont and Atkinson 2004). Postmodernists tend to emphasize the notion of **reflexivity** (see Key concept 27.6 and Key concept 27.8), which posits the significance of the researcher for the research process and consequently the tentativeness of any findings presented in a research report (since the researcher is always implicated in his or her findings). As this account of postmodernism implies, postmodernists tend to be deeply suspicious of any view of research that implies that there are or can be accepted foundations to knowledge, as is suggested by positivists (see Key concept 1.7). Postmodernism is a deeply disruptive stance on social and business research, in that it problematizes and questions our capacity ever to know anything.
Views vary on postmodernism's current appeal. Matthewman and Hoey (2006) depict its influence as having waned to a significant extent, while Bloland (2005) argues that it has had an impact on thinking in many fields in higher education and that this is especially noticeable among those who do not identify themselves as postmodernists.

One of the effects of the impact of postmodernism since the 1980s has been a growing interest in the writing of social science. For postmodernists, reporting findings in a journal article provides merely one version of the social reality that was investigated. Postmodernists mistrust the knowledge claims that are frequently boldly made when findings are reported and instead they adopt an attitude of investigating the bases and forms of those knowledge claims and the language that is used to represent them. This has led to what is described as a linguistic turn within the social sciences (see Key concept 27.5). While the writing of all types of social science is potentially in the postmodernist's firing line, it has been the kinds of text produced by ethnographers that have been a particular focus of attention. This focus has led to a particular interest in the claims to ethnographic authority that are inscribed into ethnographic texts (Clifford 1983). The ethnographic text 'presumes a world out there (the real) that can be captured by a "knowing" author through the careful transcription and analysis of field materials (interviews, notes, etc.)' (Denzin 1994: 296). Postmodernism problematizes such accounts and their authority to represent a reality because there 'can never be a final, accurate representation of what was meant or said, only different textual representations of different experiences' (Denzin 1994: 296).



## Key concept 27.5
## What is the linguistic turn?

Postmodernism can also be seen as the stimulus for the linguistic turn in the social sciences. The linguistic turn is based on the idea that language shapes our understanding of the world. Moreover, because knowledge is constructed through language, and language can never create an objective representation of external reality, meaning is uncontrollable and undiscoverable. This leads to a rejection of positivist scientists' claims to be able to produce reliable knowledge through a neutral process of exploration. Postmodernists argue that knowledge is never neutral and is constantly open to revision. They reject what they see as scientific 'grand' or 'meta' narratives that seek to explain the world from an objective viewpoint. Scientific investigation is thus suggested by postmodernists to be nothing more than a type of 'language game' (Rorty 1979) used by this particular community to produce localized understandings.

Postmodernists have also suggested that certain methods can be more easily adapted to the linguistic turn, in particular ethnography, because it can be used to deconstruct claims to represent reality and can provide alternative versions of reality that attempt to blur the boundary between 'fact' and 'fiction' (Linstead 1993). Auto-ethnography (see Key concept 27.13) can be seen as an attempt to modify the way we use language in research that reflects the linguistic turn. These new forms of writing are sometimes described as being part of the *narrative* turn that seeks to expose the 'fiction' of ethnographic writing by deconstructing its conventions. The narrative turn involves the use of different writing styles that do not involve the creation of ethnographic authority (Woolgar 1988*b*) and instead encourage greater plurality of perspectives to be represented (see Key concept 27.6).

However, it would be wrong to depict the growing attention being focused on ethnographic writing as exclusively a product of postmodernism. Atkinson and Coffey (1995) have argued that there are other intellectual trends in the social sciences that have stimulated this interest. Writers in the area of theory and research known as the social studies of science have been concerned with the limitations of accepted distinctions between rhetoric and logic and between the observer and the observed (e.g. Gilbert and Mulkay 1984). The problematizing of these distinctions, along with doubts about the possibility of a neutral language through which the natural and social worlds can be revealed, opened the door for an evaluation of scientific and social scientific writing. Some illustrations of these analyses can be discerned in Thinking deeply 27.2 and Key concept 27.3. Atkinson and Coffey also point to the antipathy within feminism towards the image of the neutral 'observer–author' who assumes a privileged stance in relation to members of the social setting being studied. This stance is regarded as revealing a position of domination of the observer–author over the observed that is inconsistent with the goals of feminism (see Chapter 16 for an elaboration of this general point). This concern has led to an interest in the ways in which privilege is conveyed in ethnographic texts and how voices, particularly of marginal groups, are suppressed.

The concerns within these and other traditions (including postmodernism) have led to experiments in writing ethnography (Richardson 1994) that involve the identity of the ethnographer being written into the text (see Research in focus 27.7). An example is the use of a 'dialogic' form of writing that seeks to raise the profile of the multiplicity of voices that can be heard in the course of fieldwork. As Lincoln and Denzin (1994: 584) put it: 'Slowly it dawns on us that there may . . . be . . . not one "voice", but polyvocality; not one story, but many tales, dramas, pieces of fiction, fables, memories, histories, autobiographies, poems, and other texts to inform our sense of lifeways, to extend our understandings of the Other . . .'. This postmodern preference for seeking out multiple voices and for turning the ethnographer into a 'bit player' reflects the mistrust among postmodernists of 'meta-narratives'—that is, positions or grand accounts that implicitly make claims about absolute truths and that therefore rule out the possibility of alternative versions of reality. On the other hand, 'mini-narratives, micronarratives, local narratives

are just stories that make no truth claims and are therefore more acceptable to postmodernists' (Rosenau 1992: p. xiii).

Postmodernism has also encouraged a growing reflexivity (see Key concept 27.6) in considerations about the writing of business and management research (see Key concept 27.8) stimulated by the debates about the writing of ethnography. This reflexivity can be discerned in the way in which many ethnographers have turned inwards to examine the truth claims inscribed in their own classic texts, which is the focus of the next section.



## Key concept 27.6
## What is reflexivity?

Reflexivity has several meanings in the social sciences. The term is employed by ethnomethodologists to refer to the way in which speech and action are constitutive of the social world in which they are located; in other words, they do more than merely act as indicators of deeper phenomena (see Chapter 20). The other meaning of the term carries the connotation that business researchers should reflect on the implications of their methods, values, biases, and decisions for the knowledge of the social world they generate and try to be aware of how personal idiosyncracies, and implicit assumptions, affect their approach to study. Reflexivity also entails sensitivity to the researcher's cultural, political, and social context. As such, knowledge from a reflective position is always based on the researcher's location in time and social space. Also, unlike reflection, which takes place after the interaction or acitivity has passed, reflexivity is exercised in the moment, as well as afterwards (Riach 2009). However, most importantly, according to Riach (2009: 359), reflexivity 'requires a fundamental requestioning of what is knowable in a given context'. This notion is especially explicit in Pink's (2001) formulation of a reflexive approach to analysing visual images (see Chapter 17) and in Plummer's (2001) definition of a reflexive approach to life histories (see Key concept 18.4).

There has been growing evidence of reflexivity in organizational research in the form of an industry of books that collect together inside stories of the research process that detail the nuts and bolts of research as distinct from the often sanitized portrayal in research articles. An early volume on the sociological research process edited by Hammond (1964) paved the way for a large number of imitators (e.g. Bell and Newby 1977; Bell and Roberts 1984; Bryman 1988*b*; Shaffir and Stebbins 1991), and the confessional tales referred to in Research in focus 27.10 are invariably manifestations of this development. Therefore, the rise of reflexivity largely pre-dates the growing awareness of postmodern thinking since the late 1980s. What distinguishes the reflexivity that has followed in the wake of postmodernism is a greater awareness and acknowledgement of the role of the researcher as part and parcel of the construction of knowledge. In other words, the reflexive attitude within postmodernism is highly critical of the notion that the researcher is someone who extracts knowledge from observations and conversations with others and then transmits knowledge to an audience. The researcher is viewed as implicated in the construction of knowledge through the stance that he or she assumes in relation to the observed and through the ways in which an account is transmitted in the form of a text. This understanding entails an acknowledgement of the implications and significance of the researcher's choices as both observer and writer.

However, reflexivity is a concept that, Riach (2009) claims, tends to put the researcher at the epicentre of discussion, through focusing on the particular biases that he or she may bring to the research. She argues instead for a more participant-centred reflexivity in research interviews, through advocating a focus on participant-induced moments of reflexivity, or 'sticky moments'. Riach illustrates the idea of 'sticky moments' through referring to her Ph.D. research studying age-related discrimination in the workplace, when research participants challenged her motives for researching and ability to understand this particular topic because of her relatively young age. This prompted Riach reflexively to reconsider her relationship to the research.



## Research in focus 27.7
## Identity and ethnographic writing

In her study of everyday life on the shopfloor of a Japanese factory, Kondo (1990) provides an example of ethnographic writing in which the self is central to the account. Kondo describes how, as a Japanese–American academic studying Japanese factory life, she had to learn how to act and behave as a Japanese woman: 'My first nine months of fieldwork were characterised by an attempt to reduce the distance between expectation and inadequate reality, as my informants and I conspired to rewrite my identity as Japanese' (1990: 25). Her sense of self and identity was thereby mediated 'by the experiences, relations and interactions of her fieldwork' (Coffey 1999: 24).

Writing partly in the first person, Kondo seeks to reveal her identity through the text in order to emphasize the point that the ethnographic text is constructed through the stance assumed in relation to the observed. For example she states: 'what I write is no mere academic exercise; for me it matters, and matters deeply' (Kondo 1990: 302).

Kondo is also critical of conventional ethnographic writing, which 'sandwiches the "data" into the body of the book, leaving "theory" for the beginning and the end' (1990: 304). Instead she 'scatters' theoretical discussion 'in different parts of the text, and the "ethnographic" vignettes and anecdotes are marshaled analytically' (1990: 304).

Kondo's work thus provides an example of a contemporary organizational ethnography that seeks to achieve a postmodern reflexivity, partly through exploration of experimental writing strategies.



## Key concept 27.8
## Reflexivity in management research

Johnson and Duberley (2003) differentiate between three different forms of reflexivity within management research. The form assumed depends upon the epistemological and ontological assumptions that guide the researcher:

- *Methodological reflexivity* stems from an objectivist view of ontology (see Key concept 1.13), which holds that social phenomena exist independently of social actors. Objectivism seeks to find a way of recording social phenomena in a way that is neutral, by ensuring that the social phenomena remain unaffected by the research. It is also related to a positivist epistemology (see Key concept 1.7) and also to empiricism (see Key concept 1.4), which both share a commitment to generating knowledge based on an observable reality. Methodological reflexivity therefore involves monitoring the behavioural impact of the researcher's actions on the social setting under investigation and detailing the nature of these effects in research writing.
- *Deconstructive reflexivity* arises from a constructionist ontological view (see Key concept 1.14), which presupposes that social phenomena are produced through social interactions involving social actors. This is often associated with an interpretative epistemology (see Key concept 1.10), which holds that the study of social phenomena involves trying to understand how social actors understand their behaviour. It also relates to the role of postmodernism discussed in this chapter, in challenging existing conventions about how language is used to represent reality and invites the deconstruction of texts in order to reveal their narrative logic. The implications for reflexivity are significant, suggesting that the author must de-centre him- or herself as a privileged voice within the narrative, instead allowing multiple voices to appear and disrupt each other. Deconstructive reflexivity therefore entails the researcher questioning his or her own taken-for-granted beliefs and accepting that there will always be multiple valid accounts of a research project.
- *Epistemic reflexivity* also relates to constructionism and interpretivism, but it goes further than deconstructive reflexivity in seeking out new modes of engagement with research subjects that are more amenable to the co-creation of knowledge through the adoption of more participatory approaches (Chapter 16, 'Researcher–subject relationships'). However, unlike deconstructive reflexivity, epistemic reflexivity retains the hope that some notion of truth can be attained through consensus based on engagement with research subjects. It is, therefore, more closely aligned with critical realism (see Key concept 1.9).

In the end, what postmodernism leaves us with is an acute sense of uncertainty. It raises the issue of how we can ever know or capture the social reality that belongs to others and in so doing it points to an unresolvable tension that will not go away and that is further revealed in the issues raised in the next section, because, to quote Lincoln and Denzin (1994: 582) again: 'On the one hand there is the concern for validity, or certainty in the text as a form of isomorphism and authenticity. On the other hand there is the sure and certain knowledge that all texts are socially, historically, politically, and culturally located. We, like the texts we write, can never be transcendent.' At the same time, of course, such a view renders problematic the very idea of what knowledge is or comprises. Research in focus 27.9 gives an example of the extremes that some researchers fear postmodern writing might lead to.



## Telling it like it is
## Using direct quotations to enhance confidence and demonstrate reflexivity

When students reach the stage of writing up qualitative research, they can find the previous work that they have done in recording the comments of research participants in their own words extremely valuable when presenting their findings. Karen found that, when she was writing up her research project, the ability to include direct quotations based on the detailed notes she had taken during interviews was invaluable and that this enhanced her dissertation. Similarly, Angharad described how 'quite often there was a good quote or just a word that summed it up really well that I could use from the data'. A direct quotation from a research participant can help to convey the views of people being studied in a way that is engaging and interesting. Direct quotations can also enhance the perceived trustworthiness of the research project by enabling the researcher to provide an example from the data that illustrates the theoretical point that he or she is trying to make. They can also help convince the reader that a methodical and thorough approach to data collection and analysis has been adopted. Direct quotations can also help the researcher to demonstrate reflexivity and awareness of researcher–subject relationships, by showing that he or she has been aware of the power relations between the researcher and the people being studied, and has sought to deal with this by 'giving voice' to participants in a way that is not mediated by his or her own interpretations. Of course, the process of selecting a direct quotation and any subsequent process of analysis does involve the researcher in imposing meaning, but this does not mean that the use of direct quotations has no value.



*To hear more about Karen and Angharad's research experiences, go to the Online Resource Centre that accompanies this book at:* ***www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/***



## Research in focus 27.9
## The Sokal hoax

The conventions of academic writing were powerfully challenged by a physicist called Alan Sokal (1996*a*) when he played a hoax that involved submitting a paper to a leading postmodern cultural studies journal, *Social Text*. He did this as an experiment, because he wanted to see if the editors would publish a paper on a specific scientific subject 'without bothering to consult anyone knowledgeable in the field'. Sokal claimed that he intentionally wrote the paper so that 'any competent physicist or mathematician would be able to see that it was a spoof' (Sokal 1996*b*) based on the writings of humanities and social science scholars about the natural sciences. The paper, which was about quantum physics, argued that physical reality is a social and linguistic construct and was emblematic of the linguistic turn (see Key concept 27.5).

The paper was duly accepted for publication and on the day it was published Sokal published another piece in *Lingua Franca* (1996*b*) stating that his paper was a hoax. His point in doing this was to seek to expose what he saw as the practices of left-wing postmodern humanists and social scientists in abuses of scientific terminology. Sokal accused the journal of publishing papers not on the basis that they were verifiably correct and made sense but instead because of who wrote them and how good they sounded. Significantly, the journal *Social Text* had recently abandoned the practice of peer review in the interests of encouraging more original and unconventional research (see Chapter 1,'The politics of business research', for more about the process of peer reviewing). The journal's reputation was adversely affected by the hoax, and the editors sought to defend their actions by saying that Sokal had acted unethically and what he had done constituted a deliberate fraud that betrayed the trust that the journal had invested in its authors.

After the Sokal hoax there was another incident, when a paper that was randomly generated by three MIT graduate students using a software program called 'SCIgen' was accepted for presentation at a computing conference in 2005. The authors revealed their paper as a hoax on a website, and their invitation to the conference was withdrawn. This hoax was an attempt to expose what the authors saw as the low academic standards of the conference. These examples illustrate a backlash against postmodernism and the intellectual freedoms that it encourages, in an attempt to reimpose standards of scientific objectivity on academic writing.

See Alan Sokal's website:
***www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/index.html#papers*** (accessed 23 July 2010)



# Writing ethnography

The term 'ethnography', as noted in Chapter 17, is interesting, because it refers both to a method of business research and to the finished product of ethnographic research. In other words, it is both something that is carried out in doing research and something one reads. Thus, writing seems to be at the heart of the ethnographic enterprise. In recent years, the production of ethnographic texts has become a focus of interest in its own right. This means that there has been a growth of interest not just in how ethnography is carried out in the field but also in the rhetorical conventions employed in the production of ethnographic texts.

Ethnographic texts are designed to convince readers of the *reality* of the events and situations described, and the plausibility of the analyst's explanations. The ethnographic text must not simply present a set of findings: it must provide an 'authoritative' account of the group or culture in question. In other words, the ethnographer must convince us that he or she has arrived at an account of social reality that has strong claims to truth.

The ethnographic text is permeated by stylistic and rhetorical devices whereby the reader is persuaded to enter into a shared framework of facts and interpretations, observations and reflections. Just like the scientific paper and the kind of approach to writing found in reporting quantitative business research, the ethnographer typically works within a writing strategy that is imbued with *realism*. This simply means that the researcher presents an authoritative, dispassionate account that represents an external, objective reality. In this respect, there is very little difference between the writing styles of quantitative and qualitative researchers. Van Maanen (1988) calls ethnography texts that conform to these characteristics *realist tales*. These are the most common type of ethnographic writing, though he distinguishes other types (see Key concept 27.10). However, the *form* that this realism takes differs. Van Maanen distinguishes four characteristics of realist tales: experiential authority; typical forms; the native's point of view; and interpretative omnipotence. Realist tales are particularly prevalent in business and management research writing (see Research in focus 27.11).

## Experiential authority

Just as in much quantitative research writing, the author disappears from view. We are told what members of a group say and do, and they are the only people directly

visible in the text. The author provides a narrative in which he or she is no longer to be seen. As a result, an impression is conveyed that the findings presented are what any reasonable, similarly placed researcher would have found. As readers, we have to accept that this is what the ethnographer saw and heard while working as a participant observer or whatever. The personal subjectivity of the author/ethnographer is essentially played down by this strategy. The possibility that the fieldworker may have his or her own biases or may have become too involved with the people being studied is suppressed. To this end, when writing up the results of their ethnographic work, authors play up their academic credentials and qualifications, their previous experience, and so on. All this enhances the degree to which the author's account can be relied upon. The author/ethnographer can then appear as a reliable witness.

A further element of experiential authority is that, when describing their methods, ethnographers invariably make a great deal of the intensiveness of the research that they carried out—they spent so many months in the field, had conversations and interviews with countless individuals, worked hard to establish rapport, and so on. These features are also added to by drawing the reader's attention to such hardships as the inconvenience of the fieldwork—the danger, the poor food, the disruptive effect on normal life, the feelings of isolation and loneliness, and so on.

Also worth mentioning are the extensive quotations from conversations and interviews that invariably form part of the ethnographic report. These are also obviously important ingredients of the author's use of *evidence* to support points. However, they are a mechanism for establishing the credibility of the report in that they demonstrate the author's ability to encourage people to talk and so demonstrate that he or she achieved rapport with them. The copious descriptive details—of places, patterns of behaviour, contexts, and so on—can also be viewed as a means of piling on the sense of the author being an ideally placed witness for all the findings that have been uncovered.

## Typical forms

The author often writes about typical forms of institutions or of patterns of behaviour. What is happening here is that the author is generalizing about a number of recurring features of the group in question to create a



### Key concept 27.10
### Three forms of ethnographic writing

Van Maanen (1988) has distinguished three major types of ethnographic writing:

- *Realist tales*: apparently definitive, confident, and dispassionate third-person accounts of a culture and of the behaviour of members of that culture. This is the most prevalent form of ethnographic writing.
- *Confessional tales*: personalized accounts in which the ethnographer is fully implicated in the data-gathering and writing-up processes. These are warts-and-all accounts of the trials and tribulations of doing ethnography. They have become more prominent since the 1970s and reflect a growing emphasis on reflexivity in qualitative research in particular. In the edited volume *Doing Research in Organizations* (Bryman 1988*b*), several of the contributors provide inside accounts of doing qualitative research in industrial enterprises. Beynon (1988), for example, describes how his account, published in *Working for Ford* (1975), of how a dead man was left lying on the factory floor for ten minutes while the line continued to run provoked a response from the Ford Motor Company, which sought to discredit his research. As this example illustrates, confessional tales are more concerned with detailing how research was carried out than with presenting findings. Very often the confessional tale is told in a particular context (such as an invited chapter in a book of similar tales), but the main findings are written up in realist tale form.
- *Impressionist tales*: accounts that place a heavy emphasis on 'words, metaphors, phrasings, and . . . the expansive recall of fieldwork experience' (Van Maanen 1988: 102). There is a heavy emphasis on stories of dramatic events that provide 'a representational means of cracking open the culture and the fieldworker's way of knowing it' (1988: 102). However, as Van Maanen notes, impressionist tales 'are typically enclosed within realist, or perhaps more frequently, confessional tales' (1988: 106).



## Research in focus 27.11
## Realism in organizational ethnography

Many organizational ethnographies tend to be written as realist tales (see Key concept 27.10) and narrated dispassionately in order to reinforce the authenticity of the account. Typically, the author is absent from the text, or is a minor character in the story, and methods are revealed only at the end, in the form of a 'confessional' chapter or appendix, where the ethnographer 'reveals his hand' (Watson 1994*a*) by disclosing personal details about the fieldwork experience. However, this is not to say that organizational ethnographers are unaware of the representational difficulties caused by such an approach to writing. Consider, for example, the first few sentences of the methodological appendix that is provided by Kunda (1992) in the book *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation*.

This study belongs to the genre known as 'ethnographic realism'. This identification says much about presentational style, little about the actual research process. The descriptive style of this genre presents an author functioning more or less as a fly on the wall in the course of his sojourn in the field—an objective, unseen observer following well-defined procedures for data collection and verification. It requires no great insight, however, to recognize that ethnographic realism is a distortion of convenience. Fieldwork, as all who have engaged in it will testify, is an intensely personal and subjective process, and there are probably at least as many 'methods' as there are fieldworkers (Kunda 1992: 229).

Kunda questions the extent to which the ethnographer is an objective observer, suggesting instead that he or she experiences organizational life from a situated position as an insider. He implies that it is, therefore, impossible for ethnographers to distance themselves from the fieldwork experience. However, despite this recognition of the need for greater 'reflexivity' within organizational ethnography, only a few organizational ethnographies are actually written in the first person, with the researcher as a main character who is telling the story. Even in cases when this does occur, the main character narrative tends to be located peripherally, in the appendices or footnotes of an article or book (Hatch 1996), such as Kunda himself has done.

typical form that that feature takes. He or she may use examples based on particular incidents or people, but basically the emphasis is upon the general. For example, in Watson's (1994*a*) conclusion to his ethnographic study of managers in a UK telecommunications company, which was cited several times in Chapter 17, we encounter the following statement:

> The image which has taken shape is one of management as essentially and inherently a social and moral activity; one whose greatest successes in efficiently and effectively producing goods and services is likely to come through building organisational patterns, cultures and understandings based on relationships of mutual trust and shared obligation among people involved with the organisation. (1994*a*: 223)

The study is thus meant to portray managers in general, and individuals are important only in so far as they represent such general tendencies.

## The native's point of view

The point has been made several times that one of the distinguishing features of much qualitative research is the commitment to seeing through the eyes of the people being studied. This is an important feature for qualitative researchers, because it is part of a strategy of getting at the meaning of social reality from the perspective of those being studied. However, it also represents an important element in creating a sense of authoritativeness on the part of the ethnographer. After all, claiming that he or she takes the native's point of view and sees through the native's eyes means that he or she is in an excellent position to speak authoritatively about the group in question. The very fact that the ethnographer has taken the native's point of view testifies to the fact that he or she is well placed to write definitively about the group in question. Realist tales frequently include numerous references to the steps taken by the ethnographer to get close to the people studied and his or her success in this regard. Thus, in her study of Afro-Caribbean women working in high-tech informatics (see Chapter 17), Freeman (2000) writes about the small group of six

women at Multitext who became the focus of more intense, long-term data collection:

> After many Sunday lunches, picnics, church services, birthday celebrations, and family outings, I got to know these few women better, seeing them not only as workers but also as members of families, as partners in complex relationships, as mothers, as daughters, as co-workers, and as friends. We spent time together in my rented flat, and in their wood and 'wall house' homes, cooking and eating meals together, sometimes watching videos as we talked. I persuaded them, on rare occasions, to picnic at the beach, and they took me to their churches and fetes and on special outings—to the circus, to the calypso contests, and to national sites enjoyed by tourists and locals alike. Sometimes we went shopping, and sometimes we bought ice cream after work. (2000: 17)

## Interpretative omnipotence

When writing up an ethnography in the realist style, the author rarely presents possible alternative interpretations of an event or pattern of behaviour. Instead, the phenomenon in question is presented as having a single meaning or significance, which the fieldworker alone has cracked. Indeed, the evidence provided is carefully marshalled to support the singular interpretation that is placed on the event or pattern of behaviour. We are presented with an inevitability. It seems obvious or inevitable that someone would draw the inferences that the author has drawn when faced with such clear-cut evidence.

These four characteristics of realist tales imply that what the researcher did qua researcher is only one part of creating a sense of having figured out the nature of a culture. It is also very much to do with how the researcher represents what he or she did through writing about ethnography. For the postmodernist position, any realist tale is merely one 'spin'—that is, one version—which can be or has been formulated in relation to the culture in question.

## Ways of writing differently

Van Maanen (1996) has suggested that 'in these textually sophisticated times, few argue that a research report is anything more (or, certainly, anything less) than a framework- or paradigm-dependent document, crafted and shaped within the rules and conventions of a particular research community, some articulated (and written in the back of research journals) and some tacitly understood' (1996: 376). Ways of writing in business and management thus involve following such conventions of style and structure as we have tried to make explicit in this chapter, through our analysis of a published quantitative example (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2000) and a qualitative example (Perlow 1999). However, this should not be taken to mean that we are wholly in favour of strictly maintaining these conventions, but rather that we think it is helpful to students who are starting to write a dissertation project to try to decipher them as a first step in the process of learning the craft of academic writing. Becoming aware of these conventions can also be helpful to students in reading and understanding the work of others, because these two activities are so closely related. Understanding the conventions of academic writing can also be the first step towards challenging them, since it is easier and probably safer to do this from the vantage point of having some idea of what they are and how they work, rather than from a position of relative ignorance.

Czarniawska (1999) has argued that management and business researchers need to rethink the way that they think and write and to master the art of persuasion as opposed to the presentation of 'facts'. This involves a blurring of the boundaries between narrative and literary theory and the social sciences. Writing is, she argues, the main activity of organizational researchers and as such it is in the interests of the writers as well as the readers that it is as 'good' as possible, although there is by no means agreement as to what 'good' writing is actually like. The art of writing is also important in relating management theory to practice, in part because it is through writing and being read that researchers remain in contact with management practice. She goes on to suggest that certain conventions about how management and organization theory is written have arisen during the relatively short life of this field of enquiry, which all writers who wish to contribute to this field must either struggle with or against. These rules constitute management and organizational theory as a genre with boundaries that are regulated (see Thinking deeply 27.12). This may thus have resulted in what Czarniawska (1999) sees as unhelpfully rigid constraints of genre that can lead to stagnation of a discipline causing it to become dull and self-centred. These concerns correspond to broader calls within the social sciences for a more engaging and compelling style of qualitative research writing (Goodall 2000) that has led to the emergence of new genres such as auto-ethnography (see Key concept 27.13).



## Thinking deeply 27.12
## Management theory as a logico-scientific genre

Czarniawska (1999) defines genre as a system of action that has become institutionalized and been made recognizable through repetition. In literature, where the concept of genre is most commonly used, the rules of practice that define the art of writing and constitute particular genres, such as romantic poetry or detective stories, help to make texts accessible to others by defining how they should be interpreted. Genre boundaries also act as constraints by defining how a text should be constructed and the writing style that should be adopted. Czarniawska argues that 'genre constitution is institution-building, and as such it invites policing attempts: somebody must "protect the core"' (1999: 45).

The examples of quantitative (Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler 2000) and qualitative (Perlow 1999) research writing that we have described earlier in this chapter are illustrative of what Czarniawska argues is the dominant organization theory genre of logico-scientific knowledge building. Czarniawska instead argues for a blurring of genre boundaries within management and organization theory that would enable reconciliation between scientific and narrative forms of knowledge. Narrative knowledge involves researchers in the collection and writing of stories that utilize literary devices such as plot (see Chapter 21 for a discussion of narrative analysis). This, she argues, changes the task of the organizational researcher from one of 'reproaching the practice and telling the practitioners which way to go' to telling 'them a good story' (Czarniawska 1999: 15), and casts them as 'merchants of meaning' (1999: 112) alongside consultants and journalists.



## Key concept 27.13
## What is auto-ethnography?

One of the ways in which more reflexive, narrative forms of ethnographic writing have been cultivated is through the emerging cross-disciplinary genre of auto-ethnography. This relates to the interest of anthropologists in auto-anthropology (Strathern 1987), which is an autobiographical form of research that is concerned with researching settings where the cultural backgrounds of the observer and observed are shared. Auto-ethnography involves the writing of a highly personalized text in which the personal is related to the cultural and the political in a way that claims the conventions associated with literary writing. However, it is difficult to summarize what auto-ethnography is about, precisely because its purpose is to challenge the conventions of social scientific writing by blurring the boundaries of genre that separate art and science, a practice that has come to be known as 'genre bending'. A recent example of this is a book by Ellis (2004) entitled *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Teaching and Doing Autoethnography*, which uses a fictitious account of her teaching a graduate course on auto-ethnography as the basis for discussion of doing and writing auto-ethnography. This involves blending the highly personalized accounts of her own and her students' lives with methodological discussions in a way that has come to be labelled as 'creative non-fiction'. Crucial to the auto-ethnographic style of writing is the focus on 'creating a palpable emotional experience' (Holman Jones 2005: 767) for readers so that they experience the narrative 'as if it were happening to them' (Ellis 2004: 116). Although there are few signs so far of auto-ethnography having been imported into the study of management and business, one example is found in a book by Goodall (1994) entitled *Casing a Promised Land: The Autobiography of an Organizational Detective as Cultural Ethnographer*, which describes the adventures of an organization communication specialist who enters a variety of organizational settings and, like a detective, looks for clues in order to understand them. Watson (2000) has argued that ethnographic research accounts can be written in a way that bridges the genres of creative writing and social science, calling this 'ethnographic fiction science'. One of the challenges for many social science researchers is that this entails having the skills of a fiction writer as well as the abilities of a researcher, which is a demanding combination, which their experience may not have prepared them for.

Czarniawska (1999) suggests that organization theory texts are recognized as scientific because of the devices that they use to indicate logical reasoning based on logical propositions. However, she argues that closer examination of the texts reveals that they in fact incorporate aspects of narrative in their production, by employing literary devices such as storytelling, trope, rhetoric, and metaphor. To illustrate, Czarniawska takes the example of detective stories, as a subgenre with which she compares organization studies. She argues that detective stories and organization studies both have a preference for a realist style of writing based on an interest in social life and both are built around problem solving. The central characters, the detective and the researcher/consultant, are often invisible narrators of the story who are called in to investigate a situation and provide a solution without being part of it. Although both detective stories and organization studies are 'supposed to build on analytical logic and employ deduction or induction', Czarniawska argues that, 'in practice, formal logic is rare in both' (1999: 81).

Other management and organizational researchers and writers have also challenged the conventions of logico-scientific writing that define the business and management field, arguing that the style of writing that authors wanting to publish in the leading journals are required to adopt has become too abstruse and difficult even for academics themselves to understand (Grey 2005). Although these comments are directed principally at the way that critical management studies is written, many of these points have a resonance that extends beyond this particular academic grouping. As Grey, in a paper written with Sinclair (Grey and Sinclair 2006: 447), confesses: 'I am increasingly bored and irritated by critical writing on organizations and management. I suppose that I used to think that such writing was necessarily complicated because it dealt with complicated ideas. But now I think that the complexity of expression often conceals what are quite simple ideas.' He goes on to say that he used to think that it was his own fault that he found this writing so complicated and difficult to understand, explaining: 'I used to think that I was stupid if I didn't understand papers—now I see it as at least partially a deficiency in the way they are written. If someone who has been involved in this stuff for two decades doesn't get it, then could there be something wrong with the way it is expressed?' (Grey and Sinclair 2006: 447). Our experience in talking with students doing a research project suggests that many of them experience similar doubts to Grey when they are reading the literature and struggling to understand it. Students can also feel intimidated by the thought that they are expected to write in a similar way to this in their dissertation. Knowing that there are some academics out there who admit to finding some styles of scientific writing dull, pretentious, and even intimidating might give students greater confidence in themselves as readers and writers, and some encouragement to try to find different ways of writing.



## *Checklist*

### Issues to consider for writing up a piece of research

- ◯ Have you clearly specified your research questions?
- ◯ Have you clearly indicated how the literature you have read relates to your research questions?
- ◯ Is your discussion of the literature critical and organized so that it is not just a summary of what you have read?
- ◯ Have you clearly outlined your research design and your research methods, including:
  - ◯ why you chose a particular research design;
  - ◯ why you chose a particular research method;
  - ◯ how you selected your research participants;
  - ◯ if there were any issues to do with cooperation (e.g. response rates);
  - ◯ why you implemented your research in a particular way (e.g. how the interview questions relate to your research questions, why you observed participants in particular situations, why your focus group guide asked the questions in a particular way and order);

- if your research required access to an organization, how and on what basis was agreement for access forthcoming;
- steps you took to ensure that your research was ethically responsible;
- how you analysed your data;
- any difficulties you encountered in the implementation of your research approach.

- Have you presented your data in a manner that relates to your research questions?
- Does your discussion of your findings show how they relate to your research questions?
- Does your discussion of your findings show how they shed light on the literature that you presented?
- Are the interpretations of your data that you offer fully supported with tables, figures, or segments from transcripts?
- If you have presented tables and/or figures, are they properly labelled with a title and number?
- If you have presented tables and/or figures, are they commented upon in your discussion?
- Do your conclusions clearly allow the reader to establish what your research contributes to the literature?
- Have you explained the limitations of your study?
- Do your conclusions consist solely of a summary of your findings? If they do, rewrite them!
- Do your conclusions make clear the answers to your research questions?
- Does your presentation of the findings and the discussion allow a clear argument and narrative to be presented to the reader?
- Have you broken up the text in each chapter with appropriate subheadings?
- Does your writing avoid sexist, racist, and disablist language?
- Have you included all appendices that you might need to provide (e.g. interview schedule, letters requesting access, communications with research participants)?
- Have you checked that your list of references includes ***all*** the items referred to in your text?
- Have you checked that your list of references follows precisely the style that your institution requires?
- Have you followed your supervisor's suggestions when he or she has commented on your draft chapters?
- Have you got people other than your supervisor to read your draft chapters for you?
- Have you checked to ensure that there is not excessive use of jargon?
- Do you provide clear signposts in the course of writing, so that readers are clear about what to expect next and why it is there?
- Have you ensured that your institution's requirements for submitting projects are fully met in terms of such issues as word count (so that it is neither too long nor too short) and whether or not an abstract and table of contents are required?
- Have you ensured that you do not quote excessively when presenting the literature?
- Have you fully acknowledged the work of others so that you cannot be accused of plagiarism?
- Is there a good correspondence between the title of your project and its contents?
- Have you acknowledged the help of others where this is appropriate (e.g. your supervisor, people who may have helped with interviews, people who read your drafts)?



## Key points

- Good writing is probably just as important as good research practice. Indeed, it is probably better thought of as a part of good research practice.
- Clear structure and statement of your research questions are important components of writing up research.
- Be sensitive to the ways in which writers seek to persuade us of their points of view.
- The study of rhetoric and writing strategies generally teaches us that the writings of scientists and social scientists do more than simply report findings. They are designed to convince and to persuade.
- The emphasis on rhetoric is not meant to imply that there is no external social reality; it merely suggests that our understanding of that reality is profoundly influenced by the ways it is represented by writers.
- While postmodernism has exerted a particular influence on this last point, writers working within other traditions have also contributed to it.
- The basic structure of and the rhetorical strategies employed in most quantitative and qualitative research articles are broadly similar.
- We need to get away from the idea that rhetoric and the desire to persuade others of the validity of our work are somehow bad things. They are not. We all want to get our points across and to persuade our readers that we have got things right. The questions to ask are, do we do it well and do we make the best possible case? We all have to persuade others that we have got the right angle on things; the trick is to do it well. So when you write an essay or dissertation, do bear in mind the significance of your writing strategy.



## Questions for review

- Why is it important to consider the ways in which business research is written?

### *Writing quantitative research: an example*

- Read an article based on quantitative research in an American business and management journal (e.g. *Academy of Management Journal* or *Administrative Science Quarterly*). How far does it exhibit the same characteristics as Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler's (2000) article?
- What is meant by rhetorical strategy? Why might rhetorical strategies be important in relation to the writing-up of business research?
- Do Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler employ an empiricist repertoire?

### *Writing qualitative research: an example*

- Read an article based on quantitative research in a European business and management journal (e.g. *Organization Studies*, *Journal of Management Studies*, or *Organization*). How far does it exhibit the same characteristics as Perlow's (1999) article?
- How far is the structure of Perlow's article different from Coyle-Shapiro and Kessler's?

### *Writing up mixed methods research*

- Read an article based on quantitative research in a British management journal. How far does it exhibit the same characteristics as the one by Fey and Denison (2003)?
- Do Fey and Denison employ an empiricist repertoire?

### *Postmodernism and its implications for writing*

- Why has postmodernism produced a growth of interest in writing business research?
- What is reflexivity?
- What is the linguistic turn?

### *Writing ethnography*

- How far is it true to say that ethnographic writing is typically imbued with realism?
- What forms of ethnographic writing other than realist tales can be found?
- What are the main characteristics of realist tales?

### *Ways of writing differently*

- What are the implications of the linguistic turn for business and management writing?



## Online Resource Centre

**www.oxfordtextbooks.co.uk/orc/brymanbrm3e/**

*Visit the interactive Research Guide that accompanies this book to complete an exercise in Writing up Business Research.*

# Glossary

*Terms appearing elsewhere in the Glossary are in colour.*

**Action research** An approach in which the action researcher and a client collaborate in the diagnosis of a problem and in the development of a solution based on the diagnosis.

***Ad libitum* sampling** A sampling approach in structured observation whereby whatever is happening at the moment that observation is due to occur is recorded.

**Adjacency pair** The tendency for certain kinds of activity in talk to be characterized by linked phases.

**Analytic induction** An approach to the analysis of qualitative data in which the researcher seeks universal explanations of phenomena by pursuing the collection of data until no cases that are inconsistent with a hypothetical explanation (deviant or negative cases) of a phenomenon are found.

**Arithmetic mean** Also known simply as the *mean*, this is the everyday average—namely, the total of a distribution of values divided by the number of values.

**Asynchronous online interview or focus group** Online interviews may be asynchronous or *synchronous*. In the case of the former, the transactions between participants are not in real time, so that there may be long spaces of time between interviewers' questions and participants' replies, and in the case of focus groups, between participants' contributions to the discussion.

**Attached email survey** A survey in which respondents are sent a questionnaire, which is received as an email attachment. Compare with *embedded email survey*.

**Behaviour sampling** A sampling approach in *structured observation* whereby an entire group is watched and the observer records who was involved in a particular kind of behaviour.

**Biographical method** See *life history method*.

**Bivariate analysis** The examination of the relationship between two variables, as in *contingency tables* or correlation.

**CAQDAS** An abbreviation of computer-*a*ssisted (or -*a*ided) *q*ualitative *d*ata *a*nalysis.

**Case study** A *research design* that entails the detailed and intensive analysis of a single case. The term is sometimes extended to include the study of just two or three cases for comparative purposes.

**Causality** A concern with establishing causal connections between variables, rather than mere *relationships* between them.

**Cell** The point in a table, such as a *contingency table*, where the rows and columns intersect.

**Census** The enumeration of an entire *population*. Unlike a *sample*, which comprises a count of *some* units in a population, a census relates to *all* units in a population. Thus, if a *postal questionnaire* is mailed to every person in a town or to all members of a profession, the research should be characterized as a census.

**Chi-square test** Chi-square ($\chi^2$) is a test of *statistical significance*, which is typically employed to establish how confident we can be that the findings displayed in a *contingency table* can be generalized from a *probability sample* to a *population*.

**Closed question** A question employed in an *interview schedule* or *self-completion questionnaire* that presents the respondent with a set of possible answers to choose from. Also called *fixed-choice question* and *pre-coded question*.

**Cluster sample** A sampling procedure in which at an initial stage the researcher samples areas (i.e. clusters) and then samples units from these clusters, usually using a *probability sampling* method.

**Code, coding** In *quantitative research*, codes act as tags that are placed on data about people or other units of analysis. The aim is to assign the data relating to each *variable* to groups, each of which is considered to be a category of the variable in question. Numbers are then assigned to each category to allow the information to be processed by the computer. In *qualitative research*, coding is the process whereby data are broken down into component parts, which are given names.

**Coding frame** A listing of the codes used in relation to the analysis of data. In relation to answers to a structured interview schedule or questionnaire, the coding frame will delineate the categories used in connection with each

question. It is particularly crucial in relation to the coding of *open questions*. With *closed questions*, the coding frame is essentially incorporated into the pre-given answers, hence the frequent use of the term *pre-coded question* to describe such questions.

**Coding manual** In *content analysis*, this is the statement of instructions to coders that outlines all the possible categories for each dimension being coded.

**Coding schedule** In *content analysis*, this is the form onto which all the data relating to an item being coded will be entered.

**Cognitive mapping** A method used to map the thought processes and decision-making sequences used by an individual or a group to solve a problem.

**Collaborative enquiry** A tradition founded on the assumption that the people who are the focus of study should be fully involved in the research process at all stages, from the identification of aims to the writing-up of findings. The tradition stems from a desire to challenge the conventional methods whereby knowledge is constructed in the social sciences and to dismantle the assumed authority of the researcher, and for this reason it is sometimes referred to as 'new paradigm' research or cooperative enquiry.

**Comparative design** A *research design* that entails the comparison of two or more cases in order to illuminate existing theory or generate theoretical insights as a result of contrasting findings uncovered through the comparison.

**Concept** A name given to a category that organizes observations and ideas by virtue of their possessing common features.

**Concurrent validity** One of the main approaches to establishing *measurement validity*. It entails relating a measure to a criterion on which cases (e.g. people) are known to differ and that is relevant to the *concept* in question.

**Connotation** A term used in *semiotics* to refer to the principal and most manifest meaning of a *sign*. Compare with *denotation*.

**Constant** An attribute in terms of which cases do not differ. Compare with *variable*.

**Constructionism, constructionist** An *ontological* position (often also referred to as *constructivism*) that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It is antithetical to *objectivism* and *essentialism*.

**Constructivism** See *constructionism*.

**Content analysis** An approach to the analysis of documents and texts that seeks to quantify content in terms of predetermined categories and in a systematic and replicable manner. The term is sometimes used in connection with qualitative research as well—see *qualitative content analysis*.

**Contingency table** A table, comprising rows and columns, that shows the *relationship* between two *variables*. Usually, at least one of the variables is a *nominal variable*. Each cell in the table shows the frequency of occurrence of that intersection of categories of each of the two variables and usually a percentage.

**Continuous recording** A procedure in *structured observation*, whereby observation occurs for extended periods, so that the frequency and duration of certain types of behaviour can be carefully recorded.

**Convenience sample** A sample that is selected because of its availability to the researcher. It is a form of *non-probability sample*.

**Conversation analysis** The fine-grained analysis of talk as it occurs in interaction in naturally occurring situations. The talk is recorded and *transcribed* so that the detailed analyses can be carried out. The analysis is concerned with uncovering the underlying structures of talk in interaction and as such with the achievement of order through interaction. Conversation analysis is grounded in *ethnomethodology*.

**Correlation** An approach to the analysis of relationships between *interval/ratio variables* and/or *ordinal variables* that seeks to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between the variables concerned. *Pearson's r* and *Spearman's rho* are both methods for assessing the level of correlation between variables.

**Covert research** A term frequently used in connection with *ethnographic* research in which the researcher does not reveal his or her true identity. Such research violates the ethical principle of *informed consent*.

**Cramér's *V*** A method for assessing the strength of the relationship between two variables, at least one of which must have more than two categories.

**Critical incident method** A technique that usually relies on *structured interviewing* to elicit from respondents an account of key events or specific kinds of behaviour (critical incidents) and their consequences. Analysis involves interpretation of critical incidents so as to identify common patterns of behaviour.

**Critical realism** A *realist* epistemology that asserts that the study of the social world should be concerned with the identification of the structures that generate that world. Critical realism is critical because its practitioners aim to identify structures in order to change them, so that inequalities and injustices may be counteracted. Unlike a *positivist* epistemology, critical realism accepts that the structures that are identified may not be amenable to the senses. Thus, whereas *positivism* is *empiricist*, critical realism is not.

**Cross-sectional design** A *research design* that entails the collection of data on more than one case (usually quite a lot more than one) and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection

with two or more variables (usually many more than two), which are then examined to detect patterns of association.

**Deductive** An approach to the relationship between theory and research in which the latter is conducted with reference to hypotheses and ideas inferred from the former. Compare with *inductive*.

**Denotation** A term used in *semiotics* to refer to the meanings of a sign associated with the social context within which it operates that are supplementary to and less immediately apparent than its *connotation*.

**Dependent variable** A *variable* that is causally influenced by another variable (i.e. an *independent variable*).

**Diary** In the context of social research methods, a term that can mean different things. Three types of diary can be distinguished: diaries written or completed at the behest of a researcher; personal diaries that can be analysed as a *personal document*, but that were produced spontaneously; and diaries written by social researchers as a log of their activities and reflections.

**Dichotomous variable** A variable with just two categories.

**Dimension** Refers to an aspect of a *concept*.

**Discourse analysis** An approach to the analysis of talk and other forms of discourse that emphasizes the ways in which versions of reality are accomplished through language.

**Distribution of values** A term used to refer to the entire data relating to a *variable*. Thus, the ages of members of a *sample* represent the distribution of values for that variable for that sample.

**Ecological fallacy** The error of assuming that inferences about individuals can be made from findings relating to aggregate data.

**Ecological validity** A concern with the question of whether or not social scientific findings are applicable to people's everyday, natural, social settings.

**Embedded email survey** A social survey in which respondents are sent an email that contains a *questionnaire*. Compare with *attached email survey*.

**Empiricism** An approach to the study of reality that suggests that only knowledge gained through experience and the senses is acceptable.

**Epistemology, epistemological** A theory of knowledge. It is particularly employed in this book to refer to a stance on what should pass as acceptable knowledge. See *positivism*, *realism*, and *interpretivism*.

**Essentialism** A position that has close affinities with naive *realism*. Essentialism suggests that objects have essences that denote their authentic nature. Compare with *constructionism*.

**Eta** A test of the strength of the *relationship* between two *variables*. The *independent variable* must be a *nominal variable* and the *dependent variable* must be an *interval variable* or *ratio variable*. The resulting level of correlation will always be positive.

**Ethnographic content analysis** See *qualitative content analysis*.

**Ethnography, ethnographer** Like *participant observation*, a research method in which the researcher immerses him- or herself in a social setting for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions. However, the term has a more inclusive sense than participant observation, which seems to emphasize the observational component. Also, the term 'an ethnography' is frequently used to refer to the written output of ethnographic research.

**Ethnomethodology** A sociological perspective concerned with the way in which social order is accomplished through talk and interaction. It provides the intellectual foundations of *conversation analysis*.

**Evaluation research** Research that is concerned with the evaluation of real-life interventions in the social world.

**Experiment** A *research design* that rules out alternative explanations of findings deriving from it (i.e. possesses *internal validity*) by having at least (*a*) an experimental group, which is exposed to a treatment, and a control group, which is not; and (*b*) *random assignment* to the two groups.

**External validity** A concern with the question of whether or not the results of a study can be generalized beyond the specific research context in which it was conducted.

**Face validity** A concern with whether or not an *indicator* appears to reflect the content of the *concept* in question.

**Facilitator** See *moderator*.

**Factor analysis** A statistical technique used for large numbers of *variables* to establish whether there is a tendency for groups of them to be inter-related. It is often used with *multiple-indicator measures* to see if the *indicators* tend to bunch to form one or more groups of indicators. These groups of indicators are called factors and must then be given a name.

**Fieldnotes** A detailed chronicle by an *ethnographer* of events, conversations, and behaviour, and the researcher's initial reflections on them.

**Field stimulation** A study in which the researcher directly intervenes in and/or manipulates a natural setting in order to observe what happens as a consequence of that intervention.

**Focal sampling** A sampling approach in structured observation whereby a sampled individual is observed for a set period of time. The observer records all examples of whatever forms of behaviour are of interest.

**Focus group** A form of group interview in which: there are several participants (in addition to the *moderator/*

*facilitator*); there is an emphasis in the questioning on a particular fairly tightly defined topic; and the emphasis is upon interaction within the group and the joint construction of meaning.

**Frequency table** A table that displays the number and/or percentage of units (e.g. people) in different categories of a variable.

**Generalization, generalizability** A concern with the *external validity* of research findings.

**Grounded theory** An approach to the analysis of qualitative data that aims to generate theory out of research data by achieving a close fit between the two.

**Hawthorne effect** See *reactivity, reactive effect*.

**Hermeneutics** A term drawn from theology, which, when imported into the social sciences, is concerned with the theory and method of the interpretation of human action. It emphasizes the need to understand from the perspective of the social actor.

**Hypothesis** An informed speculation, which is set up to be tested, about the possible relationship between two or more variables.

**Independent variable** A *variable* that has a causal impact on another variable (i.e. a *dependent variable*).

**Index** See *scale*.

**Indicator** A measure that is employed to refer to a *concept* when no direct measure is available.

**Inductive** An approach to the relationship between theory and research in which the former is generated out of the latter. Compare with *deductive*.

**Informed consent** A key principle in social research ethics. It implies that prospective research participants should be given as much information as might be needed to make an informed decision about whether or not they wish to participate in a study.

**Inter-coder reliability** The degree to which two or more individuals agree about the *coding* of an item. Inter-coder reliability is likely to be an issue in *content analysis*, *structured observation*, and when *coding* answers to *open questions* in research based on *questionnaires* or *structured interviews*.

**Internal reliability** The degree to which the indicators that make up a *scale* are consistent.

**Internal validity** A concern with the question of whether or not a finding that incorporates a causal relationship between two or more variables is sound.

**Interpretative repertoire** A collection of linguistic resources that are drawn upon in order to characterize and assess actions and events.

**Interpretivism** An *epistemological* position that requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action.

**Interval variable** A *variable* where the distances between the categories are identical across its range of categories.

**Intervening variable** A *variable* that is affected by another variable and that in turn has a causal impact on another variable. Taking an intervening variable into account often facilitates the understanding of the relationship between two variables.

**Interview guide** A rather vague term that is used to refer to the brief list of memory prompts of areas to be covered that is often employed in *unstructured interviewing* or to the somewhat more structured list of issues to be addressed or questions to be asked in *semi-structured interviewing*.

**Interview schedule** A collection of questions designed to be asked by an interviewer. An interview schedule is always used in a *structured interview*.

**Intra-coder reliability** The degree to which an individual differs over time in the *coding* of an item. Intra-coder reliability is likely to be an issue in *content analysis*, *structured observation*, and when *coding* answers to *open questions* in research based on *questionnaires* or *structured interviews*.

**Key informant** Someone who offers the researcher, usually in the context of conducting an *ethnography*, perceptive information about the social setting, important events, and individuals.

**Life history interview** Similar to the *oral history interview*, but the aim of this type of unstructured interview is to glean information on the entire biography of each respondent.

**Life history method** Also often referred to as the *biographical method*, this method emphasizes the inner experience of individuals and its connections with changing events and phases throughout the life course. The method usually entails *life history interviews* and the use of *personal documents* as data.

**Likert scale** A widely used format developed by Rensis Likert for asking attitude questions. Respondents are typically asked their degree of agreement with a series of statements that together form a *multiple-indicator* or *-item* measure. The scale is deemed then to measure the intensity with which respondents feel about an issue.

**Longitudinal research** A *research design* in which data are collected on a *sample* (of people, documents, etc.) on at least two occasions.

**Mail questionnaire** Traditionally, this term has been synonymous with the *postal questionnaire*, but, with the arrival of email-based questionnaires (see *embedded email survey* and *attached email survey*), many writers prefer to refer to postal rather than mail questionnaires.

**Mean** See *arithmetic mean*.

**Measure of central tendency** A statistic, like the *arithmetic mean*, *median*, or *mode*, that summarizes a *distribution of values*.

**Measure of dispersion** A statistic, like the *range* or *standard deviation*, that summarizes the amount of variation in a *distribution of values*.

**Measurement validity** The degree to which a measure of a concept truly reflects that concept. See also *face validity* and *concurrent validity*.

**Median** The mid-point in a *distribution of values*.

**Meta-analysis** A method for determining the overall effect of the relationship between variables by drawing together the findings from more than one, and often many more research studies. This is typically achieved through quantitative measurement and the use of statistical procedures.

**Missing data** Data relating to a case that are not available, for example, when a respondent in *survey* research does not answer a question. These are referred to as 'missing values' in *SPSS*.

**Mixed methods research** A term that is increasingly employed to describe research that combines the use of both quantitative and qualitative research. The term can be employed to describe research that combines just quantitative research methods or that combines just qualitative research methods. However, in recent times, it has taken on this more specific meaning of combining quantitative and qualitative research methods.

**Mode** The value that occurs most frequently in a *distribution of values*.

**Moderated relationship** A *relationship* between two *variables* is said to be moderated when it holds for one category of a third variable but not for another category or other categories.

**Moderator** The person who guides the questioning of a *focus group*. Also called a *facilitator*.

**Multiple-indicator measure** A measure that employs more than one *indicator* to measure a *concept*.

**Multi-strategy research** A term used to describe research that combines *quantitative* and *qualitative research*.

**Multivariate analysis** The examination of relationships between three or more *variables*.

**Narrative analysis** An approach to the elicitation and analysis of data that is sensitive to the sense of temporal sequence that people, as tellers of stories about their lives or events around them, detect in their lives and surrounding episodes and inject into their accounts. However, the approach is not exclusive to a focus on life histories.

**Naturalism** A confusing term that has at least three distinct meanings: a commitment to adopting the principles of natural scientific method; being true to the nature of the phenomenon being investigated; and a style of research that seeks to minimize the intrusion of artificial methods of data collection.

**Negative relationship** A *relationship* between two *variables*, whereby as one increases the other decreases.

**Nominal variable** Also known as a *categorical variable*, this is a variable that comprises categories that cannot be rank ordered.

**Non-manipulable variable** A *variable* that cannot readily be manipulated either for practical or for ethical reasons and that therefore cannot be employed in an *experiment*.

**Non-probability sample** A sample that has not been selected using a random sampling method. Essentially, this implies that some units in the population are more likely to be selected than others.

**Non-response** A source of *non-sampling error* that occurs whenever some members of a sample refuse to cooperate, cannot be contacted, or for some reason cannot supply the required data.

**Non-sampling error** Differences between the *population* and the *sample* that arise either from deficiencies in the sampling approach, such as an inadequate *sampling frame* or *non-response*, or from such problems as poor question wording, poor interviewing, or flawed processing of data.

**Null hypothesis** A *hypothesis* of no relationship between two variables.

**NVivo QSR** A *CAQDAS* package that derives from but goes beyond NUD*IST (Non-numerical Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorizing).

**Objectivism** An *ontological* position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors. Compare with *constructionism*.

**Observation schedule** A device used in *structured observation* that specifies the categories of behaviour that are to be observed and how behaviour should be allocated to those categories.

**Official statistics** Statistics compiled by or on behalf of state agencies in the course of conducting their business.

**Online survey** A very general term used to include any survey conducted online. As such, it includes the *Web survey* and the *attached email survey* and the *embedded email survey*.

**Ontology, ontological** A theory of the nature of social entities. See *objectivism* and *inductivism*.

**Open question** A question employed in an *interview schedule* or *self-completion questionnaire* that does not present the respondent with a set of possible answers to choose from. Compare with *closed question*.

**Operational definition** The definition of a *concept* in terms of the operations to be carried out when measuring it.

**Operationism, operationalism** A doctrine, mainly associated with a version of physics, that emphasizes the search for *operational definitions* of *concepts*.

**Oral history interview** A largely *unstructured interview* in which the respondent is asked to recall events from his or her past and to reflect on them.

**Ordinal variable** A variable whose categories can be rank ordered (as in the case of *interval* and *ratio variables*), but the distances between the categories are not equal across the range.

**Outlier** An extreme value in a distribution of values. If a *variable* has an extreme value—either very high or very low—the *arithmetic mean* or the *range* will be distorted by it.

**Paradigm** A term deriving from the history of science, where it was used to describe a cluster of beliefs and dictates that for scientists in a particular discipline influence what should be studied, how research should be done, and how results should be interpreted.

**Participant observation** Research in which the researcher immerses him- or herself in a social setting for an extended period of time, observing behaviour, listening to what is said in conversations both between others and with the fieldworker, and asking questions. Participant observation usually includes interviewing key informants and studying documents, and as such is difficult to distinguish from *ethnography*. In this book, participant observation is employed to refer to the specifically observational aspect of ethnography.

**Pearson's *r*** A measure of the strength and direction of the relationship between two *interval/ratio variables*.

**Personal documents** Documents such as *diaries*, letters, and autobiographies that are not written for an official purpose. They provide first-person accounts of the writer's life and events within it.

**Phenomenology** A philosophy that is concerned with the question of how individuals make sense of the world around them and how in particular the philosopher should bracket out preconceptions concerning his or her grasp of that world.

**Phi** A method for assessing the strength and direction of the relationship between two *dichotomous variables*.

**Population** The universe of units from which a *sample* is to be selected.

**Positive relationship** A *relationship* between two *variables*, whereby as one increases the other increases as well.

**Positivism** An *epistemological* position that advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond.

**Postal questionnaire** A form of *self-completion questionnaire* that is sent to respondents and usually returned by them by non-electronic mail.

**Postmodernism** A position that displays a distaste for master-narratives and for a *realist* orientation. In the context of research methodology, postmodernists display a preference for qualitative methods and a concern with the modes of representation of research findings.

**Pre-coded question** Another name for a *closed question*. The term is often preferred, because such a question removes the need for the application of a *coding frame* to the question after it has been answered. This is because the range of answers has been predetermined and a numerical *code* will have been pre-assigned to each possible answer. The term is particularly appropriate when the codes appear on the *questionnaire* or *interview schedule*.

**Probability sample** A sample that has been selected using *random sampling* and in which each unit in the population has a known probability of being selected.

**Projective techniques** A method involving the presentation of ambiguous stimuli to individuals, which are interpreted by the researcher to reveal the underlying characteristics of the individual.

**Qualitative content analysis** An approach to documents that emphasizes the role of the investigator in the construction of the meaning of and in texts. There is an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data and on recognizing the significance for understanding the meaning of the context in which an item being analysed (and the categories derived from it) appeared.

**Qualitative research** Qualitative research usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. As a *research strategy* it is *inductivist*, *constructivist*, and *interpretivist*, but qualitative researchers do not always subscribe to all three of these features. Compare with *quantitative research*.

**Quantitative research** Quantitative research usually emphasizes quantification in the collection and analysis of data. As a *research strategy* it is *deductivist* and *objectivist* and incorporates a natural science model of the research process (in particular, one influenced by *positivism*), but quantitative researchers do not always subscribe to all three of these features. Compare with *qualitative research*.

**Quasi-experiment** A *research design* that is close to being an experiment but that does not meet the requirements fully and therefore does not exhibit complete *internal validity*.

**Questionnaire** A collection of questions administered to respondents. When used on its own, the term usually denotes a *self-completion questionnaire*.

**Quota sample** A *sample* that non-randomly samples a *population* in terms of the relative proportions of people in different categories. It is a type of *non-probability sample*.

**Random assignment** A term used in connection with *experiments* to refer to the random allocation of research participants to the experimental group and the control group.

**Random sampling** Sampling whereby the inclusion of a unit of a *population* occurs entirely by chance.

**Range** The difference between the maximum and the minimum value in a *distribution of values* associated with an *interval* or *ratio variable*.

**Ratio variable** An *interval variable* with a true zero point.

**Reactivity, reactive effect** A term used to describe the response of research participants to the fact that they know they are being studied, also sometimes referred to as the Hawthorne effect. Reactivity is deemed to result in untypical behaviour.

**Realism** An epistemological position that acknowledges a reality independent of the senses that is accessible to the researcher's tools and theoretical speculations. It implies that the categories created by scientists refer to real objects in the natural or social worlds. See also *critical realism*.

**Reflexivity** A term used in research methodology to refer to a reflectiveness among social researchers about the implications for the knowledge of the social world they generate of their methods, values, biases, decisions, and mere presence in the very situations they investigate.

**Relationship** An association between two variables whereby the variation in one variable coincides with variation in another variable.

**Reliability** The degree to which a measure of a concept is stable.

**Repertory grid technique** A method for mapping the relationship between constructs used by an individual or a group of individuals to construct meaning. The method results in the production of a diagrammatic matrix representing the various constructs and elements involved in analysing this relationship, i.e. the repertory grid.

**Replication, replicability** The degree to which the results of a study can be reproduced. See also *internal reliability*.

**Representative sample** A *sample* that reflects the population accurately, so that it is a microcosm of the *population*.

**Research design** This term is employed in this book to refer to a framework for the collection and analysis of data. A choice of research design reflects decisions about the priority being given to a range of dimensions of the research process (such as *causality* and *generalization*).

**Research strategy** A term used in this book to refer to a general orientation to the conduct of social research (see *quantitative research* and *qualitative research*).

**Respondent validation** Sometimes called *member validation*, this is a process whereby a researcher provides the people on whom he or she has conducted research with an account of his or her findings and requests feedback on that account.

**Response set** The tendency among some respondents to *multiple-indicator measures* to reply in the same way to each constituent item.

**Rhetoric** A concern with the ways in which appeals to convince or persuade are devised.

**Sample** The segment of the population that is selected for research. It is a subset of the *population*. The method of selection may be based on *probability sampling* or *non-probability sampling*.

**Sampling error** Differences between a *random sample* and the *population* from which it is selected.

**Sampling frame** The listing of all units in the *population* from which a *sample* is selected.

**Scale** A term that is usually used interchangeably with *index* to refer to a *multiple-indicator measure* in which the score a person gives for each component *indicator* is used to provide a composite score for that person.

**Scan sampling** A sampling approach in *structured observation* whereby an entire group of individuals is scanned at regular intervals and the behaviour of all of them is recorded at each occasion.

**Secondary analysis** The analysis of data by researchers who will probably not have been involved in the collection of those data for purposes that may not have been envisaged by those responsible for the data collection. Secondary analysis may entail the analysis of either quantitative data or qualitative data.

**Self-administered questionnaire** See *self-completion questionnaire*.

**Self-completion questionnaire** A *questionnaire* that the respondent answers without the aid of an interviewer. Sometimes called a *self-administered questionnaire*.

**Semiotics** The study/science of *signs*. An approach to the analysis of documents and other phenomena that emphasizes the importance of seeking out the deeper meaning of those phenomena. A semiotic approach is concerned to uncover the processes of meaning production and how signs are designed to have an effect upon actual and prospective consumers of those signs.

**Semi-structured interview** A term that covers a wide range of types. It typically refers to a context in which the interviewer has a series of questions that are in the general form of an *interview guide* but is able to vary the sequence of questions. The questions are frequently somewhat more general in their frame of reference from that typically found in a *structured interview* schedule. Also, the interviewer usually has some latitude to ask further questions in response to what are seen as significant replies.

**Sensitizing concept** A term devised by Blumer to refer to a preference for treating a *concept* as a guide in an investigation, so that it points in a general way to what is relevant

or important. This position contrasts with the idea of an *operational definition*, in which the meaning of a concept is fixed in advance of carrying out an investigation.

**Sign** A term employed in *semiotics*. A sign is made up of a signifier (the manifestation of a sign) and the signified (that idea or deeper meaning to which the signifier refers).

**Simple observation** The passive and unobtrusive observation of behaviour.

**Simple random sample** A *sample* in which each unit has been selected entirely by chance. Each unit of the *population* has a known and equal probability of inclusion in the sample.

**Snowball sample** A *non-probability sample* in which the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others.

**Social survey** See *survey research*.

**Social desirability bias** A distortion of data that is caused by respondents' attempts to construct an account that conforms to a socially acceptable model of belief or behaviour.

**Spearman's rho** ($\rho$) A measure of the strength and direction of the *relationship* between two *ordinal variables*.

**SPSS** Originally short for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS is a widely used computer program that allows quantitative data to be managed and analysed.

**Spurious relationship** A *relationship* between two *variables* is said to be spurious if it is being produced by the impact of a third variable on each of the two variables that form the spurious relationship. When the third variable is controlled, the relationship disappears.

**Standard deviation** A measure of dispersion around the mean.

**Standard error of the mean** An estimate of the amount that a sample mean is likely to differ from the population mean.

**Statistical inference** See *statistical significance (test of)*.

**Statistical significance (test of)** Allows the analyst to estimate how confident he or she can be that the results deriving from a study based on a randomly selected *sample* are generalizable to the *population* from which the sample was drawn. Such a test does not allow the researcher to infer that the findings are of substantive importance. The *chi-square test* is an example of this kind of test. The process of using a test of statistical significance to generalize from a sample to a population is known as *statistical inference*.

**Stratified random sample** A *sample* in which units are *randomly sampled* from a *population* that has been divided into categories (strata).

**Structured interview** A research interview in which all respondents are asked exactly the same questions in the same order with the aid of a formal *interview schedule*.

**Structured observation** Often also called *systematic observation*, structured observation is a technique in which the researcher employs explicitly formulated rules for the observation and recording of behaviour. The rules inform observers about what they should look for and how they should record behaviour.

**Survey research** A *cross-sectional design* in relation to which data are collected predominantly by *self-completion questionnaire* or by *structured interview* on more than one case (usually quite a lot more than one) and at a single point in time in order to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more *variables* (usually many more than two) which are then examined to detect patterns of *relationship*.

**Symbolic interactionism** A theoretical perspective in sociology and social psychology that views social interaction as taking place in terms of the meanings actors attach to action and things.

**Synchronous online interview or focus group** Online interviews may be asynchronous or synchronous. In the case of the latter, the transactions between participants are in real time, so that there will be only brief time lapses between interviewers' questions and participants' replies, and, in the case of focus groups, between participants' contributions to the discussion.

**Systematic observation** See *structured observation*.

**Systematic sample** A *probability sampling* method in which units are selected from a *sampling frame* according to fixed intervals, such as every fifth unit.

**Text** A term that is used either in the conventional sense of a written work or in more recent years to refer to a wide range of phenomena. For example, in arriving at a *thick description*, Geertz refers to treating culture as a text.

**Theoretical sampling** A term used mainly in relation to *grounded theory* to refer to sampling carried out so that emerging theoretical considerations guide the selection of cases and/or research participants. Theoretical sampling is supposed to continue until a point of *theoretical saturation* is reached.

**Theoretical saturation** In *grounded theory*, the point when emerging concepts have been fully explored and no new theoretical insights are being generated. See also *theoretical sampling*.

**Thick description** A term devised by Geertz to refer to detailed accounts of a social setting that can form the basis for the creation of general statements about a culture and its significance in people's social lives.

**Time sampling** A sampling method in *structured observation*, which entails using a criterion for deciding when observation will occur.

**Transcription, transcript** The written translation of an audio-recorded *interview* or *focus group* session.

**Triangulation** The use of more than one method or source of data in the study of a social phenomenon so that findings may be cross-checked.

**Trustworthiness** A set of criteria advocated by some writers for assessing the quality of *qualitative research*.

**Turn-taking** The notion from *conversation analysis* that order in everyday conversation is achieved through orderly taking of turns in conversations.

**Univariate analysis** The analysis of a single *variable* at a time.

**Unobtrusive methods** Methods that do not entail the awareness among research participants that they are being studied and that are therefore not subject to *reactivity*.

**Unstructured interview** An interview in which the interviewer typically only has a list of topics or issues, often called an *interview guide*, that are typically covered. The style of questioning is usually very informal. The phrasing and sequencing of questions will vary from interview to interview.

**Validity** A concern with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research. There are different aspects of validity. See, in particular, *measurement validity*, *internal validity*, *external validity*, and *ecological validity*. When used on its own, *validity* is usually taken to refer to *measurement validity*.

**Variable** An attribute in terms of which cases vary. See also *dependent variable* and *independent variable*. Compare with *constant*.

**Verbal protocol approach** A method that involves asking respondents to think aloud while they are performing a task in order to capture their thought processes while they are making a decision or judgement or solving a problem.

**Web survey** A *social survey* conducted so that respondents complete a *questionnaire* via a website.

# References


Abrahamson, E. (1996). 'Management Fashion', *Academy of Management Review*, 21(1): 254–85.

Addison, J. T., and Belfield, C. R. (2000). 'The Impact of Financial Participation and Employee Involvement on Financial Performance: A Reiteration Using the 1998 WERS', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 47(5): 571–83.

Adler, N. (1983). 'A Typology of Management Studies Involving Culture', *Journal of International Business Studies*, Fall: 29–47.

Adriaenssens, C., and Cadman, L. (1999). 'An Adaptation of Moderated E-Mail Focus Groups to Assess the Potential of a New Online (Internet) Financial Services Offer in the UK', *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 41: 417–24.

Ainsworth, S., and Hardy, C. (2009). 'Mind over Body: Physical and Psychotherapeutic Discourses and the Regulation of the Older Worker', *Human Relations*, 62(8): 1199–229.

Alderson, P. (1998). 'Confidentiality and Consent in Qualitative Research', *Network: Newsletter of the British Sociological Association*, 69: 6–7.

Aldrich, H. E. (1972). 'Technology and Organizational Structure: A Re-Examination of the Findings of the Aston Group', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17(1): 26–43.

Aldridge, A. (1998). 'Reproducing the Value of Professional Expertise in Post-Traditional Culture: Financial Advice and the Creation of the Client', *Cultural Values*, 2: 445–62.

Alise, M. A., and Teddlie, C. (2010). 'A Continuation of the Paradigm Wars? Prevalence Rates of Methodological Approaches across the Social/Behavioral Sciences', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(2): 103–26.

Altheide, D. L. (1980). 'Leaving the Newsroom', in W. Shaffir, R. A. Stebbins, and A. Turowetz (eds), *Fieldwork Experience: Qualitative Approaches to Social Research*. New York: St Martin's Press.

Altheide, D. L. (1996). *Qualitative Media Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Altschuld, J. W., and Lower, M. A. (1984). 'Improving Mailed Questionnaires: Analysis of a 96 Percent Return Rate', in D. C. Lockhart (ed.), *Making Effective Use of Mailed Questionnaires*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Alvesson, M. (2002). *Postmodernism and Social Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Alvesson, M. (2003). 'Methodology for Close Up Studies: Struggling with Closeness and Closure', *Higher Education*, 46: 167–93.

Alvesson, M., and Kärreman, D. (2000). 'Varieties of Discourse: On the Study of Organization through Discourse Analysis', *Human Relations*, 53(9): 1125–49.

Anderson, N. (1990). 'Repertory Grid Technique in Employee Selection', *Personnel Review*, 19(3): 9–15.

Archer, M. (1995). *Realist Social Theory: The Morphogenetic Approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Argyris, C., Putnam, R., and Smith, M. (1985). *Action Science: Concepts, Methods and Skills for Research and Intervention.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Armstrong, G. (1993). 'Like that Desmond Morris?', in D. Hobbs and T. May (eds), *Interpreting the Field: Accounts of Ethnography*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Armstrong, K. (2006). *Life after MG Rover: A Report Prepared for BBC Radio 4*. London: The Work Foundation.

Aronson, E., and Carlsmith, J. M. (1968). 'Experimentation in Social Psychology', in G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (eds), *The Handbook of Social Psychology*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Arthur, J. (1994). 'Effects of Human Resource Systems on Manufacturing, Performance and Turnover', *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(3): 670–87.

Asch, S. E. (1951). 'Effect of Group Pressure upon the Modification and Distortion of Judgments', in H. Guetzkow (ed.), *Groups, Leadership and Men*. Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press.

Ashforth, B. E., Kreiner, G. E., Clark, M. A., and Fugate, M. (2007). 'Normalizing Dirty Work: Tactics for Countering Occupational Taint', *Academy of Management Journal*, 50: 149–74.

Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) (2002). 'Ethical Decision Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee', URL (consulted 18 Jan. 2006): ***aoir.org/reports/ethics.pdf*** (accessed 15 December 2010).

Atkinson, P. (1981). *The Clinical Experience*. Farnborough: Gower.

Atkinson, P. (1990). *The Ethnographic Imagination: Textual Constructions of Society*. London: Routledge.

Atkinson, P., and Coffey, A. (1995). 'Realism and its Discontents: On the Crisis of Cultural Representation in Ethnographic Texts', in B. Adam and S. Allan (eds), *Theorizing Culture: An Interdisciplinary Critique after Postmodernism*. London: UCL Press.

Atkinson, P., and Coffey, A. (2004). 'Analysing Documentary Realities', in D. Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*, 2nd edn. London: Sage.

Atkinson, P., and Silverman, D. (1997). 'Kundera's Immortality: The Interview Society and the Invention of Self', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(3): 324–45.

Bacon, N., and Blyton, P. (2001). 'Management Practices and Employee Attitudes: A Longitudinal Study Spanning Fifty Years', *Sociological Review*, 49(2): 254–74.

Ball, K., and Wilson, D. C. (2000). 'Power, Control and Computer-Based Performance Monitoring: Repertoires,

Resistance and Subjectivities', *Organization Studies*, 21(3): 539–65.

Banks, M. (2001). *Visual Methods in Social Research*. London: Sage.

Bansal, P., and Roth, K. (2000). 'Why Companies Go Green: A Model of Ecological Responsiveness', *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(4): 717–36.

Barley, S. (1983). 'Semiotics and the Study of Occupational and Organizational Cultures', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28: 393–413.

Barley, S. (2006). 'When I Write My Masterpiece: Thoughts on What Makes a Paper Interesting', *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(1): 16–20.

Barley, S., Meyer, G., and Gash, D. (1988). 'Cultures of Culture: Academics, Practitioners and the Pragmatics of Normative Control', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 33: 24–60.

Barnes, S. (2004). 'Issues of Attribution and Identification in Online Social Research', in M. D. Johns, S-L. S. Chen, and G. J. Hall (eds), *Online Social Research*. New York: Peter Lang.

Barnett, R. (1994). 'Editorial', *Studies in Higher Education*, 19(2): 123–4.

Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. London: Jonathan Cape.

Bartunek, J. M., Bobko, P., and Venkatraman, N. (1993). 'Toward Innovation and Diversity in Management Research Methods', *Academy of Management Journal*, 36(6): 1362–73.

Bartunek, J. M., Rynes, S. L., and Ireland, R. D. (2006). 'What Makes Management Research Interesting and Why Does it Matter?', *Academy of Management Journal*, 49(1): 9–15.

Bate, S. (1997). 'Whatever Happened to Organizational Ethnography? A Review of the Field of Organizational Ethnography and Anthropological Studies', *Human Relations*, 50(9): 1147–75.

Bauman, Z. (1978). *Hermeneutics and Social Science: Approaches to Understanding*. London: Hutchison.

Baumgartner, R. M., and Heberlein, T. A. (1984). 'Applying Attitude Theories to the Return of Mailed Questionnaires', in D. C. Lockhart (ed.), *Making Effective Use of Mailed Questionnaires*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bazerman, C. (1987). 'Codifying the Social Scientific Style: The APA *Publication Manual* as a Behaviorist Rhetoric', in J. S. Nelson, A. Megill, and D. N. McClosky (eds), *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Beardsworth, A. (1980). 'Analysing Press Content: Some Technical and Methodological Issues', in H. Christian (ed.), *Sociology of Journalism and the Press*. Keele: Keele University Press.

Bechhofer, F., Elliott, B., and McCrone, D. (1984). 'Safety in Numbers: On the Use of Multiple Interviewers', *Sociology*, 18: 97–100.

Becker, H. S. (1982). 'Culture: A Sociological View', *Yale Review*, 71: 513–27.

Becker, H. S. (1986). *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Becker, H. S., and Geer, B. (1957*a*). 'Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison', *Human Organization*, 16: 28–32.

Becker, H. S., and Geer, B. (1957*b*). '"Participant Observation and Interviewing": A Rejoinder', *Human Organization*, 16: 39–40.

Becker, S., Bryman, A., and Sempik, J. (2006). *Defining 'Quality' in Social Policy Research*. Lavenham: Social Policy Association: ***www.social-policy.org.uk/downloads/defining%20quality%20in%20social%20policy%20research.pdf*** (accessed 15 December 2010).

Beech, N. (2000). 'Narrative Styles of Managers and Workers: A Tale of Star-Crossed Lovers', *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 36(2): 210–28.

Belk, R. W., Ger, G., and Askegaard, S. (1997). 'Consumer Desire in Three Cultures: Results from Projective Research', *Advances in Consumer Research*, 24: 24–8.

Bell, C. (1969). 'A Note on Participant Observation', *Sociology*, 3: 417–18.

Bell, C., and Newby, H. (1977). *Doing Sociological Research*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

Bell, C., and Roberts, H. (1984). *Social Researching: Politics, Problems, Practice*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bell, E. (1999). 'The Negotiation of a Working Role in Organizational Ethnography', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 2(1): 17–37.

Bell, E. (2001). 'The Social Time of Organizational Payment Systems', *Time & Society*, 10(1): 45–62.

Bell, E. (in press). 'Ways of Seeing Death: A Critical Semiotic Analysis of Organizational Memorialization', *Visual Studies*.

Bell, E. and Bergman, A. (2007). 'The Ethics of Management Research: An Exploratory Context Analysis', *British Journal of Management*, 18(1): 63–77.

Bell, E., and Wray Bliss, E. (2009). 'Research Ethics: Regulations and Responsibilities', in A. Bryman and D. Buchanan (eds), *Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods*. London: Sage, 78–92.

Bell, E., Taylor, S., and Thorpe, R. (2001). 'Investors in People and the Standardization of Professional Knowledge in Personnel Management', *Management Learning*, 32(2): 201–19.

Bell, E., Taylor, S., and Thorpe, R. (2002). 'Organizational Differentiation through Badging: Investors in People and the Value of the Sign', *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(8): 1071–85.

Berelson, B. (1952). *Content Analysis in Communication Research*. New York: Free Press.

Berg, P., and Frost, A. C. (2005). 'Dignity at Work for Low Wage, Low Skill Service Workers', *Industrial Relations*, 60(4): 657–82.

Berg, P. O., and Kreiner, K. (1990). 'Corporate Architecture: Turning Physical Settings into Symbolic Resources', in P. Gagliardi (ed.), *Symbols and Artifacts: Views of the Corporate Landscape*. Berlin: DeGruyter.

Bettis, R. (1991). 'Strategic management and the straightjacket: an editorial essay', *Organization Science*, 2(3): 315–19.

Bettman, J., and Weitz, B. (1983). 'Attributions in the Board Room: Causal Reasoning in Corporate Annual Reports', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 28: 165–83.

Beynon, H. (1975). *Working for Ford*, 2nd edn. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Beynon, H. (1988). 'Regulating Research: Politics and Decision Making in Industrial Organizations', in A. Bryman (ed.), *Doing Research in Organizations*. London: Routledge.

Bhaskar, R. (1975). *A Realist Theory of Science*. Leeds: Leeds Books.

Bhaskar, R. (1989). *Reclaiming Reality: A Critical Introduction to Contemporary Philosophy*. London: Verso.

Bhojraj, S., Lee, C. M. C., and Oler, D. K. (2003). 'What's My Line? A Comparison of Industry Classification Schemes for Capital Market Research', *Journal of Accounting Research*, 41(5): 745–74.

Billig, M. (1991). *Ideology and Opinions: Studies in Rhetorical Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Billig, M. (1992). *Talking of the Royal Family*. London: Routledge.

Bitektine, A. (2008). 'Prospective Case Study Design: Qualitative Method for Deductive Theory Testing', *Organizational Research Methods*, 11(1): 160–80.

Blackburn, R., and Stokes, D. (2000). 'Breaking down the Barriers: Using Focus Groups to Research Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises', *International Small Business Journal*, 19(1): 44–67.

Blauner, R. (1964). *Alienation and Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bloland, H. G. (2005). 'Whatever Happened to Postmodernism in Higher Education?', *Journal of Higher Education*, 76: 121–50.

Bloor, M. (2002). 'No Longer Dying for a Living: Collective Responses to Injury Risks in South Wales Mining Communities, 1900–47', *Sociology*, 36(1): 89–105.

Blumer, H. (1954). 'What is Wrong with Social Theory?', *American Sociological Review*, 19: 3–10.

Blumer, H. (1956). 'Sociological Analysis and the "Variable"', *American Sociological Review*, 21: 683–90.

Blumer, H. (1962). 'Society as Symbolic Interaction', in A. M. Rose (ed.), *Human Behavior and Social Processes*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Blyton, P., Bacon, N., and Morris, J. (1996). 'Working in Steel: Steelworkers' Attitudes to Change Forty Years On', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 27(2): 155–65.

Boden, D. (1994). *The Business of Talk: Organizations in Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bogdan, R., and Taylor, S. J. (1975). *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Phenomenological Approach to the Social Sciences*. New York: Wiley.

Boje, D. (1991). 'The Storytelling Organization: A Study of Performance in an Office Supply Firm', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36: 106–26.

Boje, D. (2001). *Narrative Methods for Organizational and Communication Research*. London: Sage.

Bolton, A., Pole, C., and Mizen, P. (2001). 'Picture This: Researching Child Workers', *Sociology*, 35(2): 501–18.

Bond, M., and Pyle, J. (1998). 'The Ecology of Diversity in Organizational Settings: Lessons from a Case Study', *Human Relations*, 51(5): 589–623.

Booth, C., and Rowlinson, M. (2006). 'Management and Organizational History: Prospects', *Management & Organizational History*, 1(1): 5–30.

Born, G. (2004). *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Bottomore, T. B., and Rubel, M. (1963). *Karl Marx: Selected Writings in Sociology and Social Philosophy*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Bourdieu, P. (1984). *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Bowen, D. D., and Hisrich, R. D. (1986). 'The Female Entrepreneur: A Career Development Perspective', *Academy of Management Review*, 11: 393–407.

Bowey, A., and Thorpe, R. (1986). *Payment Systems and Productivity*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Boyce, G., and Lepper, L. (2002). 'Assessing Information Quality Theories: The USSCo. Joint Venture with William Holyman and Sons and Huddart Parker Ltd, 1904–35', *Business History*, 44(4): 85–120.

Bradburn, N. A., and Sudman, S. (1979). *Improving Interview Method and Questionnaire Design*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brannick, T., and Coghlan, D. (2007). 'In Defense of Being "Native": The Case for Insider Academic Research', *Organizational Research Methods*, 10(1): 59–74.

Braverman, H. (1974). *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*. London: Monthly Review Press.

Brayfield, A., and Rothe, H. (1951). 'An Index of Job Satisfaction', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 35: 307–11.

Brengman, M., Geuens, M., Weijters, B., Smith, S. M., and Swinyard, W. R. (2005). 'Segmenting Internet Shoppers Based on their Web-Usage Related Lifestyle: A Cross-Cultural Validation', *Journal of Business Research*, 58: 79–88.

Bresnen, M., Goussevskaia, A., and Swan, J. (2004). 'Embedding New Management Knowledge in Project-based Organizations', *Organization Studies*, 25(9): 1535–55.

Brewis, J. (2005). 'Signing My Life Away? Researching Sex and Organization', *Organization*, 12(4): 439–510.

Brewster, C., and Hegewisch, A. (1994). *Policy and Practice in European Human Resource Management: The Price Waterhouse Cranfield Study*. London: Routledge.

Bridgman, P. W. (1927). *The Logic of Modern Physics*. New York: Macmillan.

Briggs, C. L. (1986). *Learning How to Ask: A Sociolinguistic Appraisal of the Role of the Interview in Social Science Research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Briner, R. B., Denyer, D., and Rousseau, D. (2009). 'Evidence-Based Management: Concept Cleanup Time?', *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(4): 5–18.

Broussine, M., and Vince, R. (1996). 'Working with Metaphor towards Organizational Change', in C. Oswick and D. Grant (eds), *Organization Development: Metaphorical Explanations*. London: Pitman Publishing.

Brown, A. D. (1998). 'Narrative, Politics and Legitimacy in an IT Implementation', *Journal of Management Studies*, 35: 35–58.

Brown, L. D., and Kaplan, R. E. (1981). 'Participative Research in a Factory', in P. Reason and J. Rowan (eds), *Human Inquiry*. London: Wiley.

Bruce, C. S. (1994). 'Research Students' Early Experiences of the Dissertation Literature Review', *Studies in Higher Education*, 19(2): 217–29.

Bryman, A. (1974). 'Sociology of Religion and Sociology of Elites', *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, 38: 109–21.

Bryman, A. (1988*a*). *Quantity and Quality in Social Research*. London: Routledge.

Bryman, A. (1988*b*). *Doing Research in Organizations*. London: Routledge.

Bryman, A. (1989*a*). *Research Methods and Organization Studies*. London: Routledge.

Bryman, A. (1989*b*). 'The Value of Re-Studies in Sociology: The Case of Clergy and Ministers, 1971 to 1985', *Sociology*, 23: 31–54.

Bryman, A. (1992). 'Quantitative and Qualitative Research: Further Reflections on their Integration', in J. Brannen (ed.), *Mixing Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Research*. Aldershot: Avebury.

Bryman, A. (1994). 'The Mead/Freeman Controversy: Some Implications for Qualitative Researchers', in R. G. Burgess (ed.), *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, vol. 4. Greenwich, CT.: JAI Press.

Bryman, A. (1995). *Disney and his Worlds*. London: Routledge.

Bryman, A. (1997). 'Animating the Pioneer versus Late Entrant Debate: An Historical Case Study', *Journal of Management Studies*, 34: 415–38.

Bryman, A. (1998). 'Quantitative and Qualitative Research Strategies in Knowing the Social World', in T. May and M. Williams (eds), *Knowing the Social World*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bryman, A. (1999). 'Global Disney', in P. Taylor and D. Slater (eds), *The American Century*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bryman, A. (2000). 'Telling Technological Tales', *Organization*, 7: 455–75.

Bryman, A. (2003). 'McDonald's as a Disneyized Institution: Global Implications', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47: 154–67.

Bryman, A. (2004*a*). *Social Research Methods*, rev. edn. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bryman, A. (2004*b*). *The Disneyization of Society* (London: Sage).

Bryman, A. (2006*a*). 'Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Research*, 6: 97–113.

Bryman, A. (2006*b*). 'Paradigm Peace and the Implications for Quality', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 9: 111–26.

Bryman, A. (2007*a*). 'Effective Leadership in Higher Education', *Studies in Higher Education*, 32: 693–710.

Bryman, A. (2007*b*) 'The Paradigm Wars?', in P. Allasutari, J. Brannen, and L. Bickman (eds), *Handbook of Social Research.* London: Sage.

Bryman, A. (2007*c*). 'The Research Question in Social Research: What is its Role?', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 9: 5–20.

Bryman, A. (2007*d*). 'Barriers to Integrating Quantitative and Qualitative Research', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1: 8–22.

Bryman, A. (2009). 'Mixed Methods in Organizational Research', in D. A. Buchanan and A. Bryman (eds), *SAGE Handbook of Organizational Research Methods*. London: Sage.

Bryman, A., and Burgess, R. G. (1994*a*). 'Developments in Qualitative Data Analysis: An Introduction', in A. Bryman and R. G. Burgess (eds), *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge.

Bryman, A., and Burgess, R. G. (1994*b*). 'Reflections on Qualitative Data Analysis', in A. Bryman and R. G. Burgess (eds), *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge.

Bryman, A., and Burgess, R. G. (1999). 'Introduction: Qualitative Research Methodology: A Review', in A. Bryman and R. G. Burgess (eds), *Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Bryman, A., and Cramer, D. (2004). *Quantitative Data Analysis with SPSS 12 and 13: A Guide for Social Scientists*. London: Routledge.

Bryman, A., and Cramer, D. (2008). *Quantitative Data Analysis with SPSS 14, 15 and 16: A Guide for Social Scientists*. London: Routledge.

Bryman, A., Becker, S., and Sempik, J. (2008). 'Quality Criteria for Quantitative, Qualitative and Mixed Methods Research: The View from Social Policy', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 11: 261–76.

Bryman, A., Gillingwater, D., and McGuinness, I. (1996). 'Industry Culture and Strategic Response: The Case of the British Bus Industry', *Studies in Cultures, Organizations and Societies*, 2: 191–208.

Bryman, A., Haslam, C., and Webb, A. (1994). 'Performance Appraisal in UK Universities: A Case of Procedural Compliance?', *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 19: 175–88.

Bryman, A., Stephens, M., and A Campo, C. (1996). 'The Importance of Context: Qualitative Research and the Study of Leadership', *Leadership Quarterly*, 7: 353–70.

Buchanan, D. A. (1998). 'Representing Process: The Contribution of a Re-engineering Frame', *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, 18(12): 1163–88.

Buchanan, D. A. (2001). 'The Role of Photography in Organization Research: A Reengineering Case Illustration', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 10: 151–64.

Buchanan, D., and Bryman, A. (2007). 'Contextualizing Methods Choice in Organizational Research', *Organizational Research Methods*, 10(3): 483–501.

Buchanan, D. A., Boddy, D., and McCalman, J. (1988). 'Getting In, Getting Out and Getting Back', in A. Bryman (ed.), *Doing Research in Organizations*. London: Routledge.

Bulmer, M. (1979). 'Concepts in the Analysis of Qualitative Data', *Sociological Review*, 27: 651–77.

Bulmer, M. (1980). 'Why Don't Sociologists Make More Use of Official Statistics?', *Sociology*, 14: 505–23.

Bulmer, M. (1982). 'The Merits and Demerits of Covert Participant Observation', in M. Bulmer (ed.), *Social Research Ethics.* London: Macmillan.

Bulmer, M. (1984). 'Facts, Concepts, Theories and Problems', in M. Bulmer (ed.), *Social Research Methods.* London: Macmillan.

Bunce, D., and West, M. (1996). 'Stress Management and Innovation Interventions at Work', *Human Relations*, 49(2): 209–32.

Burawoy, M. (1979). *Manufacturing Consent*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Burawoy, M. (2003). 'Revisits: An Outline of a Theory of Reflexive Ethnography', *American Sociological Review*, 68: 645–79.

Burawoy, M., Blum, J. A., George, S., Gille, Z., Gowan, T., Haney, L., Klawiter, M., Lopez, S. H., Riain, S. O., and Thayer, M. (2000). *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections and Imaginations in a Postmodern World*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Burger, J. M. (2009). 'Replicating Milgram: Would People Still Obey Today', *American Psychologist*, 64(1): 1–11.

Burgess, R. G. (1984). *In the Field.* London: Allen & Unwin.

Burke, R. R. (1996). 'Virtual Shopping: Breakthrough in Marketing Research', *Harvard Business Review*, 74(2): 120–31.

Burrell, G. (1997). *Pandemonium: Towards a Retro-Organization Theory.* London: Sage.

Burrell, G., and Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis*. Aldershot: Gower.

*Business Week* (1973). 'The Public Clams up on Survey Takers', 15 Sept. 216–20.

Buston, K. (1997). 'NUD*IST in Action: Its Use and its Usefulness in a Study of Chronic Illness in Young People', *Sociological Research Online*, 2: ***www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/3/6.html***

Butcher, B. (1994). 'Sampling Methods: An Overview and Review', *Survey Methods Centre Newsletter*, 15: 4–8.

Buttner, E. H. (2001). 'Examining Female Entrepreneurs' Management Style: An Application of a Relational Frame', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 29: 253–69.

Cable, D., and Graham, M. (2000). 'The Determinants of Job Seekers' Reputation Perceptions', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 21: 929–47.

Calder, B. J. (1977). 'Focus Groups and the Nature of Qualitative Marketing Research', *Journal of Marketing Research*, 14: 353–64.

Cameron, J. (2001). 'Negative Effects of Reward on Intrinsic Motivation: A Limited Phenomenon: Comment on Deci, Koestner, and Ryan (2001)', *Review of Educational Research*, 71(1): 29–42.

Cameron, J., and Pierce, W. (1994). 'Reinforcement, Reward and Intrinsic Motivation: A Meta-Analysis', *Review of Educational Research*, 64: 363–423.

Campbell, D. T. (1957). 'Factors Relevant to the Validity of Experiments in Social Settings', *Psychological Bulletin*, 54: 297–312.

Caplan, R., Cobb, S., French, J., Harrison, R., and Pinneau, S. (1975). *Job Demands and Worker Health*. Washington: US Department of Health, Education and Welfare.

Carini, R. M., Hayek, J. C., Kuh, G. D., Kennedy, J. M., and Ouimet, J. D. (2003). 'College Student Responses to Web and Paper Surveys: Does Mode Matter?' *Research in Higher Education*, 44(1): 1–19.

Casey, C. (1995). *Work, Self and Society: After Industrialism.* London: Routledge.

Catterall, M., and Maclaran, P. (1997). 'Focus Group Data and Qualitative Analysis Programs: Coding the Moving Picture as well as Snapshots', *Sociological Research Online*, 2: ***www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/1/6.html***

Cavendish, R. (1982). *Women on the Line*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Chamberlayne, P., Bornat, J., and Wengraf, T. (2000). 'Introduction: The Biographical Turn', in P. Chamberlayne, J. Bornat, and T. Wengraf (eds), *The Turn to Biographical Methods in Social Science: Comparative Issues and Examples*. London: Routledge.

Charmaz, K. (1983). 'The Grounded Theory Method: An Explication and Interpretation', in R. M. Emerson (ed.), *Contemporary Field Research: A Collection of Readings*. Boston: Little, Brown.

Charmaz, K. (2000). 'Grounded Theory: Objectivist and Constructivist Methods', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Chen, C. C., and Meindl, J. R. (1991). 'The Construction of Leadership Images in the Popular Press: The Case of Donald Burr and People Express', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 36: 521–51.

Cicourel, A. V. (1964). *Method and Measurement in Sociology.* New York: Free Press.

Cicourel, A. V. (1968). *The Social Organization of Juvenile Justice.* New York: Wiley.

Cicourel, A. V. (1982). 'Interviews, Surveys, and the Problem of Ecological Validity', *American Sociologist*, 17: 11–20.

Clapper, D. L., and Massey, A. P. (1996). 'Electronic Focus Groups: A Framework for Exploration', *Information and Management*, 30: 43–50.

Clarke, I., and Mackaness, W. (2001). 'Management Intuition: An Interpretative Account of Structure and Content Using Cognitive Maps', *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(2): 147–72.

Clegg, S. (2002). ' "Lives in the Balance": A Comment on Hinings and Greenwood's "Disconnects and Consequences in Organization Theory?"', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47: 428–41.

Clifford, J. (1983). 'On Ethnographic Authority', *Representations*, 1: 118–46.

Clifford, J., and Marcus, G. E. (1986). *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Cobanoglu, C., Ward, B., and Moreo, P. J. (2001). 'A Comparison of Mail, Fax and Web-Based Survey Methods', *International Journal of Market Research*, 43: 441–52.

Cockburn, C., and Ormrod, S. (1993). *Gender and Technology in the Making.* London: Sage.

Coffey, A. (1999). *The Ethnographic Self: Fieldwork and the Representation of Reality.* London: Sage.

Coffey, A., and Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making Sense of Qualitative Data: Complementary Research Strategies*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Coffey, A., Holbrook, B., and Atkinson, P. (1996). 'Qualitative Data Analysis: Technologies and Representations', *Sociological Research Online*, 2: ***www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/1/1/4.html***

Coghlan, D. (2001). 'Insider Action Research Projects: Implications for Practising Managers', *Management Learning*, 32(1): 49–60.

Coleman, C., and Moynihan, J. (1996). *Understanding Crime Data: Haunted by the Dark Figure*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Coleman, J. S. (1958). 'Relational Analysis: The Study of Social Organization with Survey Methods', *Human Organization*, 16: 28–36.

Collins, G., and Wickham, J. (2004). 'Inclusion or Exploitation: Irish Women Enter the Labour Force', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 11(1): 26–46.

Collins, M. (1997). 'Interviewer Variability: A Review of the Problem', *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 39: 67–84.

Collins, R. (1994). *Four Sociological Traditions*, rev. edn. New York: Oxford University Press.

Collinson, D. L. (1988). 'Engineering Humour: Masculinity, Joking and Conflict in Shop Floor Relations', *Organisation Studies*, 9(2): 181–99.

Collinson, D. L. (1992*a*). *Managing the Shopfloor: Subjectivity, Masculinity and Workplace Culture*. Berlin: DeGruyter.

Collinson, D. L. (1992*b*). 'Researching Recruitment: Qualitative Methods and Sex Discrimination', in R. Burgess (ed.), *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, vol. 3. London: JAI Press.

Collinson, D. L., and Hearn, J. (1996). *Men as Managers, Managers as Men*. London: Sage.

Combe, I. A., and Crowther, D. E. (2000). 'The Semiology of an Advertising Campaign: Brand Repositioning', University of North London, Social Marketing Working Paper Series, 1–32.

Conger, J. A., and Kanungo, R. N. (1998). *Charismatic Leadership in Organizations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Converse, J. M., and Presser, S. (1986). *Survey Questions: Handcrafting the Standardized Questionnaire.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Conway, N., and Briner, R. (2002). 'A Daily Diary Study of Affective Responses to Psychological Contract Breach and Exceeded Promises', *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 23: 287–302.

Cook, T. D., and Campbell, D. T. (1979). *Quasi-Experimentation: Design and Analysis for Field Settings.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Cooke, B. (2003). 'The Denial of Slavery in Management Studies', *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(8): 1895–918.

Cooke, B. (2006). The Cold War Origin of Action Research as Managerialist Cooptation', *Human Relations* 59(5): 665–93.

Corti, L. (1993). 'Using Diaries in Social Research', *Social Research Update*, 2.

Corti, L., Foster, J., and Thompson, P. (1995). 'Archiving Qualitative Research Data', *Social Research Update*, 10.

Cotterill, P. (1992). 'Interviewing Women: Issues of Friendship, Vulnerability, and Power', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 15(5–6): 593–606.

Couper, M. P. (2000). 'Web Surveys: A Review of Issues and Approaches', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 64: 464–94.

Couper, M. P. (2004). 'Internet Surveys', in M. S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman, and T. F. Liao (eds), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods.* 3 vols. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Couper, M. P. (2008). *Designing Effective Web Surveys*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Couper, M. P., and Hansen, S. E. (2002). 'Computer-Assisted Interviewing', in J. F. Gubrium and J. A. Holstein (eds), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Couper, M. P., Traugott, M. W., and Lamias, M. J. (2001). 'Web Survey Design and Administration', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 65: 230–53.

Coupland, C. (2005). 'Corporate Social Responsibility on the Web', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 62: 355–66.

Coutrot, T. (1998). 'How Do Institutional Frameworks Affect Industrial Relations Outcomes? A Micro-Statistical Comparison of France and Britain', *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 4(2): 177–205.

Cowley, J. C. P. (2000). 'Strategic Qualitative Focus Group Research: Define and Articulate our Skills or We Will Be Replaced by Others', *International Journal of Market Research*, 42(1): 17–38.

Coyle, J. R., and Thorson, E. (2001). 'The Effects of Progressive Levels of Interactivity and Vividness in Web Marketing Sites', *Journal of Advertising*, 30(3): 65–77.

Coyle-Shapiro, J., and Kessler, I. (2000). 'Consequences of the Psychological Contract for the Employment Relationship: A Large Scale Survey', *Journal of Management Studies*, 37(7): 903–30.

Cramer, D. (1998). *Fundamental Statistics for Social Research*. London: Routledge.

Crang, P. (1994). 'It's Showtime: On the Workplace Geographies of Display in a Restaurant in South East England', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 12: 675–704.

Crawford, S. D., Couper, M. P., and Lamias, M. J. (2001). 'Web Surveys: Perception of Burden', *Social Science Computer Review*, 19: 146–62.

Creswell, J., and Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Conducting and Designing Mixed Methods Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cresswell, J., and Tashakkori, A. (2007). 'Developing Publishable Mixed Methods Manuscripts', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Croll, P. (1986). *Systematic Classroom Observation*. London: Falmer Press.

Cryer, P. (1996). *The Research Student's Guide to Success.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Cullen, D. (1997). 'Maslow, Monkeys and Motivation Theory', *Organization*, 4(3): 355–73.

Cully, M., Woodland, S., O'Reilly, A., and Dix, G. (1999). *Britain at Work: As Depicted by the 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey*. London: Routledge.

Cummings, L. L., and Frost, P. J. (1995). *Publishing in the Organizational Sciences*. London: Sage.

Cunha, M. P., and Cunha, R. C. (2004). 'The Dialectics of Human Resource Management in Cuba', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15(7): 1280–92.

Cunha, R. C., and Cooper, C. L. (2002). 'Does Privatization Affect Corporate Culture and Employee Wellbeing?', *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 17(1): 21–49.

Curasi, C. F. (2001). 'A Critical Exploration of Face-to-Face Interviewing vs Computer-Mediated Interviewing', *International Journal of Market Research*, 43: 361–75.

Curran, J., and Blackburn, R. (1994). *Small Firms and Local Economic Networks: The Death of the Local Economy?* London: Paul Chapman.

Czaja, R., and Blair, J. (1996). *Designing Surveys: A Guide to Decisions and Procedures*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Czarniawska, B. (1998). *A Narrative Approach to Organization Studies.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Czarniawska, B. (1999). *Writing Management: Organization Theory as a Literary Genre*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Daft, R. L. (1995). 'Why I Recommended that your Manuscript be Rejected and What You can Do about It', in L. L. Cummings and P. J. Frost (eds), *Publishing in the Organizational Sciences*. London: Sage.

Dale, A., Arber, S., and Proctor, M. (1988). *Doing Secondary Analysis*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Dalton, M. (1959). *Men who Manage: Fusion of Feeling and Theory in Administration.* New York: Wiley.

Dalton, M. (1964). 'Perceptions and Methods in Men who Manage', in P. Hammond (ed.), *Sociologists at Work*. New York: Basic Books.

Davies, B., Browne, J., Gannon, S., Honan, E., and Somerville, M. (2005). 'Embodied Women at Work in Neoliberal Times and Places', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 12(4): 343–62.

Davies, C. A. (1999). *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*. London: Routledge.

Davies, J. (2001). 'International Comparisons of Labour Disputes in 1999', *Labour Market Trends*, Apr.: 195–201.

Davis, J. A. (1964). 'Great Books and Small Groups: An Informal History of a National Survey', in P. Hammond (ed.), *Sociologists at Work.* New York: Basic Books.

Davison, J. (2009). 'Icon, Iconography, Iconology: Visual Branding, Banking and the Case of the Bowler Hat', *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, 22(6): 883–906.

Deacon, D., Bryman, A., and Fenton, N. (1998). 'Collision or Collusion? A Discussion of the Unplanned Triangulation of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 1: 47–63.

Deci, E. L., Koestner, R., and Ryan, R. (2001). 'Extrinsic Rewards and Intrinsic Motivation in Education: Reconsidered Once Again', *Review of Educational Research*, 71(1): 1–27.

Deery, S., Iverson, R., and Walsch, J. (2002). 'Work Relationships in Telephone Call Centres: Understanding Emotional Exhaustion and Employee Withdrawal', *Journal of Management Studies*, 39(4): 471–96.

Delamont, S., and Atkinson, P. (2004). 'Qualitative Research and the Postmodern Turn', in C. Hardy and A. Bryman (eds), *Handbook of Data Analysis.* London: Sage.

Delamont, S., and Hamilton, D. (1984). 'Revisiting Classroom Research: A Continuing Cautionary Tale', in S. Delamont (ed.), *Readings on Interaction in the Classroom*. London: Methuen.

Delbridge, R. (1998). *Life on the Line: The Workplace Experience of Lean Production and the 'Japanese' Model*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

DeLorme, D. E., Zinkhan, G. M., and French, W. (2001). 'Ethics and the Internet: Issues Associated with Qualitative Research', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 33: 271–86.

Denscombe, M. (2006). 'Web-Based Questionnaires and the Mode Effect: An Evaluation Based on Completion Rates and Data Contents of Near-Identical Questionnaires Delivered in Different Modes', *Social Science Computer Review*, 24: 246–54.

Denyer, D., and Tranfield, D. (2009). 'Producing a Systematic Review', in D. Buchanan and A. Bryman (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods.* London: Sage.

Denzin, N. K. (1968). 'On the Ethics of Disguised Observation', *Social Problems*, 15: 502–4.

Denzin, N. K. (1970). *The Research Act in Sociology*. Chicago: Aldine.

Denzin, N. K. (1994). 'Evaluating Qualitative Research in the Poststructural Moment: The Lessons James Joyce Teaches us', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 7: 295–308.

Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y. S. (2005*a*). *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N. K., and Lincoln, Y. S. (2005*b*). 'Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Diener, E., and Crandall, R. (1978). *Ethics in Social and Behavioral Research.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Dillman, D. A. (1978). *Mail and Telephone Surveys: The Total Design Method*. New York: Wiley.

Dillman, D. A. (1983). 'Mail and Other Self-Administered Questionnaires', in P. H. Rossi, J. D. Wright, and A. B. Anderson (eds), *Handbook of Survey Research*. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Dingwall, R. (1980). 'Ethics and Ethnography', *Sociological Review*, 28: 871–91.

Ditton, J. (1977). *Part-Time Crime: An Ethnography of Fiddling and Pilferage.* London: Macmillan.

Doloriert, C., and Sambrook, S. (2009). 'Ethical Confessions of the "I" of Autoethnography: The Student's Dilemma', *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, 4(1): 27–45.

Dommeyer, C. J., and Moriarty, E. (2000). 'Comparison of Two Forms of an E-Mail Survey: Embedded vs Attached', *International Journal of Market Research*, 42: 39–50.

Dorsey, E. R., Steeves, H. L., and Porras, L. E. (2004). 'Advertising Ecotourism on the Internet: Commodifying Environment and Culture', *New Media and Society*, 6: 753–79.

Dougherty, D., and Kunda, G. (1990). 'Photograph Analysis: A Method to Capture Organizational Belief Systems', in P. Gagliardi (ed.), *Symbols and Artefacts: Views of the Corporate Landscape.* Berlin: DeGruyter.

Douglas, J. D. (1976). *Investigative Social Research: Individual and Team Field Research.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Duriau, V. J., Reger, R. K., and Pfarrer, M. D. (2007). 'A Content Analysis of the Content Analysis Literature in Organization Studies: Research Themes, Data Sources, and Methodological Refinements', *Organizational Research Methods*, 10(5): 5–34.

Durkheim, E. (1938). *The Rules of Sociological Method*, trans. S. A. Solavay and J. H. Mueller. New York: Free Press.

Dyer, W. G., and Wilkins, A. L. (1991). 'Better Stories, not Better Constructs, to Generate Better Theory: A Rejoinder to Eisenhardt', *Academy of Management Review*, 16: 613–19.

Easterby-Smith, M., Golden-Biddle, K., and Locke, K. (2008). 'Working with Pluralism: Determining Quality in Qualitative Research', *Organizational Research Methods*, 11(3): 419–29.

Easton, G. (2002). 'Marketing: A Critical Realist Approach', *Journal of Business Research*, 55(2): 103–9.

Eden, C. (1988). 'Cognitive Mapping: A Review', *European Journal of Operational Research*, 36: 1–13.

Eden, C. (1992). 'On the Status of Cognitive Maps', *Journal of Management Studies*, 29(3): 261–5.

Eden, C., and Huxham, C. (1996). 'Action Research for Management Research', *British Journal of Management*, 7(1): 75–86.

Eden, C., Ackermann, F., and Cropper, S. (1992). 'The Analysis of Cause Maps', *Journal of Management Studies*, 29(3): 309–24.

Edwards, P. (1995). 'Human Resource Management, Union Voice and the Use of Discipline: An Analysis of WIRS 3', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 26(3): 204–20.

Edwards, P., Collinson, M., and Rees, C. (1998). 'The Determinants of Employee Responses to Total Quality Management: Six Case Studies', *Organization Studies*, 19(3): 449–75.

Edwards, R. (1979). *Contested Terrain*. New York: Basic Books.

Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). 'Building Theories from Case Study Research', *Academy of Management Review*, 14: 532–50.

Eisenhardt, K. M., and Graebner, M. E. (2007). 'Theory Building from Cases: Opportunities and Challenges', *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(1): 25–32.

Elliott, H. (1997). 'The Use of Diaries in Sociological Research on Health Experience', *Sociological Research Online*, 2: ***www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/2/7.html***

Ellis, C. (2004). *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Teaching and Doing Autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira.

Erikson, K. T. (1967). 'A Comment on Disguised Observation in Sociology', *Social Problems*, 14: 366–73.

Evans, J., and Benefield, P. (2001). 'Systematic Reviews of Educational Research: Does the Medical Model Fit?', *British Educational Research Journal*, 27(5): 527–41.

Evans, M., Wedande, G., Ralston, L., and van't Hul, S. (2001). 'Consumer Interaction in the Virtual Era: Some Qualitative Insights', *Qualitative Market Research*, 4: 150–9.

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. London: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. London: Routledge.

Fairclough, N. (2005). 'Discourse Analysis in Organization Studies: The Case for Critical Realism', *Organization Studies*, 26(6): 915–39.

Faraday, A., and Plummer, K. (1979). 'Doing Life Histories', *Sociological Review*, 27: 773–98.

Faules, D. (1982). 'The Use of Multi-Methods in the Organizational Setting', *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 46: 150–61.

Faulkner, X., and Culwin, F. (2005). 'When Fingers Do the Talking: A Study of Text Messaging', *Interacting with Computers*, 17: 167–85.

Felstead, A., Gallie, D., and Green, F. (2002). *Work Skills in Britain*. Nottingham: DfES Publications.

Felstead, A., Jewson, N., Phizacklea, A., and Walters, S. (2001). 'Working at Home: Statistical Evidence for Seven Key Hypotheses', *Work, Employment and Society*, 15(2): 215–31.

Fenton, N., Bryman, A., and Deacon, D. (1998). *Mediating Social Science.* London: Sage.

Fern, E. F. (2001). *Advanced Focus Group Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fernández, R., Taylor, S., and Bell, E. (2005). *How Long until We Get There? A Survival Analysis of the Investors in People Initiative 1991–2001*. Oxford/Warwick: SKOPE Working Paper, 56.

Fey, C. F., and Denison, D. R. (2003). 'Organizational Culture and Effectiveness: Can American Theory Be Applied in Russia?', *Organization Science*, 14(6): 686–706.

Fiedler, E. E. (1967). *A Theory of Leadership Effectiveness.* New York: McGraw Hill.

Fielding, N., and Lee, R. M. (1998). *Computer Analysis and Qualitative Research.* London: Sage.

Filmer, P., Phillipson, M., Silverman, D., and Walsh, D. (1972). *New Directions in Sociological Theory.* London: Collier-Macmillan.

Finch, J. (1984). '"It's great to have someone to talk to": The Ethics and Politics of Interviewing Women', in C. Bell and H. Roberts (eds), *Social Researching: Politics, Problems, Practice.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Finch, J. (1987). 'The Vignette Technique in Survey Research', *Sociology*, 21: 105–14.

Fine, G. A. (1996). 'Justifying Work: Occupational Rhetorics as Resources in Kitchen Restaurants', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41: 90–115.

Flanagan, J. C. (1954). 'The Critical Incident Technique', *Psychological Bulletin*, 1: 327–58.

Fleetwood, S. (2005). 'Ontology in Organization and Management Studies: A Critical Realist Perspective', *Organization*, 12(2): 197–222.

Fleming, C., and Bowden, M. (2009). 'Web-Based Surveys as an Alternative to Traditional Mail Methods', *Journal of Environmental Management*, 90: 284–92.

Fletcher, D. (2002). '"In the Company of Men": A Reflexive Tale of Cultural Organizing in a Small Organization', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 9(4): 398–419.

Fletcher, J. (1966). *Situation Ethics.* London: SCM Press.

Flint, A., Clegg, S., and Macdonald, R. (2006). 'Exploring Staff Perceptions of Student Plagiarism', *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 30: 145–56.

Foddy, W. (1993). *Constructing Questions for Interviews and Questionnaires: Theory and Practice in Social Research.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Forster, N. (1994). 'The Analysis of Company Documentation', in C. Cassell and G. Symon (eds), *Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*. London: Sage.

Foucault, M. (1974). *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences.* New York: Vintage.

Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* New York: Random House.

Foucault, M. (1980). *The History of Sexuality*, i. *An Introduction.* New York: Random House.

Fowler, F. J. (1993). *Survey Research Methods*, 2nd edn. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Fowler, F. J., and Mangione, T. W. (1990). *Standardized Survey Interviewing: Minimizing Interviewer-Related Error.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Franzosi, R. (1995). 'Computer-Assisted Content-Analysis of Newspapers: Can We Make an Expensive Research Tool More Efficient?', *Quantity and Quality*, 29(2): 157–72.

Frayne, C. A., and Geringer, J. M. (2000). 'Self-Management Training for Improving Job Performance: A Field Experiment Involving Salespeople', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 85(3): 361–72.

Freeman, C. (2000). *High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work and Pink-Collar Identities in the Caribbean.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Frege, C. M. (2005). 'Varieties of Industrial Relations Research: Take-over, Convergence or Divergence?', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 43(2): 179–207.

Frey, J. H. (2004). 'Telephone Surveys', in M. S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman, and T. F. Liao (eds), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods.* 3 vols. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Frey, J. H., and Oishi, S. M. (1995). *How to Conduct Interviews by Telephone and in Person*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fricker, S., and Schonlau, M. (2002). 'Advantages and Disadvantages of Internet Research Surveys: Evidence from the Literature', *Field Methods*, 14: 347–67.

Fricker, S., Galesic, M., Tourangeau, R., and Yan, T. (2005). 'An Experimental Comparison of Web and Telephone Surveys', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 69: 370–92.

Fritzsche, D. J. (1988). 'An Examination of Marketing Ethics: Role of the Decision Maker, Consequences of the Decision, Management Position, and Sex of the Respondent', *Journal of Macromarketing*, 8: 29–39.

Gabriel, Y. (1998). 'The Use of Stories', in G. Symon and C. Cassell (eds), *Qualitative Methods and Analysis in Organizational Research.* London: Sage.

Gagliardi, P. (1990). *Symbols and Artifacts: Views of the Corporate Landscape.* Berlin: DeGruyter.

Gallup, G. (1947). 'The Quintamensional Plan of Question Design', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 11: 385–93.

Gallupe, R. B., Dennis, A. R., Cooper, W. H., Valacich, J. S., Bastianutti, L. M., and Nunamaker, J. F. (1992). 'Electronic Brainstorming and Group Size', *Academy of Management Journal*, 35: 350–69.

Galton, M., Simon, B., and Croll, P. (1980). *Inside the Primary Classroom*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Gans, H. J. (1962). *The Urban Villagers*. New York: Free Press.

Gans, H. J. (1968). 'The Participant-Observer as Human Being: Observations on the Personal Aspects of Field Work', in H. S. Becker (ed.), *Institutions and the Person: Papers Presented to Everett C. Hughes.* Chicago: Aldine.

Garcia, A. C., Standlee, A. I., Bechkoff, J., and Cui, Y. (2009). 'Ethnographic Approaches to the Internet and Computer-Mediated Communication', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38(1): 52–84.

Gardner, W. L., Lowe, K. B., Moss, T. W., Mahoney, K. T., and Cogliser, C. C. (2010). 'Scholarly Leadership of the Study of Leadership: A Review of *The Leadership Quarterly*'s Second Decade, 2000–2009', *The Leadership Quarterly* 21: 922–58.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Geertz, C. (1973*a*). 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in C. Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gephart, R. P. (1988). *Ethnostatistics: Qualitative Foundations for Quantitative Research.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Gephart, R. P. (1993). 'The Textual Approach: Risk and Blame in Disaster Sensemaking', *Academy of Management Journal*, 36(6): 1465–514.

Gersick, C. J. G. (1994). 'Pacing Strategic Change: The Case of a New Venture', *Academy of Management Journal*, 37(1): 9–45.

Gevorgyan, G., and Manucharova, N. (2009). 'Does Culturally Adapted Online Communication Work? A Study of American and Chinese Internet Users' Attitudes and Preferences toward Culturally Customized Web Elements', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 14: 393–413.

Gherardi, S., and Turner, B. (1987). 'Real Men Don't Collect Soft Data', *Quaderno 13.* Department of Social Policy, University of Trento.

Ghobadian, A., and Gallear, D. (1997). 'TQM and Organization Size', *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, 17(2): 121–63.

Gibbons, M., Limoges, C., Nowotny, H., Schwartzman, S., Scott, P., and Trow, M. (1994). *The New Production of Knowledge.* London: Sage.

Gibson, D. R. (2005). 'Taking Turns and Talking Ties: Networks and Conversational Interaction', *American Journal of Sociology*, 110(6): 1561–97.

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society.* Cambridge: Polity.

Gilbert, G. N. (1977). 'Referencing as Persuasion', *Social Studies of Science*, 7: 113–22.

Gilbert, G. N., and Mulkay, M. (1984). *Opening Pandora's Box: A Sociological Analysis of Scientists' Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gill, R. (1996). 'Discourse Analysis: Practical Implementation', in J. T. E. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods for Psychology and the Social Sciences*. Leicester: BPS Books.

Gill, R. (2000). 'Discourse Analysis', in M. W. Bauer and G. Gaskell (eds), *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound.* London: Sage.

Gioia, D., Thomas, J., Clark, S., and Chittipeddi, K. (1994). 'Symbolism and Strategic Change in Academia: The Dynamics of Sensemaking and Influence', *Organization Science*, 5(3): 363–83.

Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.

Glaser, B. G., and Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Glock, C. Y. (1988). 'Reflections on Doing Survey Research', in H. J. O'Gorman (ed.), *Surveying Social Life*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Glucksmann, M. (1994). 'The Work of Knowledge and the Knowledge of Women's Work', in M. Maynard and J. Purvis (eds), *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Godard, J. (1994). 'Beyond Empiricism: Towards a Reconstruction of IR Theory and Research', *Advances in Industrial and Labour Relations*, 6: 1–35.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.

Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Gold, R. L. (1958). 'Roles in Sociological Fieldwork', *Social Forces*, 36: 217–23.

Golden-Biddle, K., and Locke, K. D. (1993). 'Appealing Work: An Investigation of how Ethnographic Texts Convince', *Organization Science*, 4: 595–616.

Golden-Biddle, K., and Locke, K. D. (1997). *Composing Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Goldthorpe, J. H., Lockwood, D., Bechhofer, F., and Platt, J. (1968). *The Affluent Worker: Industrial Attitudes and Behaviour*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goodall, H. L., Jnr (1994). *Casing a Promised Land: The Autobiography of an Organizational Detective as Cultural Ethnographer*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Goodall, H. L. (2000). *Writing the New Ethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Goode, E. (1996). 'The Ethics of Deception in Social Research: A Case Study', *Qualitative Sociology*, 19: 11–33.

Goode, W. J., and Hatt, P. K. (1952). *Methods of Social Research*. New York: McGraw Hill.

Gorard, S. (2002). 'Ethics and Equity: Pursuing the Perspective of Non-Participants', *Social Research Update*, 39.

Gottdiener, M. (1982). 'Disneyland: A Utopian Urban Space', *Urban Life*, 11: 139–62.

Goulding, C. (2009). 'Grounded Theory Perspectives in Organizational Research', in D. Buchanan and A. Bryman (eds), *Handbook of Organizational Research Methods*. London: Sage.

Grant, A. M., and Wall, T. D. (2009). 'The Neglected Science and Art of Quasi-Experimentation: Why-to, When-to, and How-to Advice for Organizational Researchers', *Organizational Research Methods*, 12(4): 653–86.

Grant, D., Keenoy, T., and Oswick, C. (1998). *Discourse and Organization*. London: Sage.

Grant, D., Hardy, C., Oswick, C., and Putnam, L. L. (2004) (eds). *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*. London: Sage.

Greatbatch, D., and Clark, T. (2003). 'Displaying Group Cohesiveness: Humour and Laughter in the Public Lectures of Management Gurus', *Human Relations*, 56(12): 1515–44.

Greene, J. C. (1994). 'Qualitative Program Evaluation: Practice and Promise', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Greene, J. C. (2000). 'Understanding Social Programs through Evaluation', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Greenwood, D., Whyte, W., and Harkavy, I. (1993). 'Participatory Action Research as a Process and as a Goal', *Human Relations*, 46(2): 175–91.

Greising, D. (1998). *I'd Like the World to Buy a Coke. The Life and Leadership of Robert Goizueta*. New York: Wiley.

Grele, R. J. (1998). 'Movement without Aim: Methodological and Theoretical Problems in Oral History', in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *The History Reader*. London: Routledge.

Grey, C. (1996). 'Towards a Critique of Managerialism: The Construction of Simone Weil', *Journal of Management Studies*, 33(5): 591–611.

Grey, C. (2005). *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Studying Organizations*. London: Sage.

Grey, C., and Sinclair, A. (2006). 'Writing Differently', *Organization*, 13(3): 443–53.

Grint, K. (2000). *The Arts of Leadership*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Grint, K., and Woolgar, S. (1997). *The Machine at Work: Technology, Work and Organization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Grinyer, A. (2002). 'The Anonymity of Research Participants: Assumptions, Ethics and Practicalities', *Social Research Update*, 36; ***sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU36.html***.

Grinyer, P., and Yasai-Ardekani, M. (1980). 'Dimensions of Organizational Structure: A Critical Replication', *Academy of Management Journal*, 23: 405–21.

Guba, E. G. (1985). 'The Context of Emergent Paradigm Research', in Y. S. Lincoln (ed.), *Organization Theory and Inquiry: The Paradigm Revolution*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Guba, E. G., and Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). 'Competing Paradigms in Qualitative Research', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gubrium, J. F., and Holstein, J. A. (1997). *The New Language of Qualitative Method*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Guest, D. E., and Dewe, P. (1991). 'Company or Trade Union? Which Wins Worker's Allegiance? A Study of Commitment in the UK Electronics Industry', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 29(1): 73–96.

Gully, S., Incalcaterra, K., Joshi, A., and Beaubien, J. (2002). 'A Meta-Analysis of Team-Efficacy, Potency, and Performance: Interdependence and Level of Analysis as Moderators of Observed Relationships', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(5): 819–32.

Gummesson, E. (2000). *Qualitative Methods in Management Research*, 2nd edn. London: Sage.

Gusfield, J. (1976). 'The Literary Rhetoric of Science: Comedy and Pathos in Drinking Driving Research', *American Sociological Review*, 41: 16–34.

Haber, S., and Reichel, A. (2005). 'Identifying Performance Measures of Small Ventures: The Case of the Tourism Industry', *Journal of Small Business Management*, 43(3): 257–86.

Hackley, C. (2003). '"We Are All Customers Now": Rhetorical Strategy and Ideological Control in Marketing Management Texts', *Journal of Management Studies*, 40: 1325–52.

Hackman, J., and Oldham, G. (1976). 'Motivation through the Design of Work: Test of a Theory', *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance*, 16(2): 250–79.

Hackman, J., and Oldham, G. (1980). *Work Redesign.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Halfpenny, P. (1979). 'The Analysis of Qualitative Data', *Sociological Review*, 27: 799–825.

Hall, E. (1993). 'Smiling, Deferring and Flirting: Doing Gender by Giving "Good Service"', *Work and Occupations*, 20(4): 452–71.

Hall, R., Workman, J., and Marchioro, C. (1998). 'Sex, Task, and Behavioral Flexibility Effects on Leadership Perceptions', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 74(1): 1–32.

Hammersley, M. (1989). *The Dilemma of Qualitative Method: Herbert Blumer and the Chicago Tradition*. London: Routledge.

Hammersley, M. (1992*a*). 'By what Criteria should Ethnographic Research be Judged?', in M. Hammersley, *What's Wrong with Ethnography*? London: Routledge.

Hammersley, M. (1992*b*). 'Deconstructing the Qualitative–Quantitative Divide', in M. Hammersley (ed.), *What's Wrong with Ethnography*? London: Routledge.

Hammersley, M. (1996). 'The Relationship between Qualitative and Quantitative Research: Paradigm Loyalty versus Methodological Eclecticism', in J. T. E. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Research Methods for Psychology and the Social Sciences.* Leicester: BPS Books.

Hammersley, M. (1997). 'Qualitative Data Archiving: Some Reflections on its Prospects and Problems', *Sociology*, 31: 131–42.

Hammersley, M. (2001). 'On "Systematic" Reviews of Research Literatures: A "Narrative" Response to Evans & Benefield', *British Educational Research Journal*, 27(5): 543–54.

Hammersley, M., and Atkinson, P. (1995). *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*, 2nd edn. London: Routledge.

Hammersley, M., and Gomm, R. (2000). 'Bias in Social Research', in M. Hammersley (ed.), *Taking Sides in Social Research: Essays in Partisanship and Bias.* London: Routledge.

Hammond, P. (1964). *Sociologists at Work*. New York: Basic Books.

Haney, C., Banks, C., and Zimbardo, P. (1973). 'Interpersonal Dynamics in a Simulated Prison', *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*, 1: 69–97.

Hanson, D., and Grimmer, M. (2005). 'The Mix of Qualitative and Quantitative Research in Major Marketing Journals', *European Journal of Marketing*, 41(1/2): 58–70.

Hantrais, L. (1996). 'Comparative Research Methods', *Social Research Update*, 13.

Hardy, C. (2001). 'Researching Organizational Discourse', *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 31(3): 25–47.

Hardy, M., and Bryman, A. (2004). 'Introduction: Common Threads among Techniques of Data Analysis', in M. Hardy and A. Bryman (eds), *Handbook of Data Analysis*. London: Sage.

Harfield, T., and Hamilton, R. (1997). 'Journeys in a Declining Industry: Stories of Footwear Manufacturing', *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 10(1): 61–70.

Harlow, G., Bouldmetis, J., Clark, P. G., and Willis, G. H. (2003). 'Computer-Assisted Life Stories', *Computers in Human Behaviour*, 19: 391–406.

Harper, D. (1986). 'Meaning and Work: A Study in Photo Elicitation', *Current Sociology*, 34(3): 24–68.

Harré, R. (1972). *The Philosophies of Science.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Harris, H. (2001). 'Content Analysis of Secondary Data: A Study of Courage in Managerial Decision Making', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 34(3–4): 191–208.

Hartog, D. N., and Verburg, R. M. (1997). 'Charisma and Rhetoric: Communicative Techniques of International Business Leaders', *Leadership Quarterly*, 8(4): 355–91.

Haslam, C., and Bryman, A. (1994). 'The Research Dissemination Minefield', in C. Haslam and A. Bryman (eds), *Social Scientists Meet the Media*. London: Routledge.

Hassard, J. (1991). 'Multiple Paradigms and Organizational Analysis: A Case Study', *Organization Studies*, 12(2): 275–99.

Hatch, M. J. (1996). 'The Role of the Researcher: An Analysis of Narrative Position in Organization Theory', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 5(4): 359–74.

Hawkes, N. (2003). 'Close Shaves Beat Death by a Whisker', *The Times*, 6 Feb., 1.

Hayano, D. (1979). 'Auto-Ethnography: Paradigms, Problems and Prospects', *Human Organization*, 38(1): 99–104.

Healey, M. J., and Rawlinson, M. B. (1993). 'Interviewing Business Owners and Managers: A Review of Methods and Techniques', *Geoforum*, 24(3): 339–55.

Heap, J. L., and Roth, P. A. (1973). 'On Phenomenological Sociology', *American Sociological Review*, 38: 354–67.

Heath, C. (1997). 'The Analysis of Activities in Face to Face Interaction Using Video', in D. Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage.

Heisley, D. D., and Levy, S. J. (1991). 'Autodriving: A Photoelicitation Technique', *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18(4): 257–72.

Heritage, J. (1984). *Garfinkel and Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Heritage, J. (1987). 'Ethnomethodology', in A. Giddens and J. H. Turner (eds), *Social Theory Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Heron, J., and Reason, P. (2000). 'The Practice of Co-operative Inquiry', in P. Reason and H. Bradbury (eds), *Handbook of Action Research*. London: Sage.

Herzberg, F., Mausner, B., and Snyderman, B. B. (1959). *The Motivation to Work*, 2nd edn. New York: Wiley.

Hesse-Biber, S. (1995). 'Unleashing Frankenstein's Monster? The Use of Computers in Qualitative Research', *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, 5: 25–41.

Hewson, C., and Laurent, D. (2008). 'Research Design and Tools for Internet Research', in N. Fielding, R. M. Lee, and G. Blank (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods* (London: Sage).

Hewson, C., Yule, P., Laurent, D., and Vogel, C. (2003). *Internet Research Methods: A Practical Guide for the Social and Behavioural Sciences.* London: Sage.

Heyes, J. (1997). 'Annualised Hours and the Knock: The Organisation of Working Time in a Chemicals Plant', *Work, Employment and Society*, 11(1): 65–81.

Hilton, G. (1972). 'Causal Inference Analysis: A Seductive Process', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 17(1): 44–54.

Hine, C. (2008). 'Virtual Ethnography: Models, Varieties, Affordances', in N. Fielding, R. M. Lee and G. Blank (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods* (London: Sage).

Hine, C. (2000). *Virtual Ethnography*. London: Sage.

Hinings, C. R., and Greenwood, R. (2002). 'ASQ Forum: Disconnects and Consequences in Organization Theory?', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47: 411–21.

Hinings, C. R., Ranson, S., and Bryman, A. (1976). 'Churches as Organizations', in D. S. Pugh and C. R. Hinings (eds), *Organizational Structure: Extensions and Replications*, *The Aston Programme II.* Farnborough: Saxon House.

Ho, K. C., Baber, Z., and Khondker, H. (2002). '"Sites of Resistance": Alternative Websites and State-Society Relations', *British Journal of Sociology*, 53: 127–48.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The Managed Heart*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Hochschild, A. R. (1989). *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking.

Hodson, R. (1996). 'Dignity in the Workplace under Participative Management', *American Sociological Review*, 61: 719–38.

Hodson, R. (1999). *Analyzing Documentary Accounts.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work Related Values.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Holbrook, A., Green, M. C., and Krosnick, J. A. (2003). 'Telephone versus Face-to-Face Interviewing of National Probability Samples with Long Questionnaires: Comparisons of Respondent Satisficing and Social Desirability Response Bias', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 67: 79–125.

Holdaway, E. A., Newberry, J. F., Hickson, D. J., and Heron, R. P. (1975). 'Dimensions of Structure in Complex Societies: The Educational Sector', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 20: 37–58.

Holliday, R. (1995). *Investigating Small Firms: Nice Work?* London: Routledge.

Holliday, R. (2001). 'We've Been Framed: Visualising Methodology', *Sociological Review*, 48(4): 503–21.

Holmberg, R., Fridell, M., Arnesson, P., and Bäckvall, M. (2008). 'Leadership and Implementation of Evidence-Based Practices', *Leadership in Health Services*, 21(3): 168–84.

Holman Jones, S. (2005). 'Autoethnography: Making the Personal Political', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd edn. London: Sage.

Holsti, O. R. (1969). *Content Analysis for the Social Sciences and Humanities.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Homan, R. (1991). *The Ethics of Social Research.* London: Longman.

Hoque, K. (2003). 'All in All, It's Just Another Plaque on the Wall: The Incidence and Impact of the Investors in People Standard', *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(2): 543–71.

House, J. (1981). *Work Stress and Social Support.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Howell, J. M., and Frost, P. J. (1989). 'A Laboratory Study of Charismatic Leadership', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 43: 243–69.

Huberman, A. M., and Miles, M. B. (1994). 'Data Management and Analysis Methods', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hudson, J. M., and Bruckman, A. S. (2004). '"Go Away": Participant Objections to Being Studied and the Ethics of Chatroom Research', *Information Society*, 20: 127–39.

Hudson, S., Snaith, T., Miller, G., and Hudson, P. (2001). 'Distribution Channels in the Travel Industry: Using Mystery Shoppers to Understand the Influence of Travel Agency Recommendations', *Journal of Travel Research*, 40: 148–54.

Hughes, E. C. (1958). *Men and their Work*. Glencoe, IL: Free Press.

Hughes, J. A. (1990). *The Philosophy of Social Research*, 2nd edn. Harlow: Longman.

Hummerinta-Peltomäki, L., and Nummela, N. (2006). 'Mixed Methods in International Business Research', *Management International Review*, 46(4): 439–59.

Humphreys, M., and Watson, T. (2009). 'Ethnographic Practices: From "Writing-up Ethnographic Research" to "Writing Ethnography"', in S. Ybema, D. Yanow, H. Wels, and F. Kamsteeg (eds), *Organizational Ethnography: Studying the Complexities of Everyday Life*. London: Sage.

Hunter, W. C. (2008). 'A Typology of Photographic Representations for Tourism: Depictions of Groomed Spaces', *Tourism Management*, 29: 354–365.

Hurworth, R. (2003). *Photo-Interviewing for Research.* Social Research Update, Issue 40; ***sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU40.html***.

Huselid, M. (1995). 'The Impact of Human Resource Management Practices on Turnover, Productivity and Corporate Financial Performance', *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(3): 635–72.

Hutt, R. W. (1979). 'The Focus Group Interview: A Technique for Counseling Small Business Clients', *Journal of Small Business Management*, 17(1): 15–20.

Huxley, P., Evans, S., Gately, C., Webber, M., Mears, A., Pajak, S., Kendall, T., Medina, J., and Catona, C. (2005). 'Stress and Pressures in Mental Health Social Work: The Worker Speaks', *British Journal of Social Work*, 35: 1063–79.

Hycner, R. H. (1985). 'Some Guidelines for the Phenomenological Analysis of Interview Data', *Human Studies*, 8: 279–303.

Hyde, P., McBride, A., Young, R., and Walshe, K. (2006). 'Role Redesign: New Ways of Working in the NHS', *Personnel Review*, 34(6): 697–712.

Insch, G., Moore, J., and Murphy, L. (1997). 'Content Analysis in Leadership Research: Examples, Procedures and Suggestions for Future Use', *Leadership Quarterly*, 8(1): 1–25.

Jack, L., and Kholief, A. (2007). 'Introducing Strong Structuration Theory for Informing Qualitative Case Studies in Organization, Management and Accounting Research', *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 2(3): 208–25.

Jackall, R. (1988). *Moral Mazes: The World of the Corporate Manager.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jackson, B. (2001). *Management Gurus and Management Fashions*. London: Routledge.

Jackson, N., and Carter, P. (1991). 'In Defence of Paradigm Incommensurability', *Organization Studies*, 12(1): 109–27.

Jackson, N., and Carter, P. (1998). 'Management Gurus: What are we to Make of Them?', in J. Hassard and R. Holliday (eds), *Organization-Representation: Work and Organization in Popular Culture*. London: Sage.

Jackson, T. (2001). 'Cultural Values and Management Ethics: A Ten Nation Study', *Human Relations*, 54(10): 1267–302.

Jacobs, J., and O'Neill, C. (2003). 'On the Reliability (or Otherwise) of SIC Codes', *European Business Review*, 15(3): 164–9.

Jacques, R. S. (2010). 'Discourse Analysis', in A. J. Mills, G. Durepos, and E. Wiebe (eds), *Sage Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, i. 304–8.

Janis, I. L. (1982). *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos*, 2nd edn. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Jayaratne, T. E., and Stewart, A. J. (1991). 'Quantitative and Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences: Current Feminist Issues and Practical Strategies', in M. M. Fonow and J. A. Cook (eds), *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Jenkins, G. D., Nader, D. A., Lawler, E. E., and Cammann, C. (1975). 'Standardized Observations: An Approach to Measuring the Nature of Jobs', *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 60: 171–81.

John, I. D. (1992). 'Statistics as Rhetoric in Psychology', *Australian Psychologist*, 27: 144–9.

Johns, G., Xie, J., and Fang, Y. (1992). 'Mediating and Moderating Effects in Job Design', *Journal of Management*, 18(4): 657–76.

Johnson, P., and Duberley, J. (2000). *Understanding Management Research*. London: Sage.

Johnson, P., and Duberley, J. (2003). 'Reflexivity in Management Research', *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(5): 1279–303.

Jones, G. (1983). 'Life History Methodology', in G. Morgan (ed.), *Beyond Method: Strategies for Social Research*. London: Sage.

Jones, M. L. (2004). 'Application of Systematic Review Methods to Qualitative Research: Practical Issues', *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 48(3): 271–8.

Kabanoff, B., Waldersee, R., and Cohen, M. (1995). 'Espoused Values and Organizational Change Themes', *Academy of Management Journal*, 38(4): 1075–104.

Kanter, R. M. (1977). *Men and Women of the Corporation*. New York: Basic Books.

Keat, R., and Urry, J. (1975). *Social Theory as Science*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Keenoy, T., Oswick, C., and Grant, D. (1997). 'Organizational Discourses: Text and Context', *Organization*, 2: 147–58.

Kelly, G. A. (1955). *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. New York: Norton.

Kelly, L., Burton, S., and Regan, L. (1994). 'Researching Women's Lives or Studying Women's Oppression? Reflections on what Constitutes Feminist Research', in M. Maynard and J. Purvis (eds), *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Kendall, L. (1999). 'Recontextualizing "Cyberspace": Methodological Considerations for On-Line Research', in S. Jones (ed.), *Doing Internet Research: Critical Issues and Methods for Examining the Net*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kent, J., Williamson, E., Goodenough, T., and Ashcroft, R. (2002). 'Social Science Gets the Ethics Treatment: Research Governance and Ethical Review', *Sociological Research Online*, **7**(4): ***www.socresonline.org.uk/7/4/williamson.html***

Kent, R., and Lee, M. (1999). 'Using the Internet for Market Research: A Study of Private Trading on the Internet', *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 41: 377–85.

Kersley, B., Alpin, C., Forth, J., Bryson, A., Bewley, H., Dix, H., and Oxenbridge, S. (2006). *Inside the Workplace: Findings from the 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey*. London: Routledge.

Kiecker, P., and Nelson, J. E. (1996). 'Do Interviewers Follow Telephone Survey Instructions?', *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 38(2): 161–76.

Kiely, T. (1998). 'Wired Focus Groups', *Harvard Business Review*, Jan.–Feb.: 12–16.

Kieser, A. (1994). 'Crossroads: Why Organization Theory Needs Historical Analyses—and How This Should Be Performed', *Organization Science*, 5(4): 608–20.

Kieser, A. (1997). 'Rhetoric and Myth in Management Fashion', *Organization*, 4: 49–74.

Kirk, J., and Miller, M. L. (1986). *Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Kitzinger, J. (1994). 'The Methodology of Focus Groups: The Importance of Interaction between Research Participants', *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 16: 103–21.

Kivits, J. (2005). 'Online Interviewing and the Research Relationship', in C. Hine (ed.) *Virtual Methods: Issues in Social Research on the Internet*. Oxford: Berg.

Knight, K., and Latreille, P. (2000). 'Discipline, Dismissals and Complaints to Employment Tribunals', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 38(4): 533–55.

Knights, D., and Collinson, D. (1985). *Job Redesign: Critical Perspectives on the Labour Process*. Aldershot: Gower.

Knights, D., and McCabe, D. (1997). '"How Would You Measure Something Like That?": Quality in a Retail Bank', *Journal of Management Studies*, 34(3): 371–88.

Knights, D., and Willmott, H. (1990). *Labour Process Theory*. London: Macmillan.

Kondo, D. K. (1990). *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kostova, T. (1999). 'Transnational Transfer of Strategic Organizational Practices: A Contextual Perspective', *Academy of Management Review*, 24(2): 308–24.

Kowalczyk, R. (2004). 'Tracing the Effects of a Hospital Merger', in S. Fleetwood and S. Ackroyd (eds), *Critical Realist Applications in Organisation and Management Studies*. London: Routledge.

Kozinets, R. V. (2002). 'The Field behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities', *Journal of Marketing Research*, 39: 61–72.

Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. London: Sage.

Kozinets, R. V., de Valck, K., Wojnicki, A. C., and Wilner, S. J. S. (2010). 'Networked Narratives: Understanding Word-of-Mouth Marketing in Online Communities', *Journal of Marketing*, 74: 71–89.

Kring, A. M., Smith, D., and Neale, J. (1994). 'Individual Differences in Dispositional Expressiveness: Development and Validation of the Emotional Expressivity Scale', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 66: 934–949.

Krishnan, J., and Press, E. (2003). 'The North American Industry Classification System and Its Implications for Accounting Research', *Contemporary Accounting Research*, 20(4): 685–717.

Kristof-Brown, A. (2000). 'Perceived Applicant Fit: Distinguishing between Recruiters' Perceptions of Person–Job and Person–Organization Fit', *Personnel Psychology*, 53: 643–71.

Krosnick, J. A., Holbrook, A. L., Berent, M. K., Carson, R. T., Hanemann, W. M., Kopp, R. J., Mitchell, R. C., Presser, S., Ruud, P. A., Smith, V. K., Moody, W. R., Green, M. C., and Conaway, M. (2002). 'The Impact of "No Opinion" Response Options on Data Quality: Non-Attitude Reduction or an Invitation to Satisfice?', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 66: 371–403.

Krueger, R. A. (1988). *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Krueger, R. A. (1998). *Moderating Focus Groups.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Kuhn, T. S. (1970). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd edn. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Kunda, G. (1992). *Engineering Culture: Control and Commitment in a High-Tech Corporation.* Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Langley, A. (2009). 'Studying Processes in and Around Organizations', in D. Buchanan and A. Bryman (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods.* London: Sage.

LaPiere, R. T. (1934). 'Attitudes vs Actions', *Social Forces*, 13: 230–7.

Lavin, D., and Maynard, D. W. (2001). 'Standardisation vs Rapport: Respondent Laughter and Interviewer Reaction during Telephone Surveys', *American Sociological Review*, 66(3): 453–79.

Lawlor, M. A., and Prothero, A. (2007). 'Exploring Children's Understanding of Television Advertising: Beyond the Advertiser's Perspective', *European Journal of Marketing*, 42(11/12): 1203–23.

Lawrence, P. R., and Lorsch, J. W. (1967). *Organization and Environment*. Boston: Addison Wesley.

Layder, D. (1993). *New Strategies in Social Research*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Lazarsfeld, P. (1958). 'Evidence and Inference in Social Research', *Daedalus*, 87: 99–130.

Learmonth, M. (2008). 'Speaking Out: Evidence-Based Management: A Backlash against Pluralism in Organization Studies', *Organization*, 15(2): 283–91.

Learmonth, M. (2009). 'Rhetoric and Evidence: The Case of Evidence-Based Management', in D. Buchanan and A. Bryman (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods.* London: Sage.

Leavitt, H. J. (1989). 'Educating our MBAs: On Teaching what We Haven't Taught', *California Management Review*, 31(3): 38–50.

LeCompte, M. D., and Goetz, J. P. (1982). 'Problems of Reliability and Validity in Ethnographic Research', *Review of Educational Research*, 52: 31–60.

Lee, B., Collier, P. M., and Cullen, J. (2007). 'Reflections on the Use of Case Studies in the Accounting, Management and Organizational Disciplines', *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, 2(3): 169–78.

Lee, C. K. (1998). *Gender and the South China Miracle: Two Worlds of Factory Women.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Lee, R. M. (2000). *Unobtrusive Methods in Social Research*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lee, R. M. (2004). 'Danger in Research', in M. S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman, and T. F. Liao (eds), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, 3 vols. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lee, R. M., and Fielding, N. G. (1991). 'Computing for Qualitative Research: Options, Problems and Potential', in N. G. Fielding and R. M. Lee (eds), *Using Computers in Qualitative Research.* London: Sage.

Lee, T. W. (1999). *Using Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*, London: Sage.

Legge, K. (1995). *Human Resource Management: Rhetorics and Realities.* Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Leidner, R. (1993). *Fast Food, Fast Talk: Service Work and the Routinization of Everyday Life.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Lincoln, Y. S., and Denzin, N. K. (1994), 'The Fifth Moment', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage).

Lincoln, Y. S., and Denzin, N. K. (2005). 'Epilogue: The Eighth and Ninth Moments: Qualitative Research in/and the Fractured Future', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lincoln, Y. S., and Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Linstead, S. (1985). 'Jokers Wild: The Importance of Humour and the Maintenance of Organizational Culture', *Sociological Review*, 33(4): 741–67.

Linstead, S. (1993). 'From Postmodern Anthropology to Deconstructive Ethnography', *Human Relations*, 46(1): 97–120.

Livingstone, S., and Lunt, P. (1994). *Talk on Television: Audience Participation and Public Debate.* London: Routledge.

Llewellyn, N., and Burrows, R. (2008). 'Streetwise Sales and the Social Order of City Streets', *British Journal of Sociology*, 59(3): 561–83.

Locke, K. (1996). 'Rewriting *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* after 25 Years?', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 5: 239–45.

Locke, K. (2001). *Grounded Theory in Management Research*. London: Sage.

Locke, R. (1996). *The Collapse of the American Management Mystique*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lofland, J. (1971). *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lofland, J., and Lofland, L. (1995). *Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*, 3rd edn. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Lonkila, M. (1995). 'Grounded Theory as an Emergent Paradigm for Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis', in U. Kelle (ed.), *Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis*. London: Sage.

Louhiala-Salminen, L. (2002). 'The Fly's Perspective: Discourse in the Daily Routine of a Business Manager', *English for Specific Purposes*, 21: 211–31.

Lowe, K. B., and Gardner, W. L. (2000). 'Ten Years of *The Leadership Quarterly*: Contributions and Challenges for the Future', *The Leadership Quarterly*, 11(4): 459–514.

Lucas, R. (1997). 'Youth, Gender and Part-Time Work: Students in the Labour Process', *Work, Employment and Society*, 11: 595–614.

Lund, D. (2000). 'An Empirical Examination of Marketing Professionals' Ethical Behaviour in Differing Situations', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 24: 331–42.

Lupton, T. (1963). *On the Shopfloor.* Oxford: Pergamon Press.

McCall, M. J. (1984). 'Structured Field Observation', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10: 263–82.

McCall, M. J., and Lombardo, M. (1982). 'Using Simulation for Leadership and Management Research: Through the Looking Glass', *Management Science*, 28(5): 533–49.

McCartney, J. L. (1970). 'On Being Scientific: Changing Styles of Presentation of Sociological Research', *American Sociologist*, 5: 30–5.

McClelland, D. C. (1961). *The Achieving Society.* Princeton: Van Nostrand.

McCloskey, D. N. (1985). *The Rhetoric of Economics.* Brighton: Wheatsheaf.

McDonald, G. (2000). 'Cross-Cultural Methodological Issues in Ethical Research', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 27: 89–104.

McDonald, S. (2005). 'Studying Actions in Context: A Qualitative Shadowing Method for Organizational Research', *Qualitative Research*, 5(4): 455–73.

Macdonald, S., and Kam, J. (2007). 'Ring a Ring o' Roses: Quality Journals and Gamesmanship in Management Studies', *Journal of Management Studies*, 44(4): 640–55.

McEnery, J., and Blanchard, P. (1999). 'Validity of Multiple Ratings of Business Student Performance in a Management Simulation', *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 10(2): 155–72.

McGuigan, J. (1992). *Cultural Populism.* London: Routledge.

McKeever, L. (2006). 'Online Plagiarism Detection Services: Saviour or Scourge?', *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 31: 155–65.

MacLure, M. (2005). '"Clarity Bordering on Stupidity": Where's the Quality in Systematic Review?', *Journal of Educational Policy*, 20(4): 393–416.

McPhail, C., and Rexroat, C. (1979). 'Mead vs Blumer: The Divergent Methodological Perspectives of Social Behaviorism and Symbolic Interactionism', *American Sociological Review*, 44: 449–67.

Madriz, M. (2000). 'Focus Groups in Feminist Research', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Maitlis, S., and Lawrence, T. B. (2007). 'Triggers and Enablers of Sensegiving in Organizations', *Academy of Management Journal*, 50: 57–84.

Malinowski, B. (1967). *A Diary in the Strict Sense of the Term.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Mangabeira, W. (1995). 'Qualitative Analysis and Microcomputer Software: Some Reflections on a New Trend in Sociological Research', *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, 5: 43–61.

Mangham, I. (1986). *Power and Performance in Organizations: An Exploration of Executive Process.* Oxford: Blackwell.

Mangione, T. W. (1995). *Mail Surveys: Improving the Quality.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mann, C., and Stewart, F. (2000). *Internet Communication and Qualitative Research: A Handbook for Researching Online.* London: Sage.

Marginson, P. (1998). 'The Survey Tradition in British Industrial Relations Research: An Assessment of the Contribution of Large-Scale Workplace and Enterprise Surveys', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 36(3): 361–88.

Markham, A. (1998). *Life Online: Researching the Real Experience in Virtual Space.* London and Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Marsden, R. (1982). 'Industrial Relations: A Critique of Empiricism', *Sociology*, 16(2): 232–50.

Marsh, C. (1982). *The Survey Method: The Contribution of Surveys to Sociological Explanation.* London: Allen & Unwin.

Marsh, C., and Scarbrough, E. (1990). 'Testing Nine Hypotheses about Quota Sampling', *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 32: 485–506.

Marshall, J. (1981). 'Making Sense as a Personal Process', in P. Reason and J. Rowan (eds), *Human Inquiry.* Chichester: John Wiley.

Marshall, J. (1984). *Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World.* Chichester: Wiley.

Marshall, J. (1995). *Women Managers Moving On: Exploring Career and Life Choices.* London: Routledge.

Martin, J. (1992). *Cultures in Organizations: Three Perspectives.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Martin, J., and Siehl, C. (1983). 'Organizational Culture and Counterculture: An Uneasy Symbiosis', *Organizational Dynamics*, Autumn: 52–64.

Martin, P., and Bateson, P. (1986). *Measuring Behaviour: An Introductory Guide.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Martin, P. Y., and Turner, B. A. (1986). 'Grounded Theory and Organizational Research', *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 22(2): 141–57.

Martinko, M. J., and Gardner, W. L. (1990). 'Structured Observation of Managerial Work: A Replication and Synthesis', *Journal of Management Studies*, 27(3): 329–57.

Marx, G. T. (1997). 'Of Methods and Manners for Aspiring Sociologists: 37 Moral Imperatives', *American Sociologist*, 102–25.

Maslach, C., and Jackson, S. (1981). 'The Measurement of Experienced Burnout', *Journal of Occupational Behavior*, 2: 99–113.

Maslow, A. (1943). 'A Theory of Human Motivation', *Psychological Review*, 50: 370–96.

Mason, J. (1996). *Qualitative Researching.* London: Sage.

Masterman, M. (1970). 'The Nature of a Paradigm', in I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Matthewman, S., and Hoey, D. (2006). 'What Happened to Postmodernism?', *Sociology*, 40: 529–47.

Matza, D. (1969). *Becoming Deviant.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Mauthner, N. S., Parry, O., and Backett-Milburn, K. (1998). 'The Data are Out There, or Are They? Implications for Archiving and Revisiting Qualitative Data', *Sociology*, 32: 733–45.

Maynard, M. (1994). 'Methods, Practice and Epistemology: The Debate about Feminism and Research', in M. Maynard and J. Purvis (eds), *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective.* London: Taylor & Francis.

Maynard, M. (1998). 'Feminists' Knowledge and the Knowledge of Feminisms: Epistemology, Theory, Methodology and Method', in T. May and M. Williams (eds), *Knowing the Social World.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

Mays, N., Pope, C., and Popay, J. (2005). 'Sytematically Reviewing Qualitative and Quantitative Evidence to Inform Management and Policy-Making in the Health Field', *Journal of Health Services Research and Policy*, 10 (Supplement 1): S6–S20.

Mazza, C., and Alvarez, J. L. (2000). '*Haute Couture* and *Prêt-à-Porter*: The Popular Press and the Diffusion of Management Practices', *Organization Studies*, 21(3): 567–88.

Meltzer, B. N., Petras, J. W., and Reynolds, L. T. (1975). *Symbolic Interactionism: Genesis, Varieties and Criticism.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Merton, R. K. (1967). *On Theoretical Sociology.* New York: Free Press.

Merton, R. K., Fiske, M., and Kendall, P. L. (1956). *The Focused Interview: A Manual of Problems and Procedures.* New York: Free Press.

Meyer, A. D. (1991). 'Visual Data in Organizational Research', *Organization Science*, 2(2): 218–36.

Meyer, J., and Rowan, B. (1977). 'Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony', *American Journal of Sociology*, 83: 340–63.

Mies, M. (1993). 'Towards a Methodology for Feminist Research', in M. Hammersley (ed.), *Social Research: Philosophy, Politics and Practice*. London: Sage.

Miles, M. B. (1979). 'Qualitative Data as an Attractive Nuisance', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24: 590–601.

Miles, M. B., and Huberman, A. M. (1984). *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods.* London: Sage.

Miles, M. B., and Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook.* London: Sage.

Milgram, S. (1963). 'A Behavioral Study of Obedience', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 67: 371–8.

Milgram, S., and Shotland, L. (1973). *Television and Antisocial Behavior: Field Experiments.* New York: Academic Press.

Milkman, R. (1997). *Farewell to the Factory: Auto Workers in the Late Twentieth Century.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Millen, D. (1997). 'Some Methodological and Epistemological Issues Raised by Doing Feminist Research on Non-Feminist Women', *Sociological Research Online*, 2: ***www.socresonline.org.uk/socresonline/2/3/3.html***

Miller, A. G. (2009). 'Reflections on "Replicating Milgram" (Burger, 2009)', *American Psychologist*, 64(1): 20–7.

Miller, D., and Slater, D. (2000). *The Internet: An Ethnographic Approach.* Oxford: Berg.

Miller, D. Disney (1956). *The Story of Walt Disney.* New York: Dell.

Miller, N., and Morgan, D. (1993). 'Called to Account: The CV as an Autobiographical Practice', *Sociology*, 27: 133–43.

Miller, R. L. (2000). *Researching Life Stories and Family Histories.* London: Sage.

Mills, A. J., and Helms Mills, J. (in press). 'Digging Archeology: Postpositivist Theory and Archival Research in Case Study Development', in R. Piekkari and C. Welch (eds), *Rethinking the Case Study in International Business Research*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing.

Millward, N., Bryson, A., and Forth, J. (2000). *All Change at Work? British Employment Relations 1980–1998, as Portrayed by the Workplace Industrial Relations Survey Series.* London: Routledge.

Miner-Rubino, K., Jayaratne, T. E., and Konik, J. (2007). 'Using Survey Research as a Quantitative Method for Feminist Social Change', in S. N. Hesse-Biber (ed.), *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mintzberg, H. (1973). *The Nature of Managerial Work.* New York: Harper & Row.

Mintzberg, H., and Rose, J. (2003). 'Strategic Management Upside Down: A Study of McGill University from 1829 to 1980', *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 20(4): 270–90.

Mintzberg, H., Brunet, J. P., and Waters, J. A. (1986). 'Does Planning Impede Strategic Thinking? Tracking the Strategies of Air Canada from 1937 to 1976', in R. Lamb and P. Shrivastava (ed.), *Advances in Strategic Management*. Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, iv. 3–41.

Mirchandani, K. (1999). 'Feminist Insight on Gendered Work: New Directions in Research on Women and Entrepreneurship', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 6(4): 224–35.

Mishler, E. G. (1986). *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mitchell, J. C. (1983). 'Case and Situation Analysis', *Sociological Review*, 31: 186–211.

Mitchell, T. (1985). 'An Evaluation of the Validity of Correlational Research Conducted in Organizations', *Academy of Management Review*, 10(2): 192–205.

Mohr, L. B. (1982). *Explaining Organizational Behavior: The Limits and Possibilities of Theory and Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Molina-Azorín, J. F. (2009). 'Understanding how Mixed Methods Research is Undertaken within a Specific Research Community', *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 3: 47–57.

Morgan, D. L. (1998*a*). *Planning Focus Groups.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Morgan, D. L. (1998*b*). 'Practical Strategies for Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: Applications for Health Research', *Qualitative Health Research*, 8: 362–76.

Morgan, G., and Smircich, L. (1980). 'The Case for Qualitative Research', *Academy of Management Review*, 5: 491–500.

Morrison, D. E. (1998). *The Search for a Method: Focus Groups and the Development of Mass Communication Research*. Luton: University of Luton Press.

Moser, C. A., and Kalton, G. (1971). *Survey Methods in Social Investigation*. London: Heinemann.

Mumby, D., and Clair, R. (1997). 'Organizational Discourse', in T. A. Van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction. Discourse Studies, Vol. 2: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Musson, G. (1998). 'Life Histories', in G. Symon and C. Cassell (eds), *Qualitative Methods and Analysis in Organizational Research.* London: Sage.

Myers, K. K., and Oetzel, J. G. (2003). 'Exploring the Dimensions of Organizational Assimilation: Creating and Validating a Measure', *Communication Quarterly*, 51: 438–57.

Newell, A., and Simon, H. A. (1972). *Human Problem Solving*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Nichols, T., and Beynon, H. (1977). *Living with Capitalism: Class Relations and the Modern Factory.* London: Routledge.

Noblit, G. W., and Hare, R. D. (1988). *Meta-Ethnography: Synthesizing Qualitative Studies*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Oakley, A. (1981). 'Interviewing Women: A Contradiction in Terms', in H. Roberts (ed.), *Doing Feminist Research*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Oakley, A. (1998). 'Gender, Methodology and People's Ways of Knowing: Some Problems with Feminism and the Paradigm Debate in Social Science', *Sociology*, 32: 707–31.

O'Cathain, A., Murphy, E., and Nicholl, J. (2007). 'Integration and Publication as Indicators of "Yield" from Mixed Methods Studies', *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 1: 147–63.

O'Cathain, A., Murphy, E., and Nicholl, J. (2008). 'The Quality of Mixed Methods Studies in Health Services Research', *Journal of Health Services Research and Policy*, 13: 92–8.

O'Connor, H., and Madge, C. (2001). 'Cyber-Mothers: Online Synchronous Interviewing using Conferencing Software', *Sociological Research Online*, 5: ***www.socresonline.org.uk/5/4/oconnor.html***

O'Connor, H., Madge, C., Shaw, R., and Wellens, J. (2008). 'Internet-Based Interviewing', in N. Fielding, R. M. Lee, and G. Blank (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods.* London: Sage.

O'Gorman, C., Bourke, S., and Murray, J. A. (2005). 'The Nature of Managerial Work in Small Growth-Oriented Businesses', *Small Business Economics*, 25: 1–16.

Ojala, M. (2005). 'SIC Those NAICS on Me: Industry Classification Codes for Business Research', *Online*, 29(1): 42–4.

Okely, J. (1994). 'Thinking through Fieldwork', in A. Bryman and R. G. Burgess (eds), *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge.

Oppenheim, A. N. (1966). *Questionnaire Design and Attitude Measurement*. London: Heinemann.

Oppenheim, A. N. (1992). *Questionnaire Design, Interviewing and Attitude Measurement*. London: Pinter.

Organ, D. W. (1988). *Organizational Citizenship Behaviour: The Good Soldier Syndrome.* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Orton, J. D. (1997). 'From Inductive to Iterative Grounded Theory: Zipping the Gap between Process Theory and Process Data', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 13(4): 419–38.

Oswick, C., Putnam, L., and Keenoy, T. (2004). 'Tropes, Discourse and Organizing', in D. Grant, C. Hardy, C. Oswick, and L. Putnam (eds), *Handbook of Organizational Discourse*. London: Sage.

Parboteeah, K. P., Hoegl, M., and Cullen, J. (2009). 'Religious Dimensions and Work Obligation: A Country Institutional Profile Model', *Human Relations*, 62(1): 119–48.

Park, C. (2003). 'In Other (People's) Words: Plagiarism by University Students: Literature and Lessons', *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 28: 471–88.

Park, P. (1999). 'People, Knowledge, and Change in Participatory Research', *Management Learning*, 30(2): 141–57.

Park, S. H. (1996). 'Relationships between Involvement and Attitudinal Loyalty Constructs in Adult Fitness Programmes', *Journal of Leisure Research*, 28(4): 233–50.

Parker, I. (1992). *Discourse Dynamics.* London: Routledge.

Parker, M. (2000). *Organizational Culture and Identity*. London: Sage.

Partington, D. (2000). 'Building Grounded Theories of Management Action', *British Journal of Management*, 11: 91–102.

Patterson, M. G., West, M. A., Shackleton, V. J., Dawson, J. F., Lawthom, R., Maitlis, S., Robinson, D. L., and Wallace, A. M. (2005). 'Validating the Organizational Climate Measure: Links to Managerial Practices, Productivity and Innovation', *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26: 379–408.

Patwardhan, A., Noble, S. M., and Nishihara, C. M. (2009). 'The Use of Strategic Deception in Relationships', *Journal of Services Marketing*, 23(5): 318–25.

Pawson, R., and Tilley, N. (1997). *Realistic Evaluation*. London: Sage.

Peñaloza, L. (1999). 'Just Doing It: A Visual Ethnographic Study of Spectacular Consumption Behavior at Nike Town', *Consumption, Markets and Culture*, 2: 337–400.

Peñaloza, L. (2000). 'The Commodification of the American West: Marketers' Production of Cultural Meanings at the Trade Show', *Journal of Marketing*, 64: 82–109.

Pendergrast, M. (1998). *For God, Country and Coca-Cola. The Unauthorized History of the World's Most Popular Soft Drink*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Penn, R., Rose, M., and Rubery, J. (1994). *Skill and Occupational Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Peräkylä, A. (1997). 'Reliability and Validity in Research Based on Transcripts', in D. Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage.

Perlow, L. A. (1995). 'The Time Famine: The Unintended Consequences of the Way Time is Used at Work', unpublished Ph.D. thesis, MIT.

Perlow, L. A. (1997). *Finding Time: How Corporations, Individuals and Families can Benefit from New Work Practices.* Ithaca, NY: ILR Press.

Perlow, L. A. (1999). 'Time Famine: Toward a Sociology of Work Time', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 44: 57–81.

Petticrew, M., and Roberts, H. (2006). *Systematic Reviews in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Pettigrew, A. (1985). *The Awakening Giant: Continuity and Change in Imperial Chemical Industries*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Pettigrew, A. (1990). 'Longitudinal Field Research on Change: Theory and Practice', *Organization Science*, 1(3): 267–92.

Pettigrew, A. (1997). 'What is a Processual Analysis?', *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, 13: 337–48.

Pettigrew, A., and McNulty, T. (1995). 'Power and Influence in and around the Boardroom', *Human Relations*, 48(8): 845–73.

Pfeffer, J. (1997). 'Pitfalls on the Road to Measurement: The Dangerous Liaison of Human Resource Management with the Ideas of Accounting and Finance', *Human Resource Management*, 36(3): 357–65.

Pfeffer, J., and Fong, C. T. (2002). 'The End of Business Schools? Less Success than Meets the Eye', *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 1(1): 78–95.

Phillips, D. L. (1973). *Abandoning Method*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Phillips, N., and Brown, J. L. (1993). 'Analyzing Communications in and around Organizations: A Critical Hermeneutic Approach', *Academy of Management Journal*, 36: 1547–76.

Phillips, N., and Hardy, C. (2002). *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*. London: Sage.

Phillips, N., Sewell, G., and Jaynes, D. (2008). 'Applying Critical Discourse Analysis in Strategic Management Research', *Organizational Research Methods*, 11(4): 770–89.

Piekkari, R., Welsh, C., and Paavilainen, E. (2009). 'Case Study as Disciplinary Convention: Evidence from International Business Journals', *Organizational Research Methods*, 12(3): 567–89.

Pielstick, C. D. (1998). 'The Transformational Leader: A Meta-Ethnographic Analysis', *Community College Review*, 26(3): 15–33.

Piercy, N. F., Harris, L. C., and Lane, N. (2002). 'Market Orientation and Retail Operatives' Expectations', *Journal of Business Research*, 55: 261–73.

Pink, S. (2001). *Doing Visual Ethnography*. London: Sage.

Pink, S. (2004). 'Visual Methods', in C. Seale, G. Gobo, J. F. Gubrium, and D. Silverman (eds), *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage.

Pittaway, L., Robertson, M., Munir, K., Denyer, D., and Neely, A. (2004). 'Networking and Innovation: A Systematic Review of the Evidence', *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 5/6(3–4): 137–68.

Platt, J. (1981). 'The Social Construction of "Positivism" and its Significance in British Sociology, 1950–80', in P. Abrams, R. Deem, J. Finch, and P. Rock (eds), *Practice and Progress: British Sociology 1950–1980*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

Plummer, K. (2001). 'The Call of Life Stories in Ethnographic Research', in P. Atkinson, A. Coffey, S. Delamont, J. Lofland, and L. Lofland (eds), *Handbook of Ethnography*. London: Sage.

Podsakoff, P. M., and Dalton, D. R. (1987). 'Research Methodology in Organizational Studies', *Journal of Management*, 13: 419–44.

Poland, B. D. (1995). 'Transcription Quality as an Aspect of Rigor in Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1: 290–310.

Pollert, A. (1981). *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives*. London: Macmillan.

Pondy, L., Frost, P., Morgan, G., and Dandridge, T. (1983). *Organizational Symbolism*. London: JAI Press.

Porter, S. (1993). 'Critical Realist Ethnography: The Case of Racism and Professionalism in a Medical Setting', *Sociology*, 27: 591–609.

Potter, J. (1996). *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*. London: Sage.

Potter, J. (1997). 'Discourse Analysis as a Way of Analysing Naturally Occurring Talk', in D. Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice*. London: Sage.

Potter, J. (2004). 'Discourse Analysis', in M. Hardy and A. Bryman (eds), *Handbook of Data Analysis.* London: Sage.

Potter, J., and Wetherell, M. (1987). *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage.

Potter, J., and Wetherell, M. (1994). 'Analyzing Discourse', in A. Bryman and R. G. Burgess (eds), *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge.

Poutanen, S., and Kovalainen, A. (2010). 'Critical Theory', in A. J. Mills, G. Durepos, and E. Wiebe (eds), *Sage Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, i. 260–4.

Powell, T. C. (1995). 'Total Quality Management as Competitive Advantage: A Review and Empirical Study', *Strategic Management Journal*, 16: 15–37.

Prasad, P. (1993). 'Symbolic Processes in the Implementation of Technological Change: A Symbolic Interactionist Study of Work Computerization', *Academy of Management Journal*, 36(6): 1400–29.

Pratt, M. G. (2008). 'Fitting Oval Pegs into Round Holes: Tensions in Evaluating and Publishing Qualitative Research in Top-Tier North American Journals', *Organizational Research Methods*, 11: 481–509.

Prichard, A. (2001). 'Tourism and Representation: A Scale for Measuring Gendered Portrayals', *Leisure Studies*, 20(2): 79–94.

Pringle, R. (1988). *Secretaries Talk: Sexuality, Power and Work* (London: Verso).

Psathas, G. (1995). *Conversation Analysis: The Study of Talk-in-Interaction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pugh, D. S. (1983). 'Studying Organizational Structure and Process', in G. Morgan (ed.), *Beyond Method*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Pugh, D. S. (1998). 'Introduction', in D. S. Pugh (ed.), *The Aston Programme, I. The Aston Study and its Developments*. Dartmouth: Ashgate.

Pugh, D. S., Hickson, D. J., Hinings, C. R., and Turner, C. (1968). 'Dimensions of Organization Structure', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 13: 65–105.

Punch, M. (1994). 'Politics and Ethics in Qualitative Research', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rafaeli, A., Dutton, J., Harquail, C. V., and Mackie-Lewis, S. (1997). 'Navigating by Attire: The Use of Dress by Female Administrative Employees', *Academy of Management Journal*, 40: 9–45.

Ragin, C. C., and Becker, H. S. (1989). 'How the Microcomputer is Changing our Analytic Habits', in G. Blank et al. (eds), *New Technology in Sociology: Practical Applications in Research and Work*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Ram, M. (1994). *Managing to Survive: Working Lives in Small Firms*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Ramirez, I., and Bartunek, J. (1989). 'The Multiple Realities and Experiences of Internal Organization Development in Healthcare', *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 2(1): 40–57.

Raney, A. A., Arpan, L. M., Pashupati, K., and Brill, D. A. (2003). 'At the Movies, on the Web: An Investigation of the Effects of Entertaining and Interactive Web Content on Site and Brand Evaluations', *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 17(4): 38–53.

Ranson, S., Hinings, B., and Greenwood, R. (1980). 'The Structuring of Organizational Structures', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 25: 1–17.

Raz, A. E. (1999). *Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Reason, P. (1999). 'Integrating Action and Reflection through Cooperative Inquiry', *Management Learning*, 30(2): 207–26.

Reason, P., and Marshall, J. (1987). 'Research as Personal Process', in D. Boud and V. Griffin (eds), *Appreciating Adult Learning*. London: Kogan Page.

Reason, P., and Rowan, J. (1981) (eds). *Human Inquiry*. Chichester: John Wiley.

Reay, T., Berta, W., and Kohn, M. K. (2009). 'What is the Evidence on Evidence-Based Management?', *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(4): 19–32.

Reed, M. I. (1985). *Redirections in Organizational Analysis*. London: Tavistock.

Reed, M. I. (1997). 'In Praise of Duality and Dualism: Rethinking Agency and Structure in Organizational Analysis', *Organization Studies*, 18(1): 21–42.

Reed, M. I. (2000). 'The Limits of Discourse Analysis in Organizational Analysis', *Organization*, 7: 524–30.

Reid, D. J., and Reid, F. J. M. (2005). 'Online Focus Groups: An In-depth Comparison of Computer-Mediated and Conventional Focus Group Discussions', *International Journal of Market Research*, 47(2): 131–62.

Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Reiss, A. J. (1968). 'Stuff and Nonsense about Social Surveys and Participant Observation', in H. S. Becker, B. Geer, D. Riesman, and R. S. Weiss (eds), *Institutions and the Person: Papers in Memory of Everett C. Hughes.* Chicago: Aldine.

Rhodes, C., and Brown, A. D. (2005). 'Narrative, Organizations and Research', *International Journal of Management*, 7(3): 167–88.

Riach, K. (2009). 'Exploring Participant-Centred Reflexivity in the Research Interview', *Sociology*, 43(2): 356–70.

Richards, L., and Richards, T. (1994). 'From Filing Cabinet to Computer', in A. Bryman and R. G. Burgess (eds), *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge.

Richardson, L. (1990). 'Narrative and Sociology', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 19: 116–35.

Richardson, L. (1994). 'Writing: A Method of Inquiry', in N. K. Denzin and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative Analysis*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ritzer, G. (1975). 'Sociology: A Multiple Paradigm Science', *American Sociologist*, 10: 156–67.

Roberts, H. (1990). *Doing Feminist Research*. London: Routledge.

Roethlisberger, F. J., and Dickson, W. J. (1939). *Management and the Worker: An Account of a Research Programme Conducted by the Western Electric Company, Hawthorne Works, Chicago*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Rorty, R. (1979). *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rose, G. (2001). *Visual Methodologies*. London: Sage.

Rosen, M. (1991). 'Coming to Terms with the Field: Understanding and Doing Organizational Ethnography', *Journal of Management Studies*, 28(1): 1–24.

Rosenau, P. M. (1992). *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences: Insights, Inroads, and Intrusions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rosnow, R. L., and Rosenthal, R. (1997). *People Studying People: Artifacts and Ethics in Behavioral Research*. New York: W. H. Freeman.

Rostis, A. (2010). 'Genealogy', in A. J. Mills, G. Durepos, and E. Wiebe (eds), *Sage Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, i. 416–18.

Roulston, K., DeMarrais, K., and Lewis, J. (2003). 'Learning to Interview in the Social Sciences', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9: 643–68.

Rousseau, D. (1985). 'Issues of Level in Organizational Research: Multi-Level and Cross-Level Perspectives', in L. Cummings and B. Staw (eds), *Research in Organizational Behavior*, vol. 7. London: JAI Press.

Rousseau, D. M. (2006). 'Is There Such a Thing as Evidence-Based Management?' *Academy of Management Review*, 31(2): 256–69.

Rowlinson, M. (2004*a*). 'Historical Perspectives in Organization Studies: Factual, Narrative, and Archeo-Genealogical', in D. E. Hodgson and C. Carter (eds), *Management Knowledge and the New Employee*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 8–20.

Rowlinson, M. (2004*b*). Historical Analysis of Company Documents', in C. Cassell and G. Symon (eds), *Essential Guide to Qualitative Mehtods in Organizational Research*. London: Sage, 301–10.

Roy, A., Walters, P., and Luk, S. (2001). 'Chinese Puzzles and Paradoxes: Conducting Business Research in China', *Journal of Business Research*, 52: 203–10.

Roy, D. (1958). 'Banana Time: Job Satisfaction and Informal Interaction', *Human Organisation*, 18: 156–68.

Rubin, H. J., and Rubin, I. S. (1995). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rynes, S. L., Hillman, A., Ireland, R. D., Kirkman, B., Law, K., Miller, C. C., Rajagopalan, N., and Shapiro, D. (2005). 'Everything you've always Wanted to Know about *AMJ* (but may have been Afraid to Ask)', *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(5): 732–7.

Sackmann, S. A. (1992). 'Culture and Subcultures: An Analysis of Organizational Knowledge', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 37(3): 363–99.

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., and Jefferson, G. (1974). 'A Simplest Systematics for the Organization of Turn-Taking in Conversation', *Language*, 50: 696–735.

Salancik, G. R. (1979). 'Field Stimulations for Organizational Behavior Research', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24: 638–49.

Saldaña, J. (2009). 'Popular Film as an Instructional Strategy in Qualitative Research Methods Courses', *Qualitative Inquiry*, 15(1): 247–61.

Samuel, R. (1976). 'Oral History and Local History', *History Workshop Journal*, 1: 191–208.

Sanjek, R. (1990). 'A Vocabulary for Fieldnotes', in R. Sanjek (ed.), *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Sarsby, J. (1984). 'The Fieldwork Experience', in R. F. Ellen (ed.), *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct*. London: Academic Press.

Savage, M. (2005). 'Working-Class Identities in the 1960s: Revisiting the Affluent Worker Study', *Sociology*, 39(5): 929–46.

Scandura, T. A., and Williams, E. A. (2000). 'Research Methodology in Management: Current Practices, Trends and Implications for Future Research', *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(6): 1248–64.

Scase, R., and Goffee, R. (1989). *Reluctant Managers: Their Work and Lifestyles*. London: Routledge.

Schaeffer, D. R., and Dillman, D. A. (1998). 'Development of a Standard E-Mail Methodology', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 62: 378–97.

Schegloff, E. A. (1997). 'Whose Text? Whose Context?', *Discourse and Society*, 8: 165–87.

Schlesinger, P., Dobash, R. E., Dobash, R. P., and Weaver, C. K. (1992). *Women Viewing Violence*. London: British Film Institute.

Schneider, S. M., and Foot, K. A. (2004). 'The Web as an Object of Study', *New Media and Society*, 6: 114–22.

Schoonhoven, C. B. (1981). 'Problems with Contingency Theory: Testing Assumptions Hidden within the Language of Contingency Theory', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26: 349–77.

Schrøder, K. C. (1999). 'The Best of Both Worlds? Media Audience Research between Rival Paradigms', in P. Alasuutari (ed.), *Rethinking the Media Audience*. London: Sage.

Schuman, H., and Converse, J. (1971). 'The Effects of Black and White Interviewers on Black Responses in 1968', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 35: 44–68.

Schuman, H., and Presser, S. (1981). *Questions and Answers in Attitude Surveys: Experiments on Question Form, Wording, and Context*. San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Schutte, N., Toppinnen, S., Kalimo, R., and Schaufeli, W. (2000). 'The Factorial Validity of the Maslach Burnout Inventory—General Survey (MBI—GS) across Occupational Groups and Nations', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 73(1): 53–67.

Schutz, A. (1962). *Collected Papers, I. The Problem of Social Reality*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhof.

Schwartzman, H. B. (1993). *Ethnography in Organizations*, Qualitative Research Methods Series 27. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Scott, A. (1994). *Willing Slaves?: British Workers under HRM*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scott, A. M. (1994). *Gender Segregation and Social Change: Men and Women in Changing Labour Markets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scott, J. (1990). *A Matter of Record*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Scott, W., Banks, J., Halsey, A., and Lupton, T. (1956). *Technical Change and Industrial Relations*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Seale, C. (1999). *The Quality of Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Sebba, J. (2004). 'Developing Evidence-Informed Policy and Practice in Education', in G. Thomas and R. Pring (eds), *Evidence-Based Practice in Education*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Sewell, G. (2005). 'Nice Work? Rethinking Managerial Control in an Era of Knowledge Work', *Organization*, 12(5): 685–704.

Shaffir, W. B., and Stebbins, R. A. (1991). *Experiencing Fieldwork: An Inside View of Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Shapiro, M. (1985–6). 'Metaphor in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences', *Cultural Critique*, 2: 191–214.

Sharpe, D. (1997). 'Managerial Control Strategies and Subcultural Proccesses', in S. Sackmann (ed.), *Cultural Complexity in Organizations*. London: Sage.

Sheehan, K. (2001). 'E-Mail Survey Response Rates: A Review', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 6: ***www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol6/issue2/sheehan.html***

Sheehan, K., and Hoy, M. G. (1999). 'Using E-Mail to Survey Internet Users in the United States: Methodology and Assessment', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 4: ***www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol4/issue3/sheehan.html***

Shenoy, S. (1981). 'Organization Structure and Context: A Replication of the Aston Study in India', in D. J. Hickson and J. McMillan (eds), *Organization and Nation: The Aston Programme IV*. Aldershot: Gower.

Shrivasta, P., Mitroff, I. I., Miller, D., and Miglani, A. (1988). 'Understanding Industrial Crises', *Journal of Management Studies*, 25: 283–304.

Shuy, R. W. (2002). 'In-Person versus Telephone Interviewing', in J. F. Gubrium and J. A. Holstein (eds), *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sillince, J. A. A., and Brown, A. D. (2009). 'Multiple Organizational Identities and Legitimacy: The Rhetoric of Police Websites', *Human Relations*, 62(12): 1829–56.

Silverman, D. (1984). 'Going Private: Ceremonial Forms in a Private Oncology Clinic', *Sociology*, 18: 191–204.

Silverman, D. (1985). *Qualitative Methodology and Sociology: Describing the Social World*. Aldershot: Gower.

Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Qualitative Data*. London: Sage.

Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Handbook*. London: Sage.

Sin, C. H. (2005). 'Seeking Informed Consent: Reflections on Research Practice', *Sociology*, 39(2): 277–94.

Singh, G., Haddad, K. M., and Chow, C. W. (2007). 'Are Articles in Top Management Journals Necessarily of Higher Quality?', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 16(4): 319–31.

Skinner, B. (1953). *Science and Human Behaviour*. New York: Macmillan.

Smith, C. B. (1997). 'Casting the Net: Surveying an Internet Population', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 3: ***www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol3/issue1/yun.html***

Smith, J. K. (1983). 'Quantitative versus Qualitative Research: An Attempt to Clarify the Issue', *Educational Researcher*, 12: 6–13.

Smith, J. K., and Heshusius, L. (1986). 'Closing down the Conversation: The End of the Quantitative–Qualitative Debate among Educational Enquirers', *Educational Researcher*, 15: 4–12.

Smith, K. Clegg (2004). '"Electronic Eavesdropping": The Ethical Issues Involved in Conducting a Virtual Ethnography', in M. D. Johns, S-L. S. Chen, and G. J. Hall (eds), *Online Social Research*. New York: Peter Lang.

Smith, T. W. (1995). 'Trends in Non-Response Rates', *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 7: 157–71.

Smyth, J. D., Dillman, D. A., Christian, L. M., and McBride, N. (2009). 'Open-Ended Questions in Web Surveys: Can Increasing the Size of Answer Spaces and Providing Extra Verbal Instructions Improve Response Quality?', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73(2): 325–37.

Snyder, N., and Glueck, W. F. (1980). 'How Managers Plan: The Analysis of Managers' Activities', *Long Range Planning*, 13: 70–6.

Sokal, A. D. (1996*a*). 'Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity', *Social Text*, 46(47): 217–52.

Sokal, A. D. (1996*b*). 'A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies', *Lingua Franca*, May/June: 62–4.

Sontag, S. (2003). *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin.

Sørensen, J. B. (2004). 'The Organizational Demography of Racial Employment Segregation', *American Journal of Sociology*, 110(3): 626–71.

Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., and Dillon, L. (2003). *Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A Framework for Assessing Research Evidence.* London: Government Chief Social Researcher's Office: ***www.policyhub.gov.uk/docs/qqe_rep.pdf***

Spender, J. (1989). *Industry Recipes: An Enquiry into the Nature and Sources of Managerial Judgement*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Spradley, J. P. (1979). *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

Spradley, J. P., and McCurdy, D. (1972). *The Cultural Experience*. Chicago: Science Research Associates.

Sprokkereef, A., Larkin, E., Pole, C. J., and Burgess, R. G. (1995). 'The Data, the Team, and the Ethnograph', *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, 5: 81–103.

Sprouse, M. (1992) (ed.). *Sabotage in the American Workplace*. San Francisco: Pressure Drop Press.

Stacey, J. (1988). 'Can there be a Feminist Ethnography?', *Women's International Studies Forum*, 11: 21–7.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stake, R. E. (2005). 'Qualitative Case Studies', in N. K. Denzin. and Y. S. Lincoln (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 3rd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stanley, L., and Temple, B. (1995). 'Doing the Business? Evaluating Software Packages to Aid the Analysis of Qualitative Data Sets', *Studies in Qualitative Methodology*, 5: 169–97.

Starbuck, W. H. (1981). 'A Trip to View the Elephants and Rattlesnakes in the Garden of Aston', in A. H. van de Ven and W. F. Joyce (eds), *Perspectives on Organization Design and Behaviour*. New York: Wiley.

Starkey, K., Hatchuel, A., and Tempest, S. (2004). 'Rethinking the Business School', *Journal of Management Studies*, 41(8): 1521–31.

Stefani, L., and Carroll, J. (2001). 'A Briefing Note on Plagiarism', Assessment Series 10, ***www.sussex.ac.uk/tldu/documents/plag_ass0101.doc***

Stewart, K., and Williams, M. (2005). 'Researching Online Populations: The Use of Online Focus Groups for Social Research', *Qualitative Research*, 5(4): 395–416.

Stewart, R. (1967). *Managers and their Jobs*. London: Macmillan.

Stiles, D. R. (2004). 'Pictorial Representation', in C. Cassell and G. Symon (eds), *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*. London: Sage.

Stiles, P. (2001). 'The Impact of the Board on Strategy: An Empirical Examination', *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(5): 627–50.

Stockdale, A. (2002). *Tools for Digital Audio Recording in Qualitative Research.* Social Research Update, Issue 38.

Storey, J., Quintas, P., Taylor, P., and Fowle, W. (2002). 'Flexible Employment Contracts and their Implications for Product and Process Innovation', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 13(1): 1–18.

Strangleman, T. (2004). 'Ways of (not) Seeing Work: The Visual as a Blind Spot in WES?', *Work, Employment and Society*, 18(1): 179–92.

Strathern, M. (1987). 'The Limits of Auto-Anthropology', in A. Jackson (ed.), *Anthropology at Home*. London: Tavistock.

Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Strauss, A., and Corbin, J. M. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Strauss, A., and Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Strauss, A., Schatzman, L., Ehrich, D., Bucher, R., and Sabshin, M. (1973). 'The Hospital and its Negotiated Order', in G. Salaman and K. Thompson (eds), *People and Organizations*. London: Longman.

Sudman, S., and Blair, E. (1999). 'Sampling in the Twenty-First Century', *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 27(2): 269–77.

Sudman, S., and Bradburn, N. M. (1982). *Asking Questions: A Practical Guide to Questionnaire Design*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Supphellen, M., and Nysveen, H. (2001). 'Drivers of Intention to Revisit the Websites of Well-Known Companies', *International Journal of Market Research*, 43(3): 341–52.

Sutton, R. I., and Rafaeli, A. (1988). 'Untangling the Relationship between Displayed Emotions and Organizational Sales: The Case of Convenience Stores', *Academy of Management Journal*, 31: 461–87.

Sutton, R. I., and Rafaeli, A. (1992). 'How we Untangled the Relationship between Displayed Emotion and Organizational Sales: A Tale of Bickering and Optimism', in P. J. Frost and R. Stablein (eds), *Doing Exemplary Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Swales, J. M., and Rogers, P. S. (1995). 'Discourse and the Projection of Corporate Culture: The Mission-Statement', *Discourse and Society*, 6(2): 223–42.

Sweet, C. (2001). 'Designing and Conducting Virtual Focus Groups', *Qualitative Market Research*, 4: 130–5.

Symon, G., Buehring, A., Johnson, P., and Cassell, C. (2008). 'Positioning Qualitative Research as Resistance to the Institutionalization of the Academic Labour Process', *Organization Studies*, 29(10): 1315–36.

Tashakkori, A., and Teddlie, C. (2003). *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Tashakkori, A., and Teddlie, C. (2010). *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioral Research*, rev. edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Taylor, H. (1997). 'The Very Different Methods Used to Conduct Telephone Surveys of the Public', *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 39(3): 421–32.

Taylor, S., Bell, E., and Cooke, B. (2009). 'Business History and the Historiographical Operation', *Management & Organizational History*, 4(2): 151–66.

Terkel, S. (1974). *Working*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Thomas, R., and Linstead, A. (2002). 'Losing the Plot? Middle Managers and Identity', *Organization*, 9(1): 71–93.

Thompson, E. P. (1968). *The Making of the English Working Class*. London: Pelican.

Thompson, P. (1989). *The Nature of Work*. 2nd edn. London: Macmillan.

Thompson, P., and Ackroyd, S. (2005). 'Discussion of Sewell: A Little Knowledge Is Still a Dangerous Thing: Some Comments on the Indeterminacy of Graham Sewell', *Organization*, 12(5): 705–10.

Tiessen, J. H. (2004). 'Multinational Multilingualism on the Internet: The Use of Japanese on Corporate Web Sites', *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*, 21(2): 180–9.

Tight, M. (2010). 'The Curious Case of Case Study: A Viewpoint', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 13(4): 329–39.

Tinker, T. (2004). '"The End of Business Schools?" More Than Meets the Eye', *Social Text*, 22(2): 67–80.

Todd, P. A., McKeen, J. D., and Gallupe, R. B. (1995). 'The Evolution of IS Job Skills: A Content Analysis of IS Job Advertisements from 1970 to 1990', *MIS Quarterly*, 19(1): 1–27.

Tourangeau, R., and Smith, T. W. (1996). 'Asking Sensitive Questions: The Impact of Data Collection Mode, Question Format, and Question Context', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 60: 275–304.

Tracy, S. J., Lutgen-Sandvik, P., and Alberts, J. K. (2006). 'Nightmares, Demons and Slaves: Exploring the Painful Metaphors of Workplace Bullying', *Management Communication Quarterly*, 20(2): 148–85.

Tranfield, D., and Starkey, K. (1998). 'The Nature, Social Organisation and Promotion of Management Research: Towards Policy', *British Journal of Management*, 9: 341–53.

Tranfield, D., Denyer, D., and Smart, P. (2003). 'Towards a Methodology for Developing Evidence-Informed Management Knowledge by Means of Systematic Review', *British Journal of Management*, 14: 207–22.

Trethewey, A. (1999). 'Disciplined Bodies: Women's Embodied Identities at Work', *Organization Studies*, 20(3): 423–50.

Tripp, T. M., Bies, R. J., and Aquino, K. (2002). 'Poetic Justice or Petty Jealousy? The Aesthetics of Revenge', *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 89: 966–84.

Trow, M. (1957). 'Comment on "Participant Observation and Interviewing: A Comparison"', *Human Organization*, 16: 33–5.

Truss, C. (2001). 'Complexities and Controversies in Linking HRM with Organizational Outcomes', *Journal of Management Studies*, 38(8): 1121–49.

Tsang, E., and Kwan, K.-M. (1999). 'Replication and Theory Development in Organizational Science: A Critical Realist Perspective', *Academy of Management Review*, 24(4): 759–80.

Tse, A. C. B. (1998). 'Comparing the Response Rate, Response Speed and Response Quality of Two Methods of Sending Questionnaires: E-Mail vs. Mail', *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 40: 353–61.

Tse, A. C. B. (1999). 'Conducting Electronic Focus Group Discussions among Chinese Respondents', *Journal of the Market Research Society*, 41: 407–15.

Turner, B. A. (1983). 'The Use of Grounded Theory for the Qualitative Analysis of Organizational Behaviour', *Journal of Management Studies*, 20(3): 321–48.

Turner, B. A. (1994). 'Patterns of Crisis Behaviour: A Qualitative Inquiry', in A. Bryman and R. G. Burgess (eds), *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge.

Turner, S. (1980). *Sociological Explanation as Translation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Tüselmann, H. J., McDonald, F., and Heise, A. (2002). 'Globalisation, Nationality of Ownership and Employee Relations: German Multinationals in the UK', *Personnel Review*, 31(1): 27–43.

UK Data Archive (2009). *Managing and Sharing Data: A Best Practice Guide for Researchers*. Essex: UK Data Archive.

Urch Duskat, V., and Wheeler, J. V. (2003). 'Managing from the Boundary: The Effective Leadership of Self-Managing Work Teams', *Academy of Management Journal*, 46(4): 435–57.

Usunier, J. C. (1998). *International & Cross-Cultural Management Research*. London: Sage.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1997). 'Discourse as Interaction in Society', in T. A. Van Dijk (ed.), *Discourse as Social Interaction. Discourse Studies Vol. 2: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Van Maanen, J. (1978). 'On Watching the Watchers', in P. Manning and J. Van Maanen (eds), *Policing: The View from the Street*. Santa Monica, CA: Goodyear.

Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Van Maanen, J. (1991*a*). 'Playing Back the Tape: Early Days in the Field', in W. B. Shaffir and R. A. Stebbins (eds), *Experiencing Fieldwork: An Inside View of Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Van Maanen, J. (1991*b*). 'The Smile Factory: Work at Disneyland', in P. J. Frost, L. F. Moore, M. R. Louis, C. C. Lundberg, and J. Martin (eds), *Reframing Organizational Culture*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Van Maanen, J. (1996). 'On the Matter of Voice', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 5(4): 375–81.

Van Maanen, J., and Kolb, D. (1985). 'The Professional Apprentice: Observations on Fieldwork Roles in Two Organizational Settings', *Research in the Sociology of Organizations*, 4: 1–33.

Van Selm, M., and Jankowski, N. W. (2006). 'Conducting Online Surveys', *Quality and Quantity*, 40(3): 435–56.

Vaughan, D. (1990). 'Autonomy, Independence and Social Control: NASA and the Space Shuttle *Challenger*', *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 35: 225–57.

Vaughan, D. (2006). 'The Social Shaping of Commission Reports', *Sociological Forum*, 21: 291–306.

Venter, E., Boshoff, C., and Maas, G. (2005). 'The Influence of Successor Related Factors on the Succession Process in Small and Medium-Sized Family Businesses', *Family Business Review*, 18(4): 283–303.

Vroom, V. H. (1964). *Work and Motivation*. New York: Wiley.

Waddington, D. (1994). 'Participant Observation', in C. Cassell and G. Symon (eds), *Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research*. London: Sage.

Waddington, K. (2005). 'Using Diaries to Explore the Characteristics of Work-Related Gossip: Methodological Considerations from Exploratory Multimethod Research', *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 78: 221–36.

Wajcman, J., and Martin, B. (2002). 'Narratives of Identity in Modern Management: The Corrosion of Identity Difference?', *Sociology*, 36: 985–1002.

Walsh, D. (1972). 'Sociology and the Social World', in P. Filmer, M. Phillipson, D. Silverman, and D. Walsh (eds), *New Directions in Sociological Theory.* London: Collier-Macmillan.

Wasko, J., Phillips, M., and Meehan, E. R. (2001) (eds). *Dazzled by Disney: The Global Disney Audiences Project*. London: Leicester University Press.

Warren, C. (1988). *Gender Issues in Field Research*. London: Sage.

Warren, S. (2002). 'Show Me How it Feels to Work Here: Using Photography to Research Organizational Aesthetics', *Ephemera*, 2(3): 224–45.

Warren, S. (2005). 'Photography and Voice in Critical, Qualitative, Management Research', *Accounting, Auditing and Accountability Journal*, 18(6): 861–82.

Warren, S. (2009). 'Visual Methods in Organizational Research', in D. Buchanan and A. Bryman (eds), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Research Methods.* London: Sage.

Watson, T. (1994*a*). *In Search of Management: Culture, Chaos and Control in Managerial Work*. London: Routledge.

Watson, T. (1994*b*). 'Managing, Crafting and Researching: Words, Skill and Imagination in Shaping Management Research', *British Journal of Management*, 5S: S77–87.

Watson, T. (2000). 'Ethnographic Fiction Science: Making Sense of Managerial Work and Organizational Research Processes with Caroline and Terry', *Organization*, 7(3): 489–510.

Wax, M. L. (1982). 'Research Reciprocity Rather than Informed Consent in Fieldwork', in J. E. Sieber (ed.), *The Ethics of Social Research: Fieldwork, Regulation and Publication.* New York: Springer-Verlag.

Weaver, A., and Atkinson, P. (1994). *Microcomputing and Qualitative Data Analysis.* Aldershot: Avebury.

Webb, E. J., Campbell, D. T., Schwartz, R. D., and Sechrest, L. (1966). *Unobtrusive Measures: Nonreactive Measures in the Social Sciences*. Chicago: Rand McNally.

Weber, M. (1930). *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* London: George Allen & Unwin.

Weber, M. (1947). *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and T. Parsons. New York: Free Press.

Weber, R. (1990), *Basis Content Analysis*, 2nd edn. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Weick, K. E. (1990). 'The Vulnerable System: An Analysis of the Tenerife Air Disaster', *Journal of Management*, 16: 571–93.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weil, S. (1987). *Formative Writings 1929–1941*. London: Routledge.

Weinholtz, D., Kacer, B., and Rocklin, T. (1995). 'Salvaging Quantitative Research with Qualitative Data', *Qualitative Health Research*, 5: 388–97.

Weitzman, E. A., and Miles, M. B. (1995). *Computer Programs for Qualitative Data Analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Westwood, S. (1984). *All Day Every Day: Factory, Family, Women's Lives*. London: Pluto Press.

Wetherell, M. (1998). 'Positioning and Interpretative Repertoires: Conversation Analysis and Post-Structuralism in Dialogue', *Discourse and Society*, 9: 387–412.

Wharton, A. (1993). 'The Affective Consequences of Service Work', *Work and Occupations*, 20: 205–32.

White, H. (1987). *The Content oj the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

White, P. (2009). *Developing Research Questions: A Guide for Social Scientists.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Whittington, R. (1989). *Corporate Strategies in Recession and Recovery.* London: Unwin Hyman.

Whyte, W. F. (1953). 'Interviewing for Organizational Research', *Human Organization*, 12(2): 15–22.

Whyte, W. F. (1955). *Street Corner Society*, 2nd edn. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Widdicombe, S. (1993). 'Autobiography and Change: Rhetoric and Authenticity of "Gothic" Style', in E. Burman and I. Parker (eds), *Discourse Analytic Research: Readings and Repertoires of Text*. London: Routledge.

Wilkinson, S. (1998). 'Focus Groups in Feminist Research: Power, Interaction, and the Co-Production of Meaning', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 21: 111–25.

Wilkinson, S. (1999*a*). 'Focus Group Methodology: A Review', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 1: 181–203.

Wilkinson, S. (1999*b*). 'Focus Groups: A Feminist Method', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 23: 221–44.

Williams, M. (2000). 'Interpretivism and Generalization', *Sociology*, 34: 209–24.

Williams, M. (2007). 'Cybercrime and Online Methodologies', in R. King and E. Wincup (eds), *Doing Research on Crime and Justice.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Williams, R. (1976). 'Symbolic Interactionism: Fusion of Theory and Research', in D. C. Thorns (ed.), *New Directions in Sociology*. London: David & Charles.

Willman, P., Renton-O'Creevy, M., Nicholson, N., and Soane, E. (2002). 'Traders, Managers and Loss Aversion in Investment Banking: A Field Study', *Accounting, Organizations and Society*, 27: 85–98.

Willmott, H. (1990). 'Beyond Paradigmatic Closure in Organisational Enquiry', in J. Hassard and D. Pym (eds), *The Theory and Philosophy of Organizations*. London: Routledge.

Willmott, H. (1993). 'Breaking the Paradigm Mentality', *Organization Studies*, 14(5): 681–719.

Wilson, F. (1995). *Organizational Behaviour and Gender*. London: McGraw Hill.

Winch, P. (1958). *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Winter, R. (1989). *Learning from Experience: Principles and Practice in Action-Research*. London: Falmer.

Wolcott, H. F. (1990). *Writing up Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Wolcott, H. F. (1995). 'Making a Study More Ethnographic', in J. Van Maanen (ed.), *Representation in Ethnography*. London: Sage.

Wolfe, R., Gephart, R., and Johnson, T. (1993), 'Computer-Facilitated Qualitative Data Analysis: Potential Contributions to Management Research', *Journal of Management*, 19: 637–60.

Wolfram Cox, J., and Hassard, J. (2007). 'Ties to the Past in Organization Research: A Comparative Analysis of Retrospective Methods', *Organization*, 14(4): 475–97.

Woodward, J. (1965). *Industrial Organization: Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Woolgar, S. (1988*a*). *Science: The Very Idea*. Chichester: Ellis Horwood.

Woolgar, S. (1988*b*). *Knowledge and Reflexivity: New Frontiers in the Sociology of Knowledge.* London: Sage.

Wright, G. H. von (1971). *Explanation and Understanding*. London: Routledge.

Xian, H. (2008). 'Lost in Translation? Language Culture and the Roles of Translator in Cross-Cultural Management Research', *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management*, 3(3): 231–45.

Yardley, L. (2000). 'Dilemmas in Qualitative Health Research', *Psychology and Health*, 15: 215–28.

Yauch, C.A., and Steudel, H. J. (2003). 'Complementary Use of Qualitative and Quantitative Cultural Assessment Methods', Organizational Research Methods, 6: 465–81.

Yin, R. K. (1984). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. 3rd edn, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Yun, G. W., and Trumbo, C. W. (2000). 'Comparative Response to a Survey Executed by Post, E-Mail, and Web Form', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 6: ***www.ascusc.org/jcmc/vol6/issue1/yun.html***

Zamanou, S., and Glaser, S. R. (1994). 'Moving toward Participation and Involvement', *Group and Organization Management*, 19(4): 475–502.

Zerubavel, E. (1981). *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Zimmerman, D. H., and Wieder, D. L. (1977). 'The Diary: Diary-Interview Method', *Urban Life*, 5: 479–98.

Zuber-Skerritt, O. (1996). *New Directions in Action Research*. London: Falmer.

# Author index


## A

A Campo, C. 498, 625, 639
Abrahamson, E. 565
Ackroyd, S. 9
Addison, J.T. 317–18
Adler, N. 66
Adriaenssens, C. 656–7, 659
Ainsworth, S. 526–7, 528, 557
Alberts, J.K. 14, 68
Alderson, P. 131
Aldrich, H.E. 48–9
Alise, M.A. 630
Altheide, D.L. 291, 449, 560
Altschuld, J.W. 233
Alvarez, J.L. 307–8
Alvesson, M. 35, 432, 537, 540, 698
Andersen, M. 494
Andersen, N. 294
Anderson, N. 224
Arber, S. 313
Archer, M. 616
Argyris, C. 413
Armstrong, G. 445
Aronson, E. 49
Arthur, J. 161
Asche, S.E. 516, 516
Ashforth, B.E. 391
Askegaard, S. 221
Atkinson, P. 79, 436, 443, 445, 489, 531, 559–60, 583, 588, 594–5, 622–3, 625, 676, 698–9

## B

Baber, Z. 648
Backett-Milburn, K. 590
Bacon, N. 64, 129
Ball, K. 526, 528–30
Banks, C. 123, 125, 128, 132–3
Banks, M. 452
Bansal, P. 575–6
Barley, S. 292–4, 297, 305, 308, 406, 562
Barnes, S. 671
Barnett, R. 115
Barthes, R. 558
Bartunek, J.M. 41, 415
Bate, S. 448
Bateson, P. 277, 279
Bauman, Z. 19
Baumgartner, R.M. 235
Bazerman, C. 689
Beardsworth, A. 290, 308
Bechhofer, F. 206, 474
Becker, H.S. 22, 494–5, 498, 625, 681
Becker, S. 101, 644
Beech, N. 532
Belfield, C.R. 317–18
Belk, R.W. 221
Bell, C. 427, 700
Bell, E. 5, 35, 76–7, 79, 117, 141, 206, 325–6, 451, 455, 458, 473, 496, 551, 561, 564, 620–1
Benefield, P. 102
Berelson, B. 290
Berg, P. 207
Berg, P.O. 68, 459
Bettman, J. 291, 297
Beynon, H. 30, 306, 402, 425, 431, 439–40, 444, 704
Bhaskar, R. 615
Billig, M. 525, 528
Bitektine, I. 63
Blackburn, R. 68, 219, 472, 503, 507–8, 509–10, 512
Blair, E. 505
Blanchard, P. 283–4
Blauner, R. 308, 638
Bloor, M. 545–6
Blumer, H. 19, 393, 406
Blyton, P. 64, 129
Bobko, P. 41
Boddy, D. 428, 448
Boden, D. 522, 524
Bodgan, R. 19
Boje, D. 531–2
Bolton, A. 137, 411, 419, 452
Bond, M. 421
Booth, C. 565
Born, G. 59
Bornal, J. 471
Boshoff, C. 192
Bourdieu, P. 115
Bourke, S. 274, 279
Bowden, M. 663
Bowen, D.D. 471
Bowey, A. 546
Boyce, G. 71, 306
Bradburn, N.A. 212, 238, 256
Brannick, T. 432
Braverman, H. 276
Brengman, M. 68, 71, 187
Bresnen, M. 8
Brewis, J. 31
Brewster, C. 325
Bridgman, P.W. 169
Briggs, C.L. 227
Briner, R. 6, 98, 241, 242
Broussine, M. 291, 404
Brown, A.D. 102, 532, 532, 648
Brown, J.L. 563
Brown, L.D. 420
Bruce, C.S. 92, 119
Bruckman, A.S. 670, 670
Brunet, J.P. 565
Bryman, A. 5, 26, 29, 79, 84, 101–3, 117, 118, 141, 157, 165, 167, 169, 170, 191, 192, 196, 206, 236, 305, 325, 325, 326, 334, 342, 350, 352, 386, 397, 399, 407–10, 412–13, 455, 456, 461, 473, 480, 491, 498, 547, 571, 576–7, 581–2, 595, 598, 624, 630–1, 639–40, 643–4, 684, 689, 700, 704
Bryson, A. 55
Buchanan, D.A. 26, 29, 222, 428, 448, 452
Bulmer, M. 138, 153, 583
Bunce, D. 47, 48, 51
Burawoy, M. 42, 63, 425, 444
Burger, J.M. 125–6
Burgess, R.G. 386, 409, 436, 571, 576, 624
Burrell, C. 6, 24–6
Burrell, G. 619
Burrows, R. 459, 461
Burton, S. 493
Butcher, B. 194
Buttner, E.H. 515, 515

## C

Cable, D. 221, 223
Cadman, I. 656–7, 659
Calder, B.J. 505, 507
Cameron, J. 323
Campbell, D.T. 47, 50–1
Caplan, R. 264
Carini, R.M. 663
Carlsmith, J.M. 49
Carter, P. 26, 552
Casey, C. 403, 425, 430–1, 441, 444, 625
Catterall, M. 594

Cavendish, R. 131, 306, 434, 449
Chamberlayne, P. 471
Charmaz, K. 577–8, 583–4, 617
Chen, C.C. 298, 305, 308, 553, 560, 618
Chow, C.W. 33
Cicourel, A.V. 43, 160, 168, 170, 308, 521
Clair, R. 539
Clark, T. 523–4
Clarke, I. 416
Clegg, S. 6, 116
Clifford, J. 698
Cobanoglu, C. 664
Cockburn, C. 452–3, 455
Coffey, A. 448, 531, 559–60, 583, 588, 595, 699, 701
Coghlan, D. 414, 432
Cohen, M. 68, 294, 294, 296, 296, 305
Coleman, C. 328
Coleman, J.S. 193
Collier, P.M. 60–2
Collins, G. 66, 68, 484
Collins, M. 212
Collins, R. 19
Collinson, D.L. 449, 451, 495
Collinson, M. 9, 66, 403, 436, 444
Combe, I.A. 561
Conger, J.A. 169
Converse, J. 226, 260
Conway, N. 241, 242
Cook, T.D. 47, 50–1
Cooke, B. 564, 566–7
Cooper, C.L. 197, 236
Corbin, J.M. 441, 443, 576–7, 578–9, 583–4, 617
Corti, L. 241, 243, 313, 590
Cotterill, P. 228
Couper, M.P. 209, 664, 665
Coupland, C. 526, 529–30, 557–8
Coutrot, T. 319
Cowley, J.C.P. 502–3
Coyle, J.R. 650
Coyle-Shapiro, J. 684, 686, 687, 688–91, 706–7
Cramer, D. 157, 159, 170, 334, 342, 350, 352
Crandall, R. 128, 138–9
Crang, P. 447
Crawford, S.D. 665
Creswell, J. 692, 693–4, 697
Croll, P. 277, 280
Crowther, D.E. 561
Cryer, P. 682
Cullen, D. 60–2, 164
Cullen, J. 12, 43, 68
Cully, M. 55, 237
Culwin, F. 231, 244, 304
Cummings, L.L. 33
Cunha, M.P. 512–13
Cunha, R.C. 197, 236, 512–13
Curasi, C.F. 657, 660
Curran, J. 472
Czarniawska, B. 531, 706–7, 708

## D

Daft, R.L. 33–4
Dale, A. 313
Dalton, D.R. 169
Dalton, M. 123, 123, 128, 133–4, 389, 403, 409, 430, 433–4, 437, 441, 449, 451, 552
Davies, B. 419
Davies, C.A. 448
Davies, J. 319, 319, 328
Davis, J.A. 620
Davison, J. 554, 556–7
Deacon, D. 5, 397
Deci, E.L. 322
Deery, S. 253, 263–4, 634
Delamont, S. 280, 698
Delbridge, R. 80, 425, 435, 437, 443, 585
DeLorme, D.E. 671
DeMarrais, K. 478
Denison, D.R. 235, 235, 694–7
Denyer, D. 6, 94–5, 97–8
Denzin, N.K. 330, 387–8, 397, 698, 702
Dickson, W.J. 12, 50, 69, 435, 437
Diener, E. 128, 138–9
Dillman, D.A. 235, 238
Ditton, J. 35, 433–4, 436, 445, 495
Doloriert, C. 129
Dommeyer, C.J. 661
Dorsey, E.R. 648
Dougherty, D. 291, 554–5, 560
Drew, P. 250, 251
Duberley, J. 27, 701
Duriau, V.J. 291
Durkheim, E. 29, 31
Dyer, W.G. 67

## E

Easterby-Smith, M. 33
Easton, G. 616
Eden, C. 413–16
Edwards, P. 66, 318
Edwards, R. 308
Eisenhardt, K.M. 59, 61–2, 66
Elliott, B. 206, 240, 474
Elliott, H. 241
Ellis, C. 707
Erikson, K.T. 134
Evans, J. 102, 656
Evans, M. 663

## F

Fairclough, N. 525, 539
Fang, Y. 165
Faraday, A. 470
Faules, D. 397
Faulkner, X. 231, 244, 305
Felstead, A. 185, 321–2
Fenton, N. 5, 397
Fern, E.F. 505
Fernández, R. 325–6, 620–1
Fey, C.F. 235, 235, 694, 696–7
Fiedler, E.E. 9, 254
Fielding, N.G. 593–4
Filmer, P. 227
Finch, J. 143, 262
Fine, G.A. 440
Fiske, M. 503
Flanagan, J.C. 219
Fleetwood, S. 616
Fleming, C. 663
Fletcher, D. 430, 451
Flint, A. 116
Foddy, W. 215, 249
Fong, C.T. 115
Forster, N. 551–2, 563
Forth, J. 55
Foster, J. 313, 590
Foucault, M. 538, 566
Fowler, F.J. 187, 203, 213, 217
Franzosu, R. 297
Frayne, C.A. 42, 46–7
Freeman, C. 143, 434–5, 473, 705–6
Frege, C.M. 10–11
French, W. 671
Frey, J.H. 207
Fricker, S. 665
Fritzsche, D.J. 261
Frost, A.C. 68, 207
Frost, P.J. 33, 48–9, 68

## G

Gabriel, Y. 625, 639
Gagliardi, P. 459
Gallear, D. 10, 13
Gallie, D. 185
Gallupe, R.B. 303, 303, 305
Galton, M. 277
Gans, H.J. 438
Garcia, A.C. 655
Gardner, W.L. 274, 279, 285, 630
Garfinkel, H. 308, 521
Gash, D. 292–4, 297, 305, 308
Geer, B. 494–5, 498
Geertz, C. 101, 388, 398, 403
Gephart, R.P. 60, 68, 296, 296, 405, 492, 492, 548–9, 558, 560, 623
Ger, G. 221
Geringer, J.M. 42, 46–7
Gersick, C.J.G. 583, 586
Gevorgyan, G. 649
Gherardi, S. 418
Ghobadian, A. 10, 13
Gibbons, M. 6
Gibson, G.R. 523
Giddens, A. 7–8, 22
Gilbert, G.N. 525, 577, 615, 623, 688, 699
Gill, R. 526–7, 528
Gillingwater, D. 407, 473, 582
Grinyer, A. 130
Gioia, D. 402
Glaser, B.G. 13, 391, 441, 443, 449, 492, 577, 581, 583–4, 617
Glaser, S.R. 633, 636–7
Gleuck, W.F. 285

Glucksman, M. 434
Godard, J. 10
Goetz, J.P. 43, 395, 399
Goffee, R. 43, 58, 68, 635
Goffman, E. 435, 537
Gold, R.L. 436–8
Golden-Biddle, K. 33, 95
Goldthorpe, J.H. 590
Gomm, R. 413
Goodall, H.L. 707
Gorard, S. 129
Gottdiener, M. 562
Goulding, C. 581
Goussevskaia, A. 8
Graebner, M.E. 59
Graham, M. 221, 223
Grant, A.M. 52
Grant, D. 537–40
Greatbach, D. 523–4
Green, F. 185
Green, M.C. 209
Greene, J.C. 52
Greenwood, D. 414
Greenwood, R. 6, 8
Grele, R.J. 471
Grey, C. 545, 708
Grimmer, M. 630
Grint, K. 17–18, 558
Grinyer, A. 130, 167
Guba, E.G. 43, 395, 398–9, 401, 629
Gubrium, J.F. 387, 496, 522
Guest, D.E. 250, 251
Gully, S. 99
Gummesson, E. 5, 414
Gusfield, J. 689

## H

Haber, S. 182
Hackley, C. 536–7
Hackman, J. 25, 156, 165
Haddad, K.M. 33
Halfpenny, P. 410
Hall, E. 473
Hall, R. 191–2
Hamel, G. 524
Hamilton, D. 280
Hamilton, R. 402
Hammersley, M. 19, 43, 79, 102, 399, 401, 410, 413, 436, 443, 487, 590, 632
Hammond, P. 700
Haney, C. 123, 125, 128, 132
Hansen, S.E. 209
Hanson, D. 630
Hantrais, L. 63
Hardy, C. 412–13, 525, 526–7, 528, 538, 538, 557
Hare, R.D. 101, 623
Harfield, T. 402
Harkavy, I. 414
Harlow, G. 487
Harper, D. 222
Harré, R. 615
Harris, H. 292–3, 293, 300–2, 303, 305
Harris, L.C. 351
Hartog, D.N. 534–5, 536, 536
Haslam, C. 5, 407, 473
Haslam, S. 127
Hassard, J. 25, 567, 619
Hatchuel, A. 115
Hawkes, N. 351
Hayano, D. 448
Healey, M.J. 473
Heap, J.L. 19
Hearn, J. 449
Heath, C. 523
Heberlein, T.A. 235
Hegewisch, A. 325
Heise, A. 68, 314
Heisley, D.D. 475
Helms Mills, J. 566
Heritage, J. 522–4
Heron, J. 420
Herzberg, F. 195, 219, 291, 472, 552
Heshusius, L. 629
Hesse-Biber, S. 594
Hewson, C. 659, 664, 670
Heyes, J. 431
Hilton, G. 48–9
Hine, C. 655
Hine, V. 652
Hinings, C.R. 6, 8, 167
Hisrich, R.D. 471
Ho, K.C. 648
Hochschild, A.R. 27, 394, 614, 636–7
Hodson, R. 291, 305, 306–7, 308, 623–4
Hoegl, M. 12, 43, 68
Hofstede, G. 20, 51, 65, 68, 129, 157, 165, 195, 227, 565, 649
Holbrook, A. 209, 595
Holdaway, E.A. 167
Holliday, R. 137, 138, 439–40, 447, 452
Holman Jones, S. 707
Holmberg, R. 28, 640
Holstein, J.A. 387, 387, 495, 522
Holsti, O.R. 290
Homan, R. 133
Hoque, K. 320
Howell, J.M. 48–9, 68
Hoy, M.G. 661
Huberman, A.M. 621
Hudson, J.M. 670, 670
Hudson, S. 282–3
Hughes, E.C. 391
Hughes, J.A. 19, 629
Hummerinta-Peltonäki, L. 630
Humphreys, M. 440, 449
Hunter, W.C. 298
Hurworth, R. 475
Husserl, E. 18
Hutt, R.W. 503
Huxham, C. 413–15
Huxley, P. 241, 243
Hycner, R.H. 574
Hyde, P. 53, 68

## I

Insch, G. 291, 560
Iverson, R. 253, 263–4, 634

## J

Jack, L. 63
Jackall, R. 403, 490
Jackson, N. 26, 291, 552
Jackson, S. 166
Jackson, T. 65, 157–8, 226–7
Jacques, R.S. 566
Janis, I.L. 516
Jankowski, N.W. 663
Jayaratne, T.E. 31, 418–19
Jaynes, D. 539
Jefferson, G. 521, 525
Jenkins, G.D. 276–7, 279–80
John, I.D. 530, 623
Johns, G. 165
Johnson, P. 25, 701
Johnson, T. 296
Jones, C. 405
Jones, G. 405
Jones, M.L. 101

## K

Kabanoff, B. 68, 294, 294, 296, 296, 305
Kacer, B. 643
Kalton, G. 194
Kam, J. 32
Kanter, R.M. 61, 397, 436, 497, 524, 638–9
Kanungo, R.N. 169
Kaplan, R.E. 420
Kärreman, D. 537, 540
Keat, R. 615
Keenoy, T. 534, 538, 540
Kelly, G.A. 223, 415
Kelly, L. 493
Kendall, L. 653
Kendall, P.L. 503
Kent, J. 143
Kessler, I. 684, 686, 687–92, 706–7
Kholief, A. 63
Khondker, H. 648
Kiecker, P. 208
Kiely, T. 506, 511
Kieser, A. 564–5
Kirk, J. 43, 395
Kitzinger, J. 513–14, 595
Kivits, J. 660
Knight, K. 317–18
Knights, D. 9, 60
Koestner, R. 322
Kolb, D. 50, 428
Kondo, D.K. 701
Konik, J. 418–19
Kosinets, R.V. 654
Kostova, T. 12
Kowalczyk, R. 616
Kozinets, R.V. 655

Kreiner, K. 459
Kristof-Brown, A. 225
Krosnick, J.A. 209, 260
Krueger, R.A. 510, 516
Kuhn, T.S. 24, 629
Kunda, G. 291, 425, 445, 554–5, 560, 705
Kvale, S. 476, 479–80
Kwan, K.M. 616

## L

Lamias, M.J. 665
Lane, N. 351
Langley, A. 404
Latreille, P. 317–18
Laurent, D. 659, 664
Lavin, D. 212
Lawlor, M.A. 134
Lawrence, P.R. 9
Lawrence, T.B. 391
Lawson, M. 118
Layder, D. 26
Lazarsfeld, P. 157
Learmonth, M. 5
Leavitt, H. 114–15
LeCompte, M.D. 43, 395, 399
Lee, C.K. 133, 138
Lee, R.M. 60, 61, 62, 87, 330–1, 593–4
Legge, K. 538
Leidner, R. 394, 428, 467
Lepper, L. 50, 68, 306
Levy, S.J. 475
Lewis, J. 478
Lincoln, Y.S. 43, 387–8, 395, 398–9, 401, 702
Linstead, A. 23
Linstead, S. 59, 495
Livingstone, S. 507
Llewellyn, N. 459, 461
Locke, K. 584
Locke, K.D. 33, 95
Locke, R. 114, 577
Lofland, J. 5, 205, 404, 447, 474, 483, 571, 584
Lofland, L. 5, 205, 404, 447, 474, 483, 584
Lombardo, M. 284
Lonkila, M. 584
Lorsch, J.W. 9
Louhiaia-Salminen, L. 278
Lowe, K.B. 630
Lower, M.A. 233
Lucas, R. 191, 196, 234
Luk, S. 65
Lunt, P. 507
Lupton, T. 389, 425
Lutgen-Sandvik, P. 14, 68

## M

Maas, G. 192
McCabe, D. 60, 62
McCall, M.J. 279–80, 284
McCalman, J. 428, 448
McCartney, J.L. 623
McClelland, D.C. 220
McCloskey, D.N. 689
McCrone, D. 206, 474
McCurdy, D. 432, 440, 469
McDonald, F. 66, 68, 314
MacDonald, R. 116
McDonald, S. 32, 431
McEnery, J. 283–4
McGuigan, J. 558
McGuinness, I. 407, 473, 582
Mackaness, W. 416
McKeen, J.D. 303, 303, 305
McKeever, L. 117
Maclaren, P. 594
McLure, M. 102
McNulty, T. 491
McPhail, C. 19
Madge, C. 657, 660
Madriz, M. 514, 516
Maitlis, S. 391
Malinowski, B. 241
Mangabeira, W. 595
Mangham, I. 537
Mangione, T.W. 203, 213, 234
Mann, C. 656–7, 659
Manucharova, N. 649
Marchioro, C. 191–2
Markham, A. 653–4
Marsden, R. 10
Marsh, C. 57, 194, 618
Marshall, J. 60, 62, 66, 68, 392, 396–7, 403, 420, 441, 482, 489, 491
Martin, B. 641, 641
Martin, J. 59, 547, 547
Martin, P. 277, 279
Martin, P.Y. 578
Martinko, M.J. 274, 279, 285
Marx, G.T. 79, 80
Marx, K. 257
Maslach, C. 166
Maslow, A. 164
Mason, J. 395
Mausner, B. 195, 219, 472
Mauthner, N.S. 590
Maynard, D.W. 212
Maynard, M. 418–19
Mayo, E. 566
Mays, N. 96
Mazza, C. 307–8
Mead, G.H. 19
Meehan, E.R. 65
Meindl, J.R. 298, 305, 308, 553, 560, 618
Meltzer, B.N. 19
Merton, R.K. 8, 11, 13, 503
Meyer, A.D. 451
Meyer, G. 292–4, 297, 305, 308
Meyer, J. 326
Mies, M. 30–1, 418
Miles, M.B. 571, 594, 621
Milgram, S. 48, 123, 125–6, 128, 133, 136
Milkman, R. 59, 62, 428, 430, 430, 467, 482, 508, 637–8, 644
Millen, D. 494
Miller, D. 653–4
Miller, M.L. 43, 395
Miller, R.L. 471, 531, 617
Miller, A.G. 125
Mills, A.J. 566
Millward, N. 55
Miner-Rubino, K. 418
Mintzberg, H. 271, 273, 273–4, 276–7, 279, 285, 520, 565
Mirchandani, K. 418, 639
Mishler, E.G. 227, 531
Mitchell, J.C. 62, 409
Mitchell, T. 236
Mizen, P. 137, 411, 419, 452
Mohr, L.B. 404
Molina-Azorin, J.F. 630
Moore, J. 291, 560
Moreo, P.J. 664
Morgan, D.L. 508–9, 511, 629, 632
Morgan, G. 24–6, 619
Moriarty, E. 661
Morris, J. 64
Moser, C.A. 194, 599
Moynihan, J. 328
Mulkay, M. 525, 615, 623, 688, 699
Mumby, D. 539
Murphy, E. 644
Murphy, L. 291, 560
Murray, J.A. 274, 279
Musson, G. 470
Myers, K.K. 635

## N

Nelson, J.E. 208
Newby, H. 700
Newell, A. 221
Nicholl, J. 644
Nichols, T. 306, 402
Nishihara, C.M. 489
Noble, S.M. 489
Noblit, G.W. 101, 623
Nummela, N. 630
Nysveen, H. 650

## O

Oakley, A. 30–1, 143, 228, 418–19
O'Cathain, A. 644
O'Connor, H. 657, 659–60
Oetzel, J.G. 635
O'Gorman, C. 274, 279
Oishi, S.M. 207
Okely, J. 571
Oldham, G. 25, 156, 165
Oppenheim, A.N. 203
Ormrod, S. 452–3, 455
Orton, J.D. 548–9
Oswick, C. 534, 538, 540

## P

Paavilainen, E. 61
Parboteeah, K.H. 12, 43, 68
Park, C. 117
Park, P. 420
Park, S.H. 335
Parker, M. 130, 430–1, 435, 445, 489
Parker, T. 538
Parry, O. 590
Partington, D. 584
Patterson, M.G. 162
Patton, M.Q. 400
Patwardhan, A. 489
Pawson, R. 52
Peñaloza, L. 453, 455, 459–60
Penn, R. 152
Peräkylä, A. 43
Perlow, L.A. 68, 408, 426, 435, 610, 641–2, 690–1, 706–7
Peters, T. 524
Petras, J.W. 19
Pettigrew, A. 6, 8, 57, 59, 59, 61, 68, 131, 192, 404, 483, 491, 496–7, 550
Pfarrer, M.D. 291
Pfeffer, J. 115, 161
Phillips, D.L. 226
Phillips, M. 65
Phillips, N. 525, 538, 538, 539, 563
Plano Clark, V.L. 694, 697
Piekkari, R. 61
Pielstick, C.D. 100
Pierce, W. 323
Piercy, N.F. 351
Pink, S. 137, 446, 452–3, 455, 457, 460–1, 700
Pittaway, L. 97
Platt, J. 615, 617
Plummer, K. 470–1, 700
Podsakoff, P.M. 169
Poland, B.D. 484–5
Pole, C.J. 137, 411, 419, 452
Pollert, A. 59, 306, 449–50
Pondy, L. 446
Popay, J. 96
Pope, C. 96
Porras, L.E. 648
Porter, S. 616, 617
Potter, J. 22, 525–6, 525, 528–9, 530
Prasad, P. 389, 390, 391–2, 408, 437, 469, 482–3, 579, 583
Pratt, M.G. 33, 399
Presser, S. 212–13, 226, 252, 256, 260
Prichard, A. 298
Pringle, R. 467, 491
Proctor, M. 313
Prothero, A. 134
Psathas, G. 522
Pugh, D.S. 15–16, 48–9
Punch, M. 144
Putnam, L. 534
Putnam, L.L. 413
Pyle, J. 421

## R

Rafaeli, A. 346–7, 482, 491–2, 642
Ragin, C.C. 625
Ram, M. 403, 408, 432, 439, 458–9, 465, 466
Ramirez, I. 415
Raney, A.A. 650
Ranson, S. 8, 167
Rawlinson, M.B. 473
Reason, P. 420
Reay, T. 5–6
Reed, M.I. 26, 538, 540, 540, 616
Rees, C. 66
Regan, L. 493
Reger, R.K. 291
Reicher, A. 182
Reicher, S. 127
Reid, D.J. 503, 506
Reid, F.J.M. 503, 506
Reinharz, S. 419, 449, 451, 494
Reiss, A.J. 644
Rexroat, C. 19
Reynolds, L.T. 19
Rhodes, C. 533
Rhodes, K. 102
Riach, K. 700
Richards, L. 584
Richards, T. 584
Richardson, L. 689
Riessman, C.K. 531, 589
Roberts, H. 6, 700
Rocklin, T. 645
Roethlisberger, F.J. 12, 50, 69, 435, 437
Rogers, P.S. 534, 534, 536
Rorty, R. 699
Rose, G. 452
Rose, J. 565
Rose, R. 152
Rosen, M. 425
Rosenau, P.M. 697
Rosenthal, R. 48
Rosnow, R.L. 48
Rostis, A. 566
Roth, K. 575–6
Roth, P.A. 19
Roulston, K. 478
Rousseau, D. 5–6, 67, 98
Rowan, B. 326
Rowan, J. 420
Rowlinson, M. 565, 565–6
Roy, A. 42, 63, 65
Roy, D. 42, 425, 434, 437, 691
Rubery, J. 152
Ryan, R. 322
Rynes, S.L. 33

## S

Sacks, H. 521, 525
Salancik, G.R. 281
Saldaña, J. 470
Sambrook, S. 129
Samuel, R. 471
Sanjek, R. 447
Savage, M. 590
Scandura, T.A. 633
Scarbrough, E. 194
Scase, R. 43, 58, 68, 635
Schegloff, E.A. 521, 524–5
Schlesinger, P. 508
Schoonhoven, C.B. 9–10
Schrøder, K.C. 644
Schuman, H. 212–13, 226, 252, 256
Schutte, N. 159, 165
Schutz, A. 1, 167–8, 402
Schwartzman, H.B. 13, 554
Scott, A. 616
Scott, J. 241, 308, 545, 548, 550, 558
Scott, W. 64, 129
Seale, C. 387, 401
Sebba, J. 6
Sempik, J. 101, 644
Senge, P. 524
Sewell, G. 9, 539
Shaffir, W.B. 700
Sharpe, D. 430, 437
Sheehan, K. 661, 665
Shotland, L. 128
Shrivasta, P. 5
Shuy, R.W. 207
Siehl, C. 547, 547
Sillince, J.A.A. 648
Silverman, D. 387–8, 389, 393, 498, 522, 595, 621–2, 638
Simon, B. 277
Simon, H.A. 221
Sin, C.H. 136
Sinclair, A. 708
Singh, G. 33
Skinner, B. 164
Slater, D. 653–4
Smart, P. 94–5, 98
Smircich, L. 619
Smith, C.B. 664
Smith, D. 118
Smith, J.K. 629
Smith, K. 672
Smith, M. 413
Smith, T.W. 189
Smyth, J.D. 666
Snyder, N. 285
Snyderman, B.B. 195, 219, 472
Sokal, A. 702
Sontag, S. 453
Sorensen, J.B. 68, 314
Spencer, L. 399–400
Spender, J. 468–9, 484
Spradley, J.P. 205, 432, 440, 469
Sprokkereef, A. 594–5
Sprouse, M. 35
Stacey, J. 449–50
Stake, R.E. 59–61
Stanley, L. 595
Starbuck, W.H. 398
Starkey, K. 5, 115

Stebbins, R.A. 700
Steeves, H.L. 648
Stephens, M. 498, 639
Steudel, H.J. 634
Stewart, A.J. 31, 419
Stewart, F. 656–7, 659
Stewart, K. 635, 656, 671
Stewart, R. 241, 242, 243, 270, 618, 631, 637
Stiles, D.R. 222
Stiles, P. 621–2, 633, 643
Stokes, D. 68, 219, 503, 507–8, 509–10, 512
Storey, J. 636
Strangleman, T. 411
Strathern, M. 707
Strauss, A.L. 13, 21–2, 391, 441, 443, 449, 492, 576–7, 579, 581–2, 583–4, 617
Sudman, S. 212, 238, 256, 505
Supphellen, M. 650
Sutton, R.I. 346–7, 642
Swales, J.M. 534, 534, 536
Swan, J. 8
Sweet, C. 506, 657
Symon, G. 33

## T

Tashakkori, A. 628, 630, 692–3
Taylor, F. 566
Taylor, H. 195, 206
Taylor, S. 206, 325–6, 473, 551, 561, 564, 620–1
Taylor, S.J. 5, 19
Teddlie, C. 628, 630
Tempest, S. 115
Temple, B. 595
Terkel, S. 405
Thomas, R. 23
Thompson, E.P. 546
Thompson, P. 9, 313, 590
Thorp, R. 5
Thorpe, R. 206, 473, 546, 551, 561, 620
Thorson, E. 650
Tiessen, J.H. 652
Tight, M. 62
Tilley, N. 52
Tinker, T. 115
Todd, P.A. 303, 305
Tracy, S.J. 14, 68
Tranfield, D. 5, 94–5, 97–8
Traugott, M.W. 665
Trethewey, A. 419, 419
Tripp, T.M. 634
Trow, M. 494, 498
Trumbo, C.W. 669
Truss, C. 409, 639–40
Tsang, E. 616
Tse, A.C.B. 665
Turner, B. 418
Turner, B.A. 550, 560, 578
Tüselman, H.J. 68, 314

## U

Urch Druskat, V. 220
Urry, J. 615
Usunier, J.C. 64

## V

Van Dijk, T.A. 538
Van Maanen, J. 50, 428, 435, 440, 448, 623, 698, 703–4, 706
Van Selm, M. 663
Vaughan, D. 5, 60, 549, 559
Venkatraman, N. 41
Venter, E. 192
Verburg, R.M. 534–5, 536, 536
Vince, R. 291, 404
Vroom, V.H. 164

## W

Waddington, D. 405
Waddington, K. 244
Waddington, R. 405
Wajcman, J. 641, 641
Waldersee, R. 68, 294, 294, 296, 296, 305
Wall, T.D. 52
Walsch, J. 253, 263–4, 634
Walsh, D. 22
Walters, P. 67
Ward, B. 664
Warren, C. 451
Warren, S. 137, 411, 452–3, 454–5
Wasko, J. 65
Waters, J.A. 565
Watson, T. 81, 83–4, 408, 425, 428, 440, 449, 451, 705, 705, 707
Wax, M.L. 141
Weaver, A. 594, 625
Webb, A. 407, 473
Webb, E.J. 226, 281, 305, 330–1, 397, 631, 633
Weber, M. 12, 16, 18–19, 169
Weber, R. 290
Weick, K.E. 531
Weil, S. 545, 545
Weinholtz, D. 643
Weitz, B. 291, 297
Weitzman, E.A. 594
Welsh, C. 61
Wengraf, T. 471
West, M. 47, 48, 51
Westwood, S. 449
Wetherell, M. 525, 528–9, 530
Wharton, A. 263
Wheeler, J.V. 220
White, H. 564–5
White, P. 84
Whittington, R. 11, 62
Whyte, W.F. 414, 465, 468, 495
Wickham, J. 66, 68, 484
Widdocombe, S. 526
Wieder, D.L. 241
Wilkins, A.L. 67
Wilkinson, S. 504, 508, 510, 513–14
Williams, E.A. 633
Williams, M. 656, 669, 671
Williams, R. 574
Willman, P. 467, 483
Willmott, H. 9–10, 26
Wilson, D.C. 526, 528–30
Wilson, F. 417
Winch, P. 19
Winter, R. 415
Wittgenstein, L. 19
Wolcott, H.F. 448, 682, 684
Wolfe, R. 296
Wolfram Cox, J. 567
Woolgar, S. 558, 689, 699
Workman, J. 191–2
Wright, G.H. von 16, 547
Wright, J.P. 547

## X

Xian, H. 488
Xie, J. 165

## Y

Yardley, L. 399
Yasai-Ardekani, M. 167
Yauch, C.A. 634
Yin, R.K. 60–2, 66
Yun, G.W. 669

## Z

Zamanou, S. 633, 636–7
Zerubavel, E. 691
Zimbardo, P. 48, 123, 125, 127–8, 132–3
Zimmerman, D.H. 241
Zinkhan, G.M. 671
Zuber-Skerritt, O. 420

# Subject index

*A page number in bold indicates reference to a box on that page.*

## A


ABI/INFORM 97, 104, **307**
absenteeism 160
absolute size of sample 187
abstract of dissertation 681
ABTA **282**
Academic Journal Quality Guide 32
*Academy of Management Journal* **33**, **161**, 391, **406**, 633
*Academy of Management Learning and Education* **115**
*Academy of Management Review* 104
Academy of Management (AoM) 122
access 427–8, **429**, 430–2, 435–6, 691
  Internet 671
  key informants 436
  ongoing 435–6
  overt versus covert 433–5
accessibility 98, 557
accountability 290, 685
achievement 220
acknowledgements in dissertation 681
acquiescence 226
action research **414**
active audience 558, 563
ad hoc manner 564
ad libitum sampling 279
adjacency pairs 524
*Administrative Science Quarterly* 25, 33, **307**, 633, 689
Advanced Institute of Management **108**
advantages of content analysis 305–**6**
advantages and disadvantages of online vs face-to-face methods of research **657–9**
advantages and disadvantages of online vs postal questionnaire surveys **668–9**
advantages of qualitative interviewing 496–7
advertisements 554, 563
aesthetic critique 588
aesthetics 455, **458**
affiliation 142, 534
*Affluent Worker studies* 151, 590, 617
Afro-Caribbean women 705–**6**
agency 531
*aide-mémoire* 455, 467
aiding measurement 634
AIM Fellows 97
Airline Pilots Association 548
Airtours **282–3**
alliteration 536
alternative paradigm 297
alternative positioning 530
Amadeus 107
ambiguity 26, 47, 163, 167, 226, 255–6, 536, 616
American Academy of Management (AoM) 122
American Psychological Association 122–3
  *Code of Ethics* 122
American Psychological Association *Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct see* APA
American Sociological Association (ASA) 132
American Sociological Association, *Code of Ethics* 132
American West 453
analysis grounded in data 522
analytic habits 625
analytic induction 571, **573**, **574**, **575–6**, 576
analytic interruptus 571
analytic mentality 526
Andersen Consulting 294
anecdotalism 595, 625, 638–9
Anglo-Saxon values 64
Annual Employment Survey (AES) 315
annual percentage rate (APR) 440
anonymity 123, 129, **130**, 131, **132**, **134**, 136, 449, 489, 496, 513, 670–1, **672–3**, 683
answer phones 207
anthropology 424, 448, 495
anti-realism 525, 531, 540
anti-realist 525, 531, 540
anything goes **124**
AoM *Code of Ethical Conduct* 122, 128, 129, 132–3, 137
APA 123
appendices to dissertation 683
applicability 305, 633
applying nodes in coding process 600
approaches to mixed methods research 631, 631–43, **632**
  filling in the gaps 636–7
  interpretation of relationships between variables 639, 640
  logic of triangulation 631, 633–4
  problem of generality 638, 639
  qualitative research facilitates quantitative research 634–**5**
  quantitative research facilitates qualitative research 635–**6**
  research issues and participants' perspectives 637–8
  solving a puzzle 643
  static and processual features 637
  studying different aspects of phenomenon 640–1, 642
arbitrariness 563–4, 647
archive materials 330
argument **679–80**, 682, 690
argument against mixed methods research 629
  embedded methods argument 629
  paradigm argument 629
argumentation 533
arithmetic mean 344, 372
ASA 122
Asch experiments 516, **516**
asking questions 248–63
  open or closed questions? 248–9
Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA) 282
Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Quality Guide 32
Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) 670
Association of Qualitative Market Research Practitioners 505
Aston Studies **16**, 48–**9**, 167, 398
asynchronous data collection 652, 655–6, 659
asynchronous focus group 657
asynchronous focus group study **656**, 660
AT&T 554
atheoretical approach 308
Atlas/ti 594
attached questionnaires 661
attitude 256, 285, **317**, 661, 664
attractive nuisance 571
attrition 59, 244
authenticity 308, 398–9, 449, 545, 547, 550–2, 558, 653, 702, **705**

authorative accounts 703, 705
auto-anthropology **707**
auto-ethnography 129, **448**, 706, **707**
autobiographies 546, 548
autonomy **170**, **307**
average leadership style (ALS) 67

# B

badging 5
Bank Wiring Observation Room 13, 554
Banxia 416
Barrett, Matthew 535–6
basic operations in SPSS **361**
basic terms in sampling 176
BBC 59
behaviour **164**, 243, 253, **271**, 280, 443, 460, **475**, 479, 595, 619, 620, 625, 664, 669
behaviour sampling 279
behaviour of travel agents **282**
behavioural flexibility **191**
beliefs 26, 253, **479**, 625
benefits of starting early **678**
bias 30, 94, **98**, 177, 180, 194, 206, 223–4, 226, **283**, 290, 413, 417, **492**, 648, 664, **700**
bibliography 112
  role of 115
  software **113–14**
*Big Issue* 459, 461
biographical accounts **547**–8
bit player 699
bivariate analysis 346–50, **346**
  comparing means and eta 350
  contingency tables 347, **347**
  Pearson's *r* 347–8
  Phi and Cramér's *V* 350, 356
  relationships not causality 346
  Spearman's rho 349
bivariate correlations **377**
blogs in word-of-mouth marketing **655**
BMW **650**
body language 489
bogus reflexivity **537**
Boolean searches 648
bowler hats **556–7**
boxplots 345, **345**, 372
Bradford & Bingley bank 554
brainstorming 51, 191
Branson, Richard 18, 548
breaking down quantitative/qualitative divide 614–25
British Academy of Management **108**
British Crime Survey 323
British Fire Service 25
British Household Survey (BHPS) **315**, 317
British Market Research Bureau (BMRB) 325
British Police officers 625, 639
British Social Attitudes (BSA) **315**, 323
British Sociological Association 134, 136, 460
  *Statement of Ethical Practice* 134
British Sociological Association *Ethical Guidelines* (BSA) 122, 134, 460
bureaucratization 101, 144
*Burke's Peerage* 305
burnout **166**
Burr, Donald 298, **553**, 560, 618
business and management information, strategies for 106–7
business process re-engineering 452
business research 29–30, **61**, **554**, 706
  criteria 41–2
  personal values 29, 30
  politics of 32–3
  practical issues 35
business research strategies 3–37
busyness 453
buy-in 536
buyout 638

# C

Cadbury 546, 548
*California Management Review* **114**
call centres **219**, 253, **263–4**, **486**, 489, 634, **677**
Cambridge Journals Online 105
CAPI 209
captive population 656
capturing complexity 584
capturing employer's perspective 686
CAQDAS 410, 587, 593–5, 625
  lack of agreement about utility of 594–5
  no industry leader 594
case study design 59, **68**, 686
cases 59, 60–**61**, 62–3, 68, **370**, 633
  types of 61–3
catalytic authenticity 399
categories in grounded theory **579**, 583
causality **49**, 163, 416
caution 558, 647
census **176**, 193, 263, **321**, 323
Centre for Creative Leadership **284**
*Challenger* space shuttle disaster 5, 60, 549, 559
challenges and constraints of length **683**
changes in recording figures **319**
Changing Workforce Programme (CWP) **53**
characterization 615
charismatic leadership **49**, **53**, 169, **535**, 618
Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development 105
chatroom users' responses **670**
chatrooms 651, 652, 653, 657, 669–70
chi-square 355, 372–3, **375–6**
Chicago factory study 63
Chicago School 425
child employment **137**, 419, 452
Chinese Whispers 115
chronology record 273
Citroën cars 558
claimant count 327–8
classic experimental design 45, **46**–9
  and validity 45–9
click moment 589
clicking room 425
closed questions 203–4, 238–**9**, **257**
  advantages 204, 250
  disadvantages 251
  matching question and answers **257**
closed v. open question **252**–3
  steps and considerations 585–6
cluster sampling 182, **182**, 184, 206
code-and-retrieve process 593–5
coded text 587
coding 204, **251**, 273, **275**, 299, 571, **578**, 584–9, **588**, 597, 624
  avoiding rater bias **290**
  manual 300, **301**, 308
  potential pitfalls in devising schemes 300, 301, 303
  problems with 588–9, **589**
  schedule 292, 299–300, **299**, **302**, 624
  steps and consideration in 585–6
  turning data into fragments 587, 588
coding closed questions **251**
coding dictionary **293**
coding frame 204, 681
coding in grounded theory **578**
coding in NVivo 597–602
  applying nodes in coding process 600–2
  coding stripes 602, **604**
coding sheet for university tutors **275**
coding strips 602
coding a very open question **249**
cognitive mapping 415–16, **416–17**
Cohen's kappa **280**
cohort study 58–9
cold war **566**
collaborative research **31**, 419–20, 455
*Collapse of the American Management Mystique* 114
*Columbia* Accident Investigation Board Report 559
combining paper with Web survey **663**
combining structured interviews with self-completion questionnaires **237**
commensurability **25**–6
Commission Report of 9/11 559–60
commitment 26, **161**, 440, 449, 494, 534, **620**, 623, 629, 659–60, **705**
common mistakes when asking questions 258–60, **258**–60
common sources of error in survey research **203**–4, 250
common-sense reasoning 521
common-sense thinking 18
commonality 629
communication 102, 273, 289–90, 489, **506**, 525, 533, 546, 595, 647
communication-based methods 652
companies **652**
comparative analysis **66**
  level of 67
comparative design 63–**4**, 65–6, **68**
comparing means and eta 377–8

comparison of results for closed and open questions **252**
compatibility 656
complete observer 437
complete participation **432**, 437
complexity **28**, 59, 67, 140, 320, 653
computer-aided content analysis **294–5**, **296**
computer-assisted interviewing (CAPI) 209
computer-assisted qualitative data 593
computer-assisted qualitative data analysis: using NVivo 593–607
computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) 209
computer-based performance monitoring **528**
computer-generated message **528**, 671
computerization 483
computing new variables 367–**8**
concept cards 391, **579**, 583
concepts 153–4, **156**, 157, 162, 406, **407**, 415, 466, 578, 583, 594
concepts in qualitative research 393–**4**
concepts and their measurement 153–7
  dimensions 157
  indicators 154–**5**
  measurement 154
  using multiple-indicator measures 156–7
conceptual framework **16**
conceptualization 169, 560, 583
conclusion of dissertation 682
concurrent validity **159**–60, **162**
conducting analysis of websites **649**
conducting focus groups 505–13
  asking questions 511–12
  beginning and finishing 513
  how many groups 507
  level of moderator involvement 510–11
  selecting participants 511
  size of groups 508–9
  tape recording and transcription 505–6
conducting interviews 210–18
  asking questions 211–12
  clear instructions 213
  introducing the research 210–**11**
  know the schedule 210
  leaving 217
  probing 215–16
  prompting 216–17
  question order 213, 214–15
  question sequence **215**
  rapport 211
  recording answers 212–13
  training and supervision 217–18
conferencing software 656, 659
confessional tales **704**
confidentiality 129, **130**, 131, 136, **211**, 513, 590, 651, 670–1, 683
confirmability 43, 395, 398
conflicts of interest 142
connotative elements 561
consistency 158, 161, 238, **695**
constant comparison 577
construct validity **159**–60, 633
constructing intertextual coherence 95
  non-coherence 95
  progressive coherence 95
  synthesized coherence 95
constructing rhetoric **677**
constructionism 20, 21–**3**, **22**, **27**, 526, 583–4, 614, 618, 676
constructionist 526, 583–4, 614, 677
constructivist **22**, 583–4
consumer behaviour **475**
consumer research **221**
Consumer Trends 107
consumerism 653
contact record 273, 621
contact summary sheet 621
content analysis 249, 289–308, **289**, **291**, 292, **293**, **297**, **303**, **554**, 618, 623
  advantages 305–**6**
  disadvantages 308
  HRM **307**
  qualitative research on the workplace **306**–7
content analysis dictionary 300
content analysis spanning thirty-six years **306**
content specific legitimation **529**
context 97, 403, 443, 521, 588, 620
context-sensitive approaches **28**, 531, 537–8
  critical discourse analysis 538–9, **539**
context-specific legitimation **529**
contingency table 189, **251**, **352**, 372, **375**, 380
contingency theory 10
contingent repertoire **688**
continuing workplaces 59
continuous recording 277
contract breach 687
contrast 534, 622
contrastive rhetoric 588
contrasts between quantitative and qualitative research 410–12
contrived observation **272**, 276, 281, 330
control group 45
control variables 686
controversy **142**, 260, 327, 505, 531
controversial 101, 509
convenience sampling 190–1, **191–2**, 441, 489
convenience stores **642–3**
convergent invalidity **161**
convergent validity **159**–60, 328
conversation analysis **521**, **523**, **524**, 621
convincing 676
COPAC 106
copyright 140–41, **460–1**, 671–**2**
corporate architecture 460
corporate mission statements 534, **534**, 536
corporate social responsibility 440, 526, 528, 529–31, **529**, 538, 558
correlation 158
correlations output for age **378**
Council for Excellence in Management and Leadership **115**
courage 292–3, **293**, **295**, 300
courage and managerial decision-making 293–4, 303
conversational interviewing 441
covert access 433–5, **433**
covert observation 123, 133–4, 433–**4**
covert research 134, 671, **672**
craft skill 526
crafting research 83–**4**
Cramér's *V* **346**, 350, 372–3, **375**–6
Creative Club 107
Creative Commons licences 140
credibility 33, 43, 117, 308, 395, 396, **430**, 435, 440, 545, 548, 550–2, 558, 623, 676, 684, 704
criminal behaviour **28**, 640
criteria in business research 41, 41–5
  reliability 41
  replication 41–2
  validity 42, 43–4
criteria for evaluating research questions 81, **82**
criteria of successful interviewer **476**
critical case 62
critical discourse analysis (CDA) 525, 528, 538–**9**, 571
critical hermeneutic approach 563
critical incident method 219–**20**
critical incident technique **472**
critical incidents 219, **219**, **472**
critical realism 16–**17**, **52**, 538–**9**, 616
critical realist **616**
critical realist ethnography **617**
criticisms of structured observation 285
  on the other hand 285
critique of qualitative research 408–9
  difficult to replicate 408
  lack of transparency 409
  problems of generalization 408–9
  too subjective 408
critique of quantitative research 167–8
  criticisms 167–8
Cronbach's alpha 159, **162**, **166**, 170
cross-cultural approaches 64
cross-cultural research **65**–6, 319, 656
cross-cultural validation study **187**
cross-national comparison of work orientations **317**
cross-referencing discourse studies 530
cross-sectional design **53**–4, 56–**7**, 60, 63, **68**, 163, 165
  structure of 56–7
crosstabs **373–6**
cultural dynamics 696
cultural traits 694, 696
curriculum vitae (CV) 561–2
cut to the chase 5
cybercafés 653
cyberspace 652–3
cynicism **166**

# D


*Da Vinci Code* **118**
*Daily and Sunday Telegraph* 105
data analysis with SPSS 368, 368–80
  comparing means with eta 377–**80**
  generating
    arithmetic mean, median, standard deviation and range 372
    bar chart 368–**9**
    contingency table, chi square and Cramér's *V* 272–4
    contingency table with three variables 380
    frequency table 368–**9**
    a histogram 371
    Pearson's *r* and Spearman's rho 374
    a pie chart 371
    scatter diagrams 374–7
data collection 16, 26, **28**, 35, **44**, 85, 173, 320, 415, **483**, **572**, 629–30, 633, 637, 640, 643, 647, 651–2, 669, 681, **706**
data collection error 196
data editor 362, 367
data management 139–40, 321
data processing error 196
Data Protection Act 130, 140
data sources 331, 452, 691
Data Viewer 361, **362–3**, 363, **364**
Datastream 107
deception 136, 137–8, 283, 489
Decision Explorer 416
deconstructive reflectivity **701**
decontextualization 514–15, 594
deductive and inductive theory 11–14, **12**, **27**, 708
deductive theory 11–13, **12**, 60, **620**
defining search parameters 108–10
delayering 23
Delta Airlines 27
Demos 105
denotative elements 561
departments 297
dependability 43, 395, 398
designerism 159
designing the self-completion questionnaire 238–40
  clear instructions about how to respond 240
  clear presentation 238
  do not cramp the presentation 238
  keep question and answers together 240
  Likert scale 239–40
  vertical or horizontal closed answers? 238, **239**
desk work **273**
deskilling 9
determinants 526
determining attitudes to corporate websites **650**
deviant activities 495
dialogic form of writing 699
dialogical struggle 538
diaries **245**, 285, 331, **545**, 546, 548, 564
diaries as form of self-completion questionnaire 240–3, **241–3**
  advantages and disadvantages 243–4, **244–5**
dichotomous variables 341, **346**
differences between quantitative and qualitative research strategies 27
differences between structured and qualitative interview 466–7
different methods of administering a survey **666–7**
different thresholds for inclusion **319**
differentness 696
difficulties in making cross-cultural comparisons **319**
digital audio recording **486–7**
digital recorder 444–5
direct questions 477, 480
direct quotation referenced for 15+ years **114–15**
direct quotations **483–4**, **483**–4, **702**
disablist language 681
disadvantages of content analysis 308
disagreements 559
disasters 5, 60, 492, 548, 550
discourse analysis 22, 525–6, **525**, **527**, 540
discourse analytic questions **526**
discourse of organization **539**
discourses of the mind **527**
discrete dimensions 301
discrete missing values 364
discursive event 538
discussion in dissertation 682
disempowerment 528
disinterested spectator 437
Disney Corporation 588
Disney project **587**–8
Disney theme parks 596
Disney, Walt 547
Disney World 5, 79, 193, 206, 461, 480, 491, **562**, **587**, 595
Disneyland 562
Disneysization of Society 105, 455, **456–7**
disruption 133, 505, **691**, 704
dissertation project 72, 684, 706, 708
distortion 212, 253, 552, 558
divergence 552
documentary reality 559
documents as sources of data 544–64
'dodgy dossier' 117
Dolly's socks 447
downsizing 23, **620**, **685**
drama and executive action **537**
drug abuse 640
dynamics **9**, **28**, 508, 637, **691**, 697


# E


e-research: internet research methods 647–73
EBSCO 104, 111
ecological fallacy 328–**9**
ecological validity 43–4, 48, 49, **159**
Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) 138
  recommendations for ethical review 143–4
  *Research Ethics Framework* 139, 141
*Economist, The* 105, **108**, **114**
education 323
educative authenticity 399
effectiveness **46**, **161**, 691, **694–5**, 695, **696**
efficacy **99**, **166**
effort bargain 496
electric-shock experiments 48, **125–6**, 128, 133
electronic brainstorming 51
electronic databases 104, 105–6, 291
  using industrial classification codes 111
electronic eavesdropping **672**
elite groups 305
email 104, 236, 525, 651–3, 656, 660, 669, 671
email addresses 663
email alerts 104–5, **666–7**
email surveys 661, 664
emancipation 418, 494
embarrassment 212, 214, 481
embedded questionnaires 661
embeddedness 558
embodied identity **419**
emerging concepts **407**
emotional exhaustion **264**
emotional labour 27–8, **394**, 428
emotionalism **387**, 467, **479**
empirical realism **17**
empiricism 10, **10**, 564, 615, **701**
empiricist repertoire 623, **688**
employee–employer relationship 685–6
employment status **321**, 405
employment tribunals 305, **318**
empowerment repertoire 529, 695
encountering the unexpected 495
end justifies the means **124**, 134
Endnote **113–14**
*Enqête Ouvrière* 257
Enron 289, 290, 293
ensuring equivalence **187**
epistemic reflectivity **701**
epistemological considerations 15–17, 20, 564, 619
epistemological position **564**
epistemology 614
epistemological implications 629
equal opportunities 436
Equal Opportunities Commission 105
equivalence 66
equivalence sampling 185
erosion of student grant system 196
error in survey research 196–**7**, **203**, 413
error variance 356
errors 305, 329, 334, 552
errors in statistical significance **354**–5
ESRC *Research Ethics Framework* 138, 139, 141, **143**, 313, 590

eta 350
ethical considerations 440, 496, 552
  ethical and legal considerations 138–9
  student research project **131**
ethical considerations in e-research 669–70, 671
ethical decision-making 143–4, 190
ethical fieldwork dilemma **138**
ethical issues 655
ethical issues on changes in the NHS **672**
ethical issues on TV **127**
ethical principles 122, 128–38
  deception 136–7, 138
  harm to non-participants **129**
  harm to participants 128–9, 671
  invasion of privacy 136
  lack of informed consent 132–5
ethical problems **433**
ethical transgressions 123–**4**, 138
ethical violation 123
ethics in business research 122–43
ethics committees **126**
ethnic minorities **321**
ethnicity 193, 441
ethnicity critique 588, 599, 603
ethnicity of interviewers 226
*Ethnograph, The* 594–5
ethnographers 404, 436, 438, 441
ethnographic coding **585**
ethnographic content analysis (ECA) **291**, 560
ethnographic field notes 558, 590
ethnographic methods 641
ethnographic particulars 526, 531
ethnographic realism **705**
ethnographic research 133, 432, 434, 621
ethnographic writing **701**, **704**
ethnography 69, 419, **426**, **443**, 495, 616, 624, 653–**4**, 703
  ending fieldwork **448**
ethnography and participant observation 424–51
ethnomethodology **387**, 521, **700**
ethnostatistics 623
Europa 107, 328
European Community Studies **315**
European Foundation for Management Development **115**
European Union 138, 140, 328
European works councils 318
evaluating self-completion questionnaire 232–7
  advantages of 232–3
  disadvantages if 233–4
  steps to improve response rated to postal questionnaires 234–5
evaluation research **52**, 415
evasiveness 681
evidence 704
evidence-based management 5–**6**, **28**
example of mixed methods research 692–7
  discussion 694, 696–7
  four case studies 695
  introduction 693, 694
  lessons 697
  methods 693
  organizational culture and effectiveness 694–5
  research questions 695
  Russian context 694
  testing the model: comparative study 695
example of qualitative research 689–92
  discussion 689, 691
  implications 689, 691–2
  introduction 689, 690
  lessons 692
  methods 689, 691
  presentation of main themes 689, 691
  review of the literature 689, 690–91
example of quantitative research 684–8, 684–9
  discussion 687
  introduction 685–6
  lessons 685, 687–8
  methods 685, 686–7
  results 685, 687
  theory of hypotheses 685, 686–7
exclusion of sectors 193, 197, **319**, 624
executive action **537**
exhaustion **166**
Expenditure and Food Survey (EFS) **316**
experiential authority 703
*Experiment, The* **127**
experimental design 45, **68**, 283
  significance of 52
experimental group 45
experiments **554**
explained variance 356
explanation 16
explanatory case **62**
exploitation 30, 41, 228, 418
external reliability 395
external validity 43, 48, 56, 61, **159**, 165, 193, 278, 395, 633

## F

face validity 47, **159**–60
face-to-face interviews 488–9, 653, 656, 660
face-to-face surveys 206, 209, 211, 216, **283**
facesheet variables 595
facilitating theoretical work 584
facilitator 502
fact-finding 6, 10
factor analysis 20, **166**, 169, **170**
factorial validity **166**
failure to measure full effects **319**
fake identity 671
false consciousness 494
Family Expenditure Survey (FES) 323
family and friends **429**
fantasy interaction **672**
fatigue 12, 484
feedback 32, 679
female employment **66**
female entrepreneurs 418, **515**
female managers 641, **641**
feminism 30–1, **417**–18, 434, 449, 699
feminist ethnography 449–51, **450**
feminist research 493, 644
feminist research in business **417**
feminist research and interviewing in qualitative research 493–4
feminist research practice 419
feminist writers 30
fiddles 425, **434**
field experiment 45, **46**–8
field notes 444–5, **446**, **554**, 593, 595–6, 624
  types of 447, 448
field stimulations 276, 281, **282**, 283–4
fieldwork 437
films 552
filter questions 209–10, 213, **214**, 233, 662
*Financial Times* 86, 105
fine-grained approaches 520–31, 537
  conservation analysis 521–2, **521**, 523, 524–5
  discourse analysis 525–6
fishing for named person 473
fixed choice questions 203
fleeting contacts **242**
flexibility 101, **170**, 191, 405–6, **407**, 465, **469**, 495, 530, 666
  in the interview 485–7
focal sampling 279
focus group **205**
focus group as feminist method 514–15
focus groups 465, 502–515, **503–4**, **507**, **508**, **509**, **515**
  asking questions 511–**12**
  beginning and finishing 513
  feminist method 514–**15**
  less structured approach to **513**
  level of moderator involvement 510, **510–11**
  selecting participants 511
focused interview **205**, 503
follow-up on questionnaire survey **235**
follow-up questions 477, 660
footnotes **705**
Ford Administration 549–50
Ford factory, Dagenham 30
Ford Foundation 548
Ford Motor Company 425, **458**, **704**
formal moment 563
four themes in discourse analysis **527**
four traditions of qualitative research **387**
four-paradigm framework 619
fragmentation 588–9, 594
Franklin, Benjamin 481
FranTech 440
free node 599, **599**
free text diaries 241
free trade 538
Freedom of Information Act 559
French factory worker **545**

frequency tables 368–**9**, 380, 625
full field notes 447
funding **142**
funeral business 561–**2**
further operations in SPSS 381
  printing output 381
  retrieving your data 381
  saving your data 381

## G

Game of Death **126**
Gantt chart **77–8**
gatekeepers 33, 428, 436, **461**, 625, **672**, 681
gender 181, 193, 195, **321**, 352, 403, 432, 441, 505, 625, 639
  strategies 636
General Household Survey (GHS) 107, 320, 323, 329
General Market Information Database (GMID) 107
General Motors 425, 428, 467, 482, 508, 547, **547**, 637–8, 644
general strategies of qualitative data analysis 574–6, 574–7
  analytic induction 574–5, **575–6**
generalizability 61, 66, 163, **164**–5, 277, 409, 505, 644
generalization 13, 49, 63, 163–4, **164**, 190, 226, 408–9
  limits to 195–6
generalizing from random sample to the population **185–6**, 353
generative mechanism 538, 540, 616
genre boundaries **707**
getting help in designing questions **265**
getting most from your reading 94
getting started **99**
getting started in SPSS 362–8
  beginning SPSS 362
  computing new variable 367–**8**
  defining variables 363–4
  entering data in the data viewer 362–3
  recoding variables 364–7
ghost writers 547
GICS **183**
Giddens's structuration theory 8, 22, 691
Global Disney Audiences Project 65
global ethnography **444**
Global Industry Classifications Standard (GICS) **183**
globalization 538, **685**
going native **239**, 403, **438**, **439**
good practice 169
Google 106, **107**, 115, 648
grand theories 7–10, **8**
greater breadth of coverage 497
grounded theory 13, 391, 393, 406, 442, 449, 548, 571–2, 574–5, **576**, 577, **581**, 595, 615, 617
  criticisms 583–4
  memos 581–**2**, 606
  outcomes of grounded theory 578, **580**
  tools of 577
group conformity **516**
group interaction in focus group 513–14
group interview **205**, 465, 473
growth need strength 163
*Guardian, The* 105, **293**, 300
guinea pig effect **281**
gym users **335–8**, **339–40**, 342–**4**, **345**, **347**, **363**, **662**

## H

hacking 651
Hammersley's classification of mixed methods approaches **632**
hanging around 431, 440, **654**
harassment **14**
harm
  to non-participants **129**
  to participants 128, 132, 134
*Harvard Business Review* 104, **307**
Harvard referencing system 111–12, **112–13**
Harvard VI Psychosocial Dictionaries 300
Hawthorne effect **50**
Hawthorne studies 12–13, 19, 43, 69, 417, 435, 437, 554
hazards 555
headline-punchline 535
health maintenance organization (HMO) 390, 392
Hephaestus Corporation 431, 441
hermeneutics 16, 19, 563
HERMES Corporation 20
heroic director **532**
Hewlett Packard *see* HP
hidden activities 495
hierarchy 21, 297, 320, 428
High Performance Work Systems 410, 640
high-quality data 314
HISS 532
histograms 343–4, 371
historic turn 564–5
historical analysis 564–5, 567
historiography **564**
history 47
history interviews **470–1**
hitting a brick wall 93
hormone replacement therapy (HRT) 351
hospital **207**, **532–3**, 584
hospital information support system *see* HISS
hospital merger **616**
how the masses think **450**
HP 409, 639–**40**
HP Way 639
HRM 4, 83, 161, 292, **307**–8, 409, **513**, 538, 551, 616, 639, **640**
HTML 662
human resource management *see* HRM
hyperlinks 648
hypotheses **28**, **49**, 63, 84, 160–**1**, 173, 409, 415, 448, 579, 615–16, **621**, 624, 634, **649**, 682, 686–7

## I

IBM 20, 65, 129, 165
ICI 8, **59**, 61, **68**, 131, 483, 496–7, 550
'icy hearts and shrunken souls' **115**
identification 102, 534, 536
identity 27, **53**, 102, 129, **419**, **533**, 590, 641, **701**
identity and structuration **533**
ideological critique 599–600
idiographic approach 60
IiP 79, 106, 206, 320–21, 326, 561, **620**
imaginary data **348**
impact and importance 399
importance of argument **679–80**
impressionist tales **704**
in-depth interview **205**, 391, 635, **654**
incentive schemes 546
incidents 276, 391, 560, 624, 634, 637
inclusion thresholds **319**
inclusiveness 275, 531, 623–4
incommensurability 25–6, 629
incompetent plagiarism 118
inconsistency 213, 215, 634
indicators 154, **154–5**, 158, 644, 665
  using multiple 156–7
indirect questions 478
indirectly involved workers **319**
individual heroics 391, 691
individualism 67, 164, 195, 639, **649**
Indsco Corporation 61, 436, **638**–9
inducements 516
inductive research project **14**
inductive research strategy **573**, 692
inductive theory 11–15, 11–**14**, **20**, **27**, 60, **620–1**
industrial classification codes **111**
industrial espionage **138**
industry classification systems **182**–4
influence of author's biography on research values **31**
influences on conduct of business research 29–35
  personal values 29, 30–31
  politics of business research 32–3
  practical considerations 35
informal economy 328
informants 133, 253, 423, 436, 441, 639
informants sampling, snowball **192**–3, 491
information technology 625
informed consent **123**, 134–**5**, **461**, 670, **672–3**
  lack of 132–6, 671
informed paradigm 298
INGENTA website 105
inheritance **582**
innovation 97, **170**, 301, 635

insider information 436
insider research 432
insider status 448
insider view of strategic change **402**
instant messaging 669
Institute for Public Policy Research 105
institution expectations 72–3
intelligence 220
intensive interviewing **205**, **466**
intensiveness 704
inter-coder reliability 300, **304**
inter-coder variability 204
Inter-Departmental Business Register **55**
inter-interviewer variability 203
inter-observer consistency **158**–9
inter-textuality 559
interaction 226, 431, 459–60, 504, 511, 521, 523, 595, 641–2, 651, **692**
interaction effects of pre-testing 48
interaction of history and treatment 48
interaction of selection and treatment 47
interaction of setting and treatment 47–8
intercultural approaches 64
internal reliability 158, 160, **162**, 395
internal reports 544
internal validity 42, 47, 48, 51, 52, 56, **159**, 395, 633
International Network for Visual Studies in Organizations *see* inVisio
international participants 656
international research **65**
international respondents 656
International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) **317**
internet **105**, 116–17, 144, 331, 506, 557–8, 647, 665, **673**
  ethical concerns 671
internet message types 670, 671
internet as object of analysis 648–51
Internet service providers (ISPs) **654**, 664
internet use in Trinidad 653, **654**
interpretation 275–6, 308, 328, 653, **677**
interpretation–reinterpretation moment 563
interpretative repertoires 528, **528**, 530
interpreting data 320, **589**
interpreting documents 560–67
  hermeneutics 563
  historical analysis 564–7, **564**, **565–6**
  qualitative content analysis 560
  semiotics 561–3, **562**
interpreting qualitative data **589**
interpreting questions 478
interpretivism 16–17, **17–18**, 18–20, **27**, 101, 401, 505, 563, 617–18, 623, 629, 652, **677**
interpretivist epistemology 564, 614
interruption 273
intersubjective meaning 530
intertextuality 539
interval/ratio variables 341, 344, **346**, 348, 350
intervention 97–8, 415, **450**
interview by watching films **470**
interview contexts 205
  computer-assisted 209
  more than one interviewee 205–6
  more than one interviewer 206, **218**
  in person or by telephone 206, 207–9, **207**, **208**
interview guide 467
interviewee responses **622**
interviewees and distance **479**
interviewing for first time **478**
interviewing managers 473
interviewing in qualitative research 465–98, 493–4
intimates 133, 434, 449
intra-coder reliability 304
intra-coder variability 204
intra-interviewer variability 203, **203**
introducing questions 477
introduction to dissertation 681
intrusion 30, 206, **450**, 496–7, 530, 622
invasion of privacy 136, **137**
Investext 107
Investors in People *see* IiP
inVisio 452
Iowa school 19
IQ tests 41, 42
ironic response to HRM **532**
irony 533
ISI Web of Knowledge 104
ISO country codes **302**
issues of reliability and validity 279–80
  reliability 279, 280
  validity 280
issues resistant to observation 496
italics 523
iterative 13
iterative strategy 574, 691

# J

Jaguar car plant 35, 455, **458–9**
Japanese **652**
Japanese factory **701**
Japanese management 297
Jeep Cherokees 453
jet-plane ethnography 418, **448**
job advertisements **303**, 305
Job Characteristic Model 165
job characteristics **156**, 165, 167, 277
job competency **635**
Job Diagnostic Survey 25, 156, 167
job motivation **25**, 47
job satisfaction **28**, 47, **64**, 154–**5**, 157, 160, 214, 263, **306**, **317**, **635**
job security **317**
job specifications 559
job-seekers 221
jobs for life 639
jotted notes 447
*Journal of Management Studies* 115, 633, 685
*Journal of Mixed Methods Research* 630, 692
Jumping for Jelly Beans 552

# K

keeping recorder going **488**
key informants 436
keywords 98, 103, 108–9, **109**, 648
kick in the arse (Kita) 552
kinds of questions 477–8, **477**
King, Martin Luther 226
KITA 552
knowledge 20, **22**, 228, 253, 558, 576, 676, 697–8, **698**, **700**
knowledge creation 308
knowledge production 6
knowledge translation **6**

# L

laboratory experiment 45, 48, **127**, 283, 285
  on leadership **49**
labour disputes 328
Labour Force Survey *see* LFS
Labour Market Trends 328
labour process theory **9**, **25–6**
lack thoroughness 94
laddering up/down 415
language 506, 520, 531, 537–8, 540, 618, 623, 652, **698**, **701**
language in qualitative research 520–40
latent content 290
lavatory **434**
leadership 17, 20, **28**, **49**, 52, 67, **99**, 191, 220, 534, 625, 639–40
*Leadership Quarterly* 630
leadership research **553**
learning 67, 102, **533**
learning from others **109**
learning how to interview **470**, **479**
learning the native language 495
learning NVivo 596–607, **596**
  coding 597–606
  creating nodes 598
  final thoughts 607–**8**
  memos 606–7
  opening an existing NVivo project 607
  saving an NVivo project 607
learning/change **533**
legitimate authority repertoire 529
legitimate researchers 671
less intrusive in people's lives 496–7
letters 544–6, 548, 564
level of analysis 67
level of statistical significance 353
LFS 313, **316**, **321**–2, 323
liberalism 538
life history 69, **205**, 405, **470–71**, 531, 546–7, **549**, 617, **700**
life in work repertoire 529
Likert scales 143, **155**, **162**, **170**, 216, 226, 238, **239**–40, 253–4, 619, **635**, **650**, 665
limitations of focus groups 515–16
limits to generalization 195–6
*Lingua Franca* **703**

linguistic data 452
linguistic structure 290
linguistic turn 698–**9**
linking with practice 584
lip service 583
list 535
list of contents in dissertation 681
listening to the drawing's story 404
listservs 669, **672**
literature review 85, 91–2, **103**
  conceptualizing a 92–3
  electronic databases 104–7
  getting most from your reading 94
  hitting a brick wall **93**
  narrative review 101–3
  reasons for writing **103**
  searching for business information 103, **110**, 313
  systematic review 94, 95–101
literature review in dissertation 681
logic of comparison 52–3
logico-scientific genre **707**–8
longitudinal case 62, 69
longitudinal design(s) 57–**8**, **59**, **68**, 165
  case study **59**, 63, **68**
longitudinal research 63, 158, 163, 497, **497**
looking for accountability 530
looking for business information 103
Looking Glass simulation 283–**4**
looking for rhetorical detail 530
lurking 651, 653, 655, 671

# M

McDonald's 394, 428
magazines 293, 544, 552, 560, 618
Magic Kingdom **438**, 605
mail record 273
main preoccupations of qualitative researchers 401–7
  concepts and theory 406, **407**
  description and emphasis on context 403–4
  emphasis on process 404, 405
  flexibility and limited structure 405–6, **407**
  gaining insider view of strategic change **402**
  seeing through eyes of people being studied 402
main preoccupations of quantitative researchers 163–7
  causality 163
  generalization 163–4, 165
  measurement 163
  replication 165, 167
main steps in qualitative research 389–92, **390**
major types of observation research **272**
male domination 449, 495
male managers **641**
male values 30
malleability 494
Management & Organizational History 567
management research **701**, 706
management theory **707**
managerial decision-making **293**, 300
managerial initiatives **551**
managerial work **274**
managers participation in meetings **523**
managers and their jobs **242**
managers and workers **532**
managing resources 76–8
manifest content 290
manipulation 45, 51, 451, 558
marginalization 514, 528
market research **504**–5
Market Research Society *see* MRS
marketing management textbooks **536–7**
Marlboro cigarettes 453
Marx, Karl 257–8
masculinity 195, **417**–18, 444, **451**
Maslach Burnout Inventory 165–**6**
Maslow's hierarchy of needs **164**
mass media 289, 292–3, **295**
mass media outputs 552
Massachusetts institute of Technology *see* MIT
material reality 531, 540
maturation 47
mean **186**
meaning 227, 545, 548, 558, 563, 618–19, 622, **695**
means **380**
measurement 163, 634
measurement by fiat 160, 168, 170
measurement as a change agent **281**
measurement validity 42, 54, 159
mechanisms 97, 223, 530, 595
median 344, 372
memory 256, 260, **271**
memos 46, 283, 544, 550, 581–3, **582**, 584, 606–7, 608
mental labour 428
mental notes 447
mentality 555
messages 290
meta-analysis **96**, **98–9**, **322–3**
meta-ethnography **96**, **99–100**, 623
meta-narratives 699
metaphors 13–**14**, 67, 404, 533–4, **553**, 560, 688–**9**, **704**, 708
methodological reflexivity **701**
metonymy 533
MG Rover plant **68**
micro-ethnography **427**
microcomputers 625
microphone 476, 506
microwave ovens **453**, 455
middle range theories 7–11, **9**
mind and body discourses 527
mini movie **650**
Minitab 594
Mintel 107
Mintzberg's categories of basic activities **271**, **273**, **274**, 276–7, 285
Missenden Code 139, 142
missing data 234, 338
missing values 361, 363, 364, **365**
mission statements 21, 525, 531, **534**, 536, 559, 618, **695**
MIT 435, **703**
mixed methods research **28**, 234, 628–43, **642–3**
  case study **631**, **638**
  rise of mixed methods research 630–33, **631–2**
Mobile acres 433
mobile phones 207–8
mode 344
moderation 502, 507
moderator 502, 504–5, 507
  involvement 510–12, **510**, **511**, 514, 515, 657
moderator involvement 514, 515–16, 656
modernism 567
monetary incentives 236
mono-method research 644
monotony 12
morality 490
MORI Financial Services **656**
morphogenetic cycle **616**
motherhood 493
mothers **706**
motivation 163–4, 195, 220, 298, **322**, 467, 660
Motivation-Hygiene theory 552
MRS's *Code of Conduct* 122, 126, 128–30, 133, 136
MSR *Code of Conduct* 137
MUDs 653
multi-stage cluster sampling 181, 182, 184, **184–5**
multi-strategy research 628
multi-user domain *see* MUD
multinational company websites **652**
multiple interviewers **218**, **474**
multiple-case study designs 63, 66–7
multivariate analysis 322, 350–2
  Could the relationship be spurious? 351
  Could there be an intervening variable? 351, 351–2
  Could a third variable moderate the relationship? 352
Murphy's Irish stout 561
museums **581**
myopic fact-collecting 564
mystery shopper **282–3**, 283

# N

NAICS 111, **183**
*naive empiricism* 10
narrative analysis 531–**3**, **532**, 571–2, 589
narrative research in organizations **533**
narrative review **96**, 101–**2**, 103
NASA 4–5, 60, 549

National Society for Quality through Teamwork 67
National Statistics Online 328
nationality critique 588
natural experiments 50
natural science epistemology 15–17
natural science model 19, 27, 615–16
naturalism **44**–5, **387**, 436, 496, 504, 521, 622
naturalistic emphasis 496, 622
naturalistic life stories **471**
nature of business research 5–7
nature of qualitative research 386–419
nature of quantitative research 150–70
negotiation 21, 403, 427, 430, 431–2, 435
neo-positivism 617
netiquette 665, 669
netnography **654**
Network for Visual Studies in Organizations *see* inVisio
networking 97, **523**
new paradigm 420
newsgroups 670
newspapers **105**, 194, 289, 290, 292–3, 300, 305, 307, 405, 544, 552, 560, 618
Nexus UK 105
NHS 5, **51**, **53**, 79, 139, 487, **672**
Nippon CTV 425
no-show rate 508
nodes **598–9**, **605**
  applying in coding process 600, 601, 602
  searching text 603
nominal variables 341, **346**, 350
nomothetic 60
non-coherence **95**
non-manipulable variables 56
non-manual workers 664
Non-numerical Unstructured Data Index Searching and Theorizing *see* NUD*IST
non-participant observation **272**
non-probability sample 170, **176**–7, 277
non-random sample 194
non-reactive method 305, 544
non-response sampling **176**–7, 188–9, 665
non-sampling errors **98**, **176**, **197**
non-sexist writing **680**
non-spurious 351
normative standards 253
North American Industrial Classification System *see* NAICS
notes **112–13**, 433
NUD*IST 594–5
null hypothesis 353–**4**
number of focus groups **507**–8
numbers vs words 410
numeric referencing system 111–12
NVivo 76, 97, 243, 594, 595, **596–8**
  final thoughts 607
  Is CAQDAS like quantitative data analysis software? 594–5
  openng existing project 607
  saving NVivo project 607

## O

obedience to authority **125–6**, 128
objectivism 20–1, **22**, 26–**7**, **453**, 583, 614, **701**
Observation Room investigators 13
observation schedule 271, 275–6
Observational Research and Classroom Learning Evaluation *see* ORACLE
observer-as-participant 437–**8**, 440–1, **450**
observing behaviour 271–**2**
observing jobs **276**
OCB 686–7, **687**
Office for National Statistics (ONS) **316**, 323, 647
official statistics **319**, 327–8
  condemning and resurrecting 329
  form of unobtrusive measure 330
  reliability and validity 328–9
older workers **527**–8
online communication 647
online communities 652, **654**, 655, 661, 665, 669
online ethnographers 655
online ethnography 651, 655
online focus groups 656, 659–60
online personal interviews 660
online social surveys 647, 651, 661–9
  email surveys 661
  mixing modes of survey administration 663
  overview 669
  sampling issues 663–6
  web surveys 662–3
ontological authenticity 399
ontological considerations 20–23, 619
  constructivism 21–3, **22**
  objectivism 21
ontological exaggeration 616
ontological status 559
open or closed questions 248–9
open questions 204, 233, 248–**9**, 665–6
  advantages 248–9
  disadvantages 249
opening an existing NVivo project 607
operationalization 151, 154, 169
operationism 169
opportunism 35, 428, 489, 490
opportunistic sampling 490
opportunity for cross-cultural analysis 318
opportunity for longitudinal analysis 317
ORACLE 277
oral history interview **205**, **470**, **546**
oral history tapes 545
ordinal variables 341, **346**
Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) 328
organization studies **565**
  archaeo-genealogical approach **566**
  factual approach **565**
  narrative approach **565**
organizational assimilation 634–**5**
organizational beliefs about customers **555**
organizational citizenship behaviour *see* OCB
organizational climate **162**
organizational context 685
organizational culture 292, 294, 308, 459, **547**, 561, 625, 633, 637, 639, **694**, 695, **696**–7
Organizational Culture Inventory 634
Organizational Culture Scale (OCS) 636
organizational death and loss **458**
organizational development **59**
organizational disaster **549**
organizational documents 550–2, **551**
organizational ethnographers **439**, 550
organizational ethnography 425, 425–**6**, **705**
organizational identity 648
organizational politics 414
organizational reality 633
organizational research, factors that influence **29**
organizational sense-making 531
organizational values 305, 308
orientation to work 617
orthodoxy 595
other approaches to structured interviewing 218–25
  critical incident method 219–**20**
  projective methods, pictorial and photo elicitation 220–1
  repertory grid technique 223–**5**
  verbal protocol approach 221–**3**
other de-legitimation **529**
other ethical considerations 138–41
other forms of structured observation 281, 283–4
  field stimulation 281–3
  organizational simulation 283
other researchers' data 313
  advantages of secondary analysis 313, 314–15, 317–18
Other, the 699
outcomes 97
overt access 433–4
overt behaviour 285
overview 498, 540
*Oxford Dictionary of English, The* 116
OzCo 59

## P

panel conditioning effect 59
panel study 58–9
  of female employment **66**–7, **68**
paper-based questionnaire 666
paradigms 24–6, **24–5**, **31**, 629–30, 706

Paragon Corporation 390–2, **469**
part-time work 191, 196, **318**
participant observation 60, 272, 404, 424, **424**, **426**, **427**, 436, **440**, 494, 531, 614, 622, 629, 684, 691
  advantages 495–6
  v qualitative interviewing 496–7
participant-as-observer 437, 438, **440**
participative research 419–20, **420**
particularization 61
patient trail **222**, 452
patterns of association 54
Pearson's *r* **346**, 347–8, 374, 377
peer review 32
people 435, 621, 635
People Express 298, **553**, 618
perceived social consensus 42
personal construct theory 415
personal documents 545–8
personal values 29, 30, **31–2**
personnel problems 133
persuasion **428**, 536, 676, 706
phenomenology 18, 18–19, 52, 67, 293, 297, 401, 403, 504, 583, 614, 640–1, 644, 693, **700**
phi **346**, 350, **375**, **376**
Philips 536
photo elicitation 220–1, **222**, 452, **475**
photo-interviewing **475**
photographs 140, 298, 420, 445–6, 452, **453–5**, **458–9**, **461**, 544, 553–4, **554**, **555**
physical discourses **527**
physical traces 330
pictorial elicitation 220, **222**
pie chart 344, 371, **371**
pilfering 35, 123, 133, 434, 496
piloting 262–3, 303, 466, 491, 624, 633
piloting and pre-testing questions 262–3
pipeline accident 60, 296, 405, **549**
plagiarism
  avoiding 116–18, **117**
  copyright and **118**
planning research projects 72–86
  doing research and analysing results 86–7
  formulating suitable research questions 79–81
  managing time and resource 76
  planning for your research 85–6
  thinking about your research area 73
  using your supervisor 74–5, **82**
  what your institution expects 72–4
  writing your research proposal 84–5
police constabularies 648
polite persistence 473
political parties 503
politics 102, 514
politics of business research 32
politics and power **533**
polysemic 561–3, **562**
polyvocality 699
popularization 565
population 60, 165, 173, **176**–7, 179–80, **185**, 193, 263, 328, 353, 505, 648, 664–5, 669, 695
  heterogeneity of 189
Population Census (UK) **316**
position-taking 536
positivism 15–16, **15–16**, 60, 167, 614–16, 629
positivist epistemology **701**
positivist format 19, **564**, 615–16
post-coding 249
postal questionnaire 210, 231–2, 335, 615, **666–7**, 681
  steps to improve response rates 234–6, **235**, 665
postmodernism **22**, **387**, 595, 616, 697–**8**, 698–700, 702
potency **99**
power **533**
power relationships 540
power through experience repertoire 529
powerless 515
practical constraints 631, **631**
pre-analytical categories **586**
pre-coded questions 203, 335
pre-coding 249
pre-testing 48, 262–3, **466**
predictive validity **159**–60, **162**
preparing an interview guide 473–7
preparing for your research 85–6
presentation 583
presentism 564
preunderstanding 414
Price Waterhouse Cranfield (PWC) Survey 325
printing output 381
prior agreement 660
priority and sequence **632**
prison experiments 48, **125**, 128, 132–3
privacy, invasion of 136, **137**, 670
privatization **197**
probability sample 165, 170, **176**, 182, 185, **188**, 194, 263, 278, 352, 491, 664
  types of 179–82
probing questions 477
problematization 699
problems with quantitative/qualitative contrast 619–22
  artificial vs natural 621, 622
  behaviour versus meaning 619–20
  numbers vs words 621
  theory tested in research vs emergent from data 620, 621
problems with structured interviewing 225–7, 225–8
  characteristics of interviewers 225–6
  feminist critique 227–8
  problem of meaning 227
  response sets 226
  social desirability bias 226–**7**
problems with survey research on behaviour 270–1, **271**
procedural compliance 407
process 404–5, **405**, **580**
processing a closed question **250**
Procite 97, **113**
procrastination 677
Proctor & Gamble 511
professional efficacy **166**
professionalism **617**
progressive coherence **95**
projective methods 220–**1**
proofreading **684**
properties 579
Proquest 104, 105
prospective case study design 63
pseudo name 129–30, 434, 440, 489
psychological contract **685**–7
psychological contract breach **242–3**, **687**
public documents 548–50, **549**
public lectures of management gurus **524**
Public Private Partnerships 106
punctuation marks 523
purposive sampling 441, **442**, **492**
pursuit 536
putting life into well-established fields 584
puzzle 642, 643
puzzlement 208, 474, 489, 653

# Q

QSR NUD*ISTVivo *see* NVivo
Qualicat 590
Qualidata archive 590
qualitative content analysis **553**, 563, 572
qualitative data analysis 571–90
qualitative interview **205**, 494
qualitative interviewing 465, 466–7, 494, 496–7
qualitative research 386–96, **388**, **391**, **400**, **406**, 615–16, 651, **693**
  concepts 393–**4**
  critique of 408–9
  feminism and 417–19, **419**
  four traditions **387**
  interviewing 466–7, 494–8
  Is it always like this? 409–10
  nine moments of **388**
  on organizations 95
  quality criteria 399–401, **400**
    between quantitative and qualitative research 399
    reliability and validity 394–5
    adapting reliability and validity for 395
    alternative criteria for evaluating 395
  research questions **391**
  steps in 389–90, 391–2
  theory and research 392–3
qualitative research using online focus groups 655–7
qualitative research using online personal interviews 659–60
qualitative/quantitative methods 696

qualities of probability sample 185–7
quality in qualitative research **400**
quantification in qualitative research 621, 624–5
  combating anecdotalism through limited quantification 625
  quasi-quantification in qualitative research 624
  thematic analysis 624
quantification rhetoric 530
quantitative data analysis 334–56
quantitative dataset **620–1**
quantitative and qualitative research
  contrasts between 410–11, **410**
  not just words **411**
  similarities between 412–13
quantitative and qualitative research strategy 26–8
quantitative research 150–3, 173, 617–18, 633, **693**
  critique of 167–8
  Is it always like this? 169–70
  main steps 150–53, **151–2**
  reliability and validity 157–9
quantitative research and constructionism 618
quantitative research and interpretivism 617–18
quantitative/qualitative findings not separated **693**
quasi-experiment **46**, 50–2, **51**, 69
quasi-quantification 621, 624–5
quota sampling 193–4, **195**

# R

racism **617**, 681
rambling 466
random digit dialling 206, 207
random sample 47, 62, 165, 170, 182, **185**, 353, 355, 491, 505, 629
range 372
rapport 211
rate setter **435**
reactive effect **281**, 496, **527**
reactive effects of experimental arrangements 48
reactivity 134, 327, 330, **433**, 622
readers vs writers' intentions **551**
reading 544, 558
  getting the most from 94
reading the detail 530
realism 16–**17**, 22, 177, 455, 457, 505, 615–16, 703
realist tales 455, **698**, 703, **704**–5, 706
reality **18**, 21, 559, 584, 653, 696, 698, 703
reality of documents 559–60
reanalysis 320
reciprocal analysis 623–4
  qualitative analysis of quantitative data 623
  quantitative analysis of qualitative data 623–4
reciprocal positioning 530
reciprocity 141, **141–2**, 451, 493
recoding variables **361**, 364, **366–7**
reconstruction of events 496
recording field notes **446**
recording interviews **481**–2
Reference Manager **113**
referencing system 111–15, **112–13**
referencing your work 111–12
  dissertation 683
  role of bibliography 113, 115
reflections on mixed methods research 643–4
reflections on reliability and validity 160, 161
reflexive life stories **471**
reflexivity 30, 455, 457, 521–2, 697, **698**–9, **700**, **701**, **702**
Regional Trends 107
regulatory failure 560
*Relations Professionnelles et Négociations d'Entreprise see* REPONSE
relationship of epistemology and ontology to business research 23–6
  competing paradigms 24–6
relationships 346, 348, **479**, 639, 644, 686
relevance 44, 401
reliability 41, 43, 54, 61, 66, 157–8, 161–2, 169, 304, 328, 466, 505, 522, 624, 644
  internal 158–9
reliability and validity 157–**8**, 160–1, 279–81
reliability and validity in qualitative research 394, 401
  adapting for 395
  alternative criteria for evaluating 393
  recent discussions about quality criteria for 399–401
reliability and validity testing 169, 170
religious belief 12, 43
repeatability 415
repertoires 528
repertoires of corporate social responsibility **529**
repertory grid technique 223–**5**, **224**, 415
repetition 536
repetitive strain injury 452
replication 41–2, 48, 51, 54, 56, 61, 66, **116**, 125, 165–7, **166**, 522
REPONSE 319
representative case 62
representative sample **58**, **176**
representativeness 62, 263, 278, 308, 489, 505, 509, 545, 548, 550, 552, 554, 555, 664
research
  collaborative and participatory 419–20, **420**
  doing and analysing your results 86
  mixed methods **28**
  preparing for 85–6
  role of *trans-disciplinarity* in 6
  safety in **87**, 129
research area 73–4, **81**
research designs 40–68, **40**, 313
  experimental 45–8
research diary 86, **241**, 447
*Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care* 139
research method **41**, 681
  used in dissertation 681
research with people 420
research project **73–4**, 78
research questions 72, 292, 681–2
  criteria for evaluating 82–3
  developing **83–4**
  formulating suitable 79
  Marx's sources **80**–81
  using literature 92
research strategy 26–7, **27**, 68
research strategy: quantitative and qualitative 26–8, **27**
research values **31**
researched life stories **471**
researcher-driven diary 240–1
researcher–participant 438
researcher–subject relationships 413–19
  action research 413–**14**, 414–15
  cognitive mapping 415–**16**, 516–**17**
  collaborative and participatory research 419–20, **420**, **421**
  feminism and qualitative research 417, **417**, 418–**19**, 419
researching your own workplace **36**
RESPECT project 140
respondent fatigue 234, 660, 669
respondent validation **396–7**, 618, 633
response formats for scales **254**
response rates **189**, 234, **236**, 249, 643, 665, 695
response sets 226, **281**
responsible legitimation **529**
results obtained for dissertation 681–2
Retail Price Index 159
retrieval process 595
retrieving data 381
retrospective ethnography 434
Reuters Business Insight 107
revelatory case 62
reverse operationism 169
reward management 108
rewards **322**, **691**
rhetoric 440, **534**, **676–7**, 708
rhetoric–reality gap 538
rhetorical analysis 533–7, **534**, **535**, **536**, **537**
rhetorical manoeuvres 648
rhetorical strategy 623, **689**
Roddick, Anita 534–6, 548
role duality 414
role redesign **53**
role selection **281**
roles for ethnographers 436–40, **439**
  active or passive 440

romantic ward manager **532**
Rorschach inkblot test 220
rules for designing questions 255–60
  general rules of thumb 255
  specific rules 255–8
Russian context 696

# S

safety in research **87**
safety risks in mining **546**
Sage 105
sameness 547, 696
sample size **130**, 187–8, **188**
  absolute and relative 187–8
  heterogeneity of the population 189
  kind of analysis 189
  non-response 188–9
  time and cost 188
sampling 170, 173–81, 277–8, **278**, 441–3, 489–92
  for online survey **664**
  further considerations 277–9
  kind of analysis 189
  not just people 443–4
  people 277
  purposive 441, **442**, **492**
  Quota 193–**5**
  response rate **189**
  steps in social survey **174–5**, **176**–7
  in terms of time 277
  theoretical 441, **442**, **443**, **492**
  university students **191–2**
sampling bias **176**, **492**
sampling error **176**, 177–**9**, 187, 196–**7**, 352
sampling frame 86, **176**–7, 277–8, 664
sampling for online survey **664**
sampling-related error 196
SAS **650**
saving an NVivo project 607
saving data 381
scan sampling 279
scatter diagrams **347**, **348**, **349**, 374, **378–9**
sceptical reading 526
scepticism **166**, 428, 548, 559, 647
science of signs *see* semiotics
search catalogue 323
search parameters 108–9
searching existing literature 103–11
  electronic databases 104
searching text 603–6
  search for occurrences of a single node 603–5
  search for specific text 605–6
secondary analysis 312–30, **313–27**
  advantages 313, 314–15
  combining primary and **314**
  data collected by an organization **326**
  data collected by a business **314**
  datasets suitable for **315–16**
  limitations of 22, 320–1
  official statistics 327
  other researchers' data 313
  of secondary materials 325–**6**
  using in small-scale research project **327**
secondary analysis of data **326**
secondary analysis of qualitative data 590
secondary data 305
secondary materials **325**
seeing through others' eyes 402, 495
selecting research sites **152**
selecting a sample 292–5
  sampling dates 293–4
  sampling media 292–3
selection 47
self-administered questionnaire 663
self-advancement 639
self-awareness 415
self-completion questionnaire **28**, 173, 209–10, 231–7, **237**, 262–3, 661, 665
  advantages over structured interview 232–7
  disadvantages 233–4
  evaluating 232
  following up on **235**
self-disclosure 660
self-employment **317**
self-management **46**
self-reliance 639
selling behaviour of travel agents **282–3**
semi-structured interviewing 195, **205**, 210, 290, 440, **453**, 465, 467, **468–9**, **480**, 493, 498, 622, 636, 641, 653, 691
semiotic theory 561
semiotics **291**, 561–3, **562**
sense-making 102, **533**
sensitivity to context 459, 495, 563
sequential triadic method 224
Servemploi 66
sex industry **31**
sexism 494
shadowing **431**, 691
show cards 209, 216, **216–17**
SIC codes 111, **182–3**, 189
sign systems **562**
signification 561, 589, 648
silence 478, 522, 528
similarities between quantitative and qualitative research 412–13
simple observation **272**, 330
simple random sample 179–80
simple way to code **588**
single respondent to represent organization **190**
situation ethics **124**
skills **317**
Skills Survey 68, 213
slavery **566**
small business research **509**–10
small and medium-sized enterprises *see* SMEs
small research project 335–40
  missing data 338
small-scale research project **427**, **551**
  secondary analysis **327**
SMEs 10, 13, 192
snowball sampling **192**–3, 441, 491, 511
social anthropology 404
Social Change and Economic Life Initiative (SCELI) **152**
Social and Community Planning Research 212
social context 514, 590, 624
social desirability bias 226–**7**, 233
social mobility 640
social reality 18, 538, 559, 584
Social Research Association *see* SRA
Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) 104, **113**
social survey **174–5**, 651
*Social Text* **702–3**
Social Trends 107, 328
social-historical moment 563
societal legitimation **529**
societies, organizations, groups and individuals *See* SOGI
Sociological Review 105
software **113–14**, 656, 659, 661, 662, 673
software engineers **690**–91
SOGI model 67
Sokal hoax **702–3**
spam 660, **672**
Spearman's rho **346**, 347–8, 374, **377**
special interest bulletin boards 657
specific characteristics 290
specific focus 498
specific obligations 687
specifying questions 477
spectacular consumption 459
spin 558, 706
split-half method 158
spontaneity 436
spontaneous thoughts 220
SPSS 76, 86, 300, 312, **326**, 334, 338, 343, 345, 356, 360, **361**, 364, 368–**70**, 372–**4**, 374–**5**, 376–**7**, **378–80**, 381, 594, 607
  data analysis with 368–80
  defining variables 363–**4**, 364
  entering data in Data Viewer 362–**3**, 363
  recoding variables 364
spurious relationship **351**–2
SRA *Guidelines* 122, **126**, 137–8
SSCI 104
stability 157, 158, 159, 169–**70**
stances on ethics **124**
standard deviation 345, 372
Standard Industrial Classification *see* SIC
standardized interview 203, 204, **205**
standardized survey interview 203
Stanford University 114–15, 125
Starbucks **654**
starting early **73**

state of e-research 673
*Statement of Ethical Practice* 134
Statistical Package for the Social Sciences *see* SPSS
statistical significance 352–6, **353**, **354**
  Chi-square test 355
  comparing means and 356
  correlation and 355–6
statistics as rhetoric 623
steelworks study **64**, 129
sticky moments **700**
stories **479**, 531, 625, 637
storytelling 95, **471**, 708
*Strategic Management Journal* 630
strategic management research **539**
strategies for dealing with business and management information **106**
strategies for observing behaviour 276–7
strategy and research design **68**
stratified interview sample 193, 441, **491**
stress 23, 47, 98, 128, **317**, 396, 448, 466, **677**
strikes **319**, 328, **405**
striptease acts 558
structuration theory 8, **533**, 691
structure of cross-sectional design 56–7
structure your writing 681–2
  abstract 681
  acknowledgements 681
  finally 683
  introduction 681
  list of contents 681
  literature review 681
  references 683
  research methods 681
  results 681–2
  title page 681
structured diaries 241
structured interview 202, **202**, 204, **205**, 210, 211, **237**
structured interview schedule 173, 262
  other approaches 218–25
structured interviewing 201–27, **554**, 628, 636
  accuracy and ease of data processing 203–4
  other types of interview 204–**5**
  reducing error due to interviewer variability 202–**3**
structured observation 270–85, **272**, **274**, 277, **278**, **642**
  field stimulation 281–**2**
  organizational simulation 283, 284
  other forms of 281–4
structuring questions 478
student research project **100**, **131**, 291, **490**, **491**, **492**
study information sheet **135**
study of managers **641**
study of a steelworks **64**, 129
subdiscipline **16**
subgroup analysis 317
subjectivity 704
subjugation 515
substantive theory 581, 583
success stories 67
Summerland Leisure Centre 548, 560
supervisor 74–6, **82**, **87**, 109, 165, 677, **679**
  literature review stage 96, **116**
  support from **219**, **573**
survey research **54–5**, 62, 204, **641**
  error in 196–**7**, **203**
suspicions 133, 435, 436, 669
symbolic interactionism 8, **17**, 19, 21, 49, 401, 403, 504
symbols 522–3, 561
symmetry 634
synchronous data collection 652, 659–60
synchronous focus group 657
synchronous interviews 653, 656
synecdoche 533
synonyms **221**, 558
synthesized coherence **95**
synthesizing translations **100**
systematic observation 271–5, **272**
systematic review **6**, 94, 96, **97**, 98, **100**–1
  role in education research **102**
  using in student research project 100–1
systematic sample 180–1

# T

tactical authenticity 399
take notes 94
taken for granted 495, 511
taking over 515
talk forged contextually 522
talk is structured 522
tape-recording 134, 221, 250, 476, 487, 505–6, 508
Target Group Index (TGI) 325
teamwork **99**, 637
technological implications 624
technologies **317**
telephone calls **273**
telephone interview 206–8, **207**, **212**, 236, 665, **666**
  misbehaviour in **208**
telephone interviewees 665
telephone interviewing 488–9
telephone market research **195**
television 134, 290, 293, 552
tendency 169
Tenerife plane crash 548
tension 494
test room method 13
testing 27, 47, 62, **223**, 253, 304
testing validity through replication **166**–7
text 290, 558, 563
text messaging **244**, **304**
textbook approach 466
textual approach 405, **549**
textual exhibits **549**
thematic analysis **572**
theoretical sampling 193, 405, 441, 442, **442–3**, 492, **492**, 577
theoretical saturation 442–**3**, 507, 577
theorizing qualitative data **589**
theory 7, 10, **29**, 101, 536, 579, 620, 783
theory and formal theory 580
theory and research 7–14, 392–3
  types of 7–10
theory-testing 615, 620
therapy 100, **430**
thinking aloud 221
Third World countries 481
thresholds for inclusion **319**
time famine 690–1
time management 76–8, **692**
time sampling 277, **277**, 443
time use 636, **637**, 641–2, **690**–2
timeline 550
*Times, The* **108**, 351
timing 72
Timmer, Jan 535–6
title page of dissertation 681
tool 537
topic agenda 512
Total Design Method (TDM) 235
total participant 438–9
total researcher 438
tour 273, 285
tourism **182**, 298, 452, 648
TQM 10, 13, 60, 66, 79–**80**, 81, **188**, **307**, **427**, 437
tracking logs 691
trade unions 131, 292, 436
Trades Union Council (TUC) 260
tragic skilled worker **532**
training 321
transcribing 221, 445, **480**, **481**
transcribing interviews **481**–2, **482–3**, **485–6**, 505–6, **507**, 583, 660
transcription 290, 505–6, 624
transferability 43, 395, 398
transgressions 122
translating interview data **488**
transparency 409, 413, 451, 489, 595
transparency and coherence 399
transparent representations 559
transcript of semi-structured interview **480**
travel cost survey 663
treatment group 45
tree nodes 599, **601**
triangulation 234, 396, **397–8**, 631, **632**, 633–4, **643**–4
Trinidad 653–**4**
trivialization 450
tropes 533, 708
trust 141, 659
trustworthiness 428
truth claims 401
turn-taking 523
Twain, Mark 481
two versions of debate about quantitative and qualitative research 630

types of non-probability sampling 190–5
convenience sampling 190–92
quota sampling 193–5
snowball sampling 192–3
types of probability sample 179–82
multi-stage cluster sampling 181–2
simple random sample 179–80
stratified random sampling 181
systematic sample 180–1
types of question 253
factual questions about others 253
informant factual questions 253
personal factual 253
questions about attitudes 253
questions about beliefs 253–4
questions about knowledge 253
questions about normative standards and values 253
types of variable 340–1, 340–2, **341–2**, 525
typical variables 525

# U

UK Association of Qualitative Market Research Practitioners 505
UK Data Archive **56**, 139, **140**, 263, 313, 314, 321, **324**–5
accessing 314, **317**, 323–5
UK databases **315–16**
UK National Statistics Publication Hub 328
UK New Earnings Survey **316**
uncritical enthusiasm 602
understanding 7, 16, 30, 111, **164**, 291, 404, 432, 504, 514–15, 524, 621, 644, **705**–6
unemployment 527–8
unexpected 495
unfair dismissal **318**
Unilever 548
unintentional plagiarism 117
unique case 62
univariate analysis 342–5
diagrams 343–**4**
frequency tables 342–3, **343**
measures of central tendency 344
measures of dispersion 344–5
universalism **124**, 138
University of Akron **191**
university ethics form **126–7**
University of Warwick 461
unobtrusive measures **330–1**
unobtrusive method 305
unofficial rewards **123**
unsolicited accounts 487
unstructured interviewing 60, 204, **205**, 210, 290, 465, 467–72, **468**, 493
unstructured observation **272**
unstructured and semi-structured interviewing 467
upsizing **620**
uses of focus groups 503–5
using an interview guide 480
using bibliographic software **113–14**
using blogs **655**
using existing material **526**
using existing questions 263
using information on the Web **107–8**
using others questionnaire **264**
using qualitative data to inform quantitative measurement **635**
using quantitative data about time to fill in gaps in qualitative study **637**
using quantitative research to facilitate qualitative research **636**
using scales of other researchers **263–4**
using SPSS for windows 360–81
using Web information **107–8**
using websites to collect individuals' data 651–2
using your supervisor 74–5

# V

validity 42–4, 54, 61, 66, 157, 159, **159**–62, **164**, **166**, 169, 170, 328, **396–7**, 399, 466, 522, 551, 565, 618, 623, 633, 653, 702
value-free research 30
value labels 361, 364–**5**
values 29–30, **479**
variability 204, 213, 215
variable **42**
variable labels 361, 363
variable names 363
Variable Viewer **361**, **364**
variables 42, 66, 163, 202, 342, 362, 639, 686
computing new 367–**8**
defining 363–4
imaginary data **348**
recoding 364, **366–7**
verbal brainstorming 51
verbal protocol approach 221, **223**
*Verstehen* approach 16, 18–19, 401, 403, 563
vertical dyadic linkage (VDL) 67
vicious work-time cycle 691–2
video-audio recording 459, 461, 523, 554
vignette questions 261, **261**–2
virtual communities 656
virtual documents 557–8, 648
virtual ethnography 652–3, 655, 671–**2**
virtual focus groups **506**
virtual interfantasy interaction **672**
virtuous circle 691
virus-checking software 661
visitors' ethnicity 588
visual documents 553–7
visual ethnography **446**, 451–61, **457**, **460**
visual images 291, **700**
Visual Sociology Group 460
visual techniques 221
voluntary notification **319**
vulnerability 133, 134, 515

# W

Walt Disney Corporation 547
Warwick Business School 115
web pages 647–8
web surveys 661, 662–3, **662**, **663**, 665–6
Web, The 105, 550, 651
web-based methods 652
Web-based surveys 236
webcam 660
weblogs 669
websites 106, 525, 553–4, 558, 647, 648, **649**, 650, **650**, **666–7**
Webspeak 558
WERS **55–6**, 58–9, **66**, **68**, 163, 184, 193, **218**, 236, **237**, 312, **314**, **316**, 317–18, **318**, 319, 320–1, **326**
Western Electric Company **50**
what is to be counted 295
dispositions 298
images 298
significant actors 295
subjects and themes 297–8
words 296, **296**, 297
where to conduct an interview **474**
whistleblowers 490
*Who's Who* 305
wilful bias 413
women 30, 228, 292, **318**, **321**, 436, 439
career opportunities **586**
factory workers 133, **450**
HRT and 351
interviewing **484**
and leadership 292
managers 60, 66, 68, 392, 403, 482, 489
women informants 436
women at Multitext 706
women as objects 418
women's voices 418
word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM) **655**
words 296, **296**, 460, **704**
Work Foundation 105
work obligation 12, 43
work orientations **317**
work role in the organization **430**
work-related gossip **244–5**
work-time cycle **691**
working at home 321, **321**
working-class women 434
working couples with children 636–**7**
working role in the organization **430**
workplace 60, 634
workplace abuse **14**
workplace bullying 13–**14**, 207
workplace diversity **421**
workplace employment relations survey *see* WERS
workplace ethnographies 308, 623
World Bank 105

world as text 558
readers and audiences: active or passive 558
World Trade Center 194
World Values Survey **12**
world views 472
WorldCom 289
Wrangler Jeans 453
wrestling matches 558
writing ethnography 699, 703
experiential authority 703–4
interpretative omnipotence 703, 706
native's point of view 703, 705–6
typical forms 703, 704, 705
ways of writing differently 703, 706
writing field notes **445**, **447**
writing for journal publication **33–4**
writing research proposal 84–5
writing up business research 676–706
writing up quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research 684
writing up your research 677–84
avoid sexist, racist and disablist language 681
be persuasive 679
conclusion 682
discussion 682
get feedback 679
references 683
start early 677–**8**
structure your writing 681
written document 558

## Y

YouTube clips 553

## Z

ZTC Ryland 81, 83, 428, 451