

Chapter 1



Business and management research, reflective diaries and the purpose of this book

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should:

- be able to explain the nature of research;
- be able to outline the features of business and management research;
- be able to place your research project on a basic–applied research continuum according to its purpose and context;
- understand the usefulness and importance of keeping a reflective diary;
- understand the stages you will need to complete (and revisit) as part of your research process;
- have an overview of this book’s purpose, structure and features;
- be aware of some of the ways you can use this book.

1.1 Introduction

This book is designed to help you to undertake your research project, whether you are an undergraduate or postgraduate student of business and management or a practising manager. It provides a clear guide on how to undertake research as well as highlighting the realities of undertaking research, including the more common pitfalls. The book is written to provide you with a guide to the research process and with the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake a piece of research from first thoughts about a potential research topic to writing your project report. As such, you will find it useful as a manual or handbook on how to tackle your research project.

After reading the book you will have been introduced to research philosophies and approaches to reasoning; explored a range of strategies, techniques and procedures with which you could collect and analyse data; and considered how to report and present your research. Of equal importance, you will know that there is no one best way for undertaking all research. Rather you will be aware of the choices you will have to make and how these will impact upon what you can find out. This means you will be able to make a series of informed choices including your research philosophy, approaches to reasoning, strategies, techniques and procedures that are most suitable to your own research project and be able to justify them. In reading the book

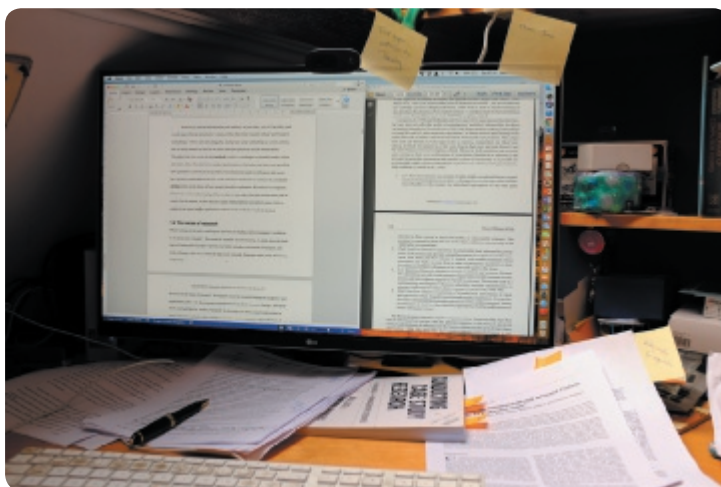


you will have been introduced to the wealth of data that are available via the Internet, techniques for collecting your own data and procedures for analysing different types of data, have had a chance to practise them, and be able to select and justify which to use. When selecting and using these techniques and procedures you will be aware of the contribution that the appropriate use of information technology can make to your research.

The invention of Post-it® notes

The Post-it® note is one of the best-known and most widely used office products in the world. Yet, despite the discovery of the repositionable adhesive that made the Post-it® note possible in 1968, it was not until 1980 that the product was introduced to the market (Post-it® 2018). In the 1960s, 3M research scientist Spencer Silver was looking for ways to improve the adhesive used in tapes. However, he discovered something quite different from what he was looking for, an adhesive that did not stick strongly when coated onto the back of tapes! What was unclear was how it might be used. Over the next five years he struggled to find a use for his new adhesive, talking about it and its merits to colleagues whenever possible. He became known as 'Mr Persistent' because he would not give up!

Most people working for 3M know the story of what happened next and how the Post-it® note concept came about. A new product development researcher working for 3M, Art Fry, was frustrated by how the scraps of paper he used as bookmarks kept falling out of his church choir hymn book. He realised that Silver's adhesive would mean his bookmarks would not fall out. Soon afterwards the Post-it® note concept was developed and market research undertaken. This was extremely difficult as the product was



Post-it® notes in use

Source: © Mark Sanders 2018

revolutionary and was, in effect, designed to replace pieces of torn scrap paper! However, despite some initial scepticism within the company, Post-it® notes were launched in 1980. One year after their launch, they were named 3M's outstanding new product.

While your research project will be within the business and management discipline rather than natural science (such as developing a new adhesive), our introductory example still offers a number of insights into the nature of research and in particular the business and management research you will be undertaking. In particular, it highlights that when undertaking research we should be open to finding the unexpected and how sometimes the applicability of our research findings may not be immediately obvious. It also emphasises the importance of discussing your ideas with other people.

However, a word of caution before you continue. In your study, you will inevitably read a wide range of books and articles. In many of these the terms ‘research method’ and ‘research methodology’ will be used interchangeably, perhaps just using methodology as a more verbose way of saying method. In this book we have been more precise in our use of these terms. Throughout the book we use the term **method** to refer to a technique or procedure used to obtain and analyse data. This, therefore, includes questionnaires, observation and interviews as well as both quantitative (statistical) and qualitative (non-statistical) analysis techniques and, as you have probably gathered from the title, is the main focus of this book. In contrast, the term **methodology** refers to the theory of how research should be undertaken. We believe it is important that you have some understanding of this so that you can make informed choices about your research. For this reason, we also discuss a range of philosophical assumptions upon which research can be based and the implications of these for the method or methods adopted.

1.2 The nature of research

When listening to the radio, watching the television or reading a daily newspaper it is difficult to avoid the term ‘research’. The results of ‘research’ are all around us. A debate about the findings of a recent poll of people’s opinions inevitably includes a discussion of ‘research’, normally referring to the way in which the data were collected. Politicians often justify their policy decisions on the basis of ‘research’. Newspapers report the research findings of academics’ and organisations (Box 1.1). Documentary programmes tell us about ‘research findings’ and advertisers may highlight the ‘results of research’ to encourage you to buy a particular product or brand. However, we believe that what these examples really emphasise is the wide range of meanings given to the term ‘research’ in everyday speech.

Walliman (2011) argues that many of these everyday uses of the term ‘research’ are not research in the true meaning of the word. As part of this, he highlights ways in which the term is used wrongly:

- just collecting facts or information with no clear purpose;
- reassembling and reordering facts or information without interpretation;
- as an activity with no or little relevance to everyday life;
- as a term to get your product or idea noticed and respected.

The first of these highlights the fact that, although research often involves the collection of information, it is more than just reading a few books or articles, talking to a few people or asking people questions. While collecting data may be part of the research process, if it is not undertaken in a systematic way and without a clear purpose, it will not be seen as research. The second of these is commonplace in many reports. Data are collected, perhaps from a variety of different sources, and then assembled in a single document with the sources of these data listed without any explanation of what the data means. In other words, there is no interpretation of the data collected. Again, while the assembly of data from a variety of sources may be part of the research process, without interpretation it is not research. The third emphasises, as shown in the opening vignette, how despite research often appearing abstract, it influences our daily lives and creates our understanding of the world. Finally, the term ‘research’ can be used to get an idea or product noticed by people and to suggest that people should have confidence in it. In such instances, when you ask for details of the research process, these are either unclear or not forthcoming.



Box 1.1 Focus on research in the news

Buy-to-let investors target university cities

By James Pickford

Southampton, Liverpool and Leicester are among the English cities to have seen the biggest growth in student housing owned by private landlords, according to research that suggests buy-to-let investors are increasingly looking to university cities for better yields.

Between 2011 and 2016 the number of homes lived in wholly by students — excluding halls of residence or big blocks of student accommodation — has risen by 11,000, according to research by estate agency network Countrywide.

Southampton saw the biggest growth, with a rise of 3,428, compared with 2,560 in Liverpool, 2,163 in Tower Hamlets and 2,075 in Leicester. Other places to feature include Exeter, Brighton and Hove, Birmingham and Newcastle upon Tyne. Some cities saw a drop in student housing numbers, bringing the balance to 11,000.

The figures suggest buy-to-let investors are increasingly focusing on providing accommodation in places with swelling student populations. With student housing, landlords can typically achieve a yield that is two or three per cent higher than when renting a similar-sized home to a family...

The research identified student-occupied homes by identifying HMOs [houses in multiple occupation] which paid no council tax. Properties fully occupied by university or college students are exempt from paying the levy for local services. Average monthly room rents varied from £280 in Sunderland and £414 in Southampton, to £559 in Brighton and £752 in Tower Hamlets. There was anecdotal evidence that buyers in high-priced areas were purchasing outside their usual stamping grounds in search of higher yields. 'As the London market has slowed there's been a shift of landlords considering buying further away and considering the best yields rather than just capital growth,' Mr Morris said.



Source: Abridged article by James Pickford, *FT.com*, 30 June 2017. Copyright © 2017 The Financial Times

Based upon this brief discussion we can already see that research has a number of characteristics:

- The purpose, to find out things, is stated clearly.
- The data are collected systematically.
- The data are interpreted systematically.

We can therefore define **research** as a process that is undertaken in a systematic way with a clear purpose, to find things out. Two phrases are important in this definition: 'systematic way' and 'to find out things'. 'Systematic way' suggests that research is based on logical relationships and not just beliefs (Ghauri and Grønhaug 2010). As part of this, your research will involve an explanation of the method or methods used to collect the data, will argue why the results obtained are meaningful and will explain any limitations that are associated with

them. ‘To find out things’ suggests there are a multiplicity of possible purposes for your research. It is therefore an activity that has to be finished at some time to be of use. This will undoubtedly be true for your research project, which will have a specific deadline. Purposes are often stated as describing, explaining, understanding, criticising and analysing (Ghauri and Grønhaug 2010). Crucially, it also emphasises you have a clear purpose or set of ‘things’ that you want to find out, such as the answer to a question or number of questions.

1.3 Business and management research

Using our earlier definition of research we can define business and management research as undertaking systematic research to find out things about business and management.

Ongoing debate within journals has explored the nature and purpose of business and management research, its relevance and utility, as well as the purpose and future status of business schools where much of this research is located (Cassell and Lee 2011b). Two features, which have gained considerable support, are the transdisciplinary nature of such research and its relevance to or impact on business and management practice. The former of these emphasise that management research also draws on knowledge from other disciplines such as sociology, psychology and economics which have differing underlying assumptions. It also emphasises that the research ‘cannot be reduced to any sum of parts framed in terms of contributions to associated disciplines’ (Tranfield and Starkey 1998: 352). In other words, using knowledge from a range of disciplines enables management research to gain new insights that cannot be obtained through using these disciplines separately. The second ‘relevance’ or ‘impact’ feature of management research highlighted in the debate is a belief that it should have the potential for some form of practical consequences. In other words it should be relevant to and have the potential to impact upon business and management practice. Here it has been argued that such research should complete a virtuous circle of theory and practice (Tranfield and Starkey 1998) through which research on managerial practice informs practically derived theory. This in turn becomes a blueprint for managerial practice, thereby increasing the stock of relevant and practical management knowledge. Thus, business and management research needs to engage with both the world of theory and the world of practice. Consequently, the problems addressed should grow out of interaction between these two worlds rather than either on their own. This means that managers are unlikely to allow research access unless they can see the utility for their organisations or themselves.

An article by Hodgkinson et al. (2001) offers a useful four-fold taxonomy for considering rigour and relevance in relation to managerial knowledge. Using the dimensions of theoretical and methodological rigour, and of practical relevance (as discussed earlier) they identify four quadrants (see Table 1.1). Within this, **theoretical rigour** refers to the

Table 1.1 A taxonomy for considering the ‘relevance gap’ in relation to managerial knowledge

Theoretical and methodological rigour	Practical relevance	Quadrant
Higher	Lower	Pedantic science
Lower	Higher	Popularist science
Lower	Lower	Puerile science
Higher	Higher	Pragmatic science

Source: Developed from Hodgkinson et al. (2001)

clarity and thoroughness with which the research as reported is grounded in existing explanations of how things work. Although part of the same dimension, **methodological rigour** refers to the strength and quality of the research method used in terms of the planning, data collection, data analysis, and subsequent reporting; and therefore the confidence that can be placed in the conclusions drawn. Hodgkinson et al. argue that pedantic science is characterised by a focus on increasing methodological rigour at the expense of results that are relevant. This can sometimes be found in refereed academic journals. In contrast, popularist science is characterised by a focus on relevance and usefulness while neglecting theoretical and methodological rigour, examples being found in some books targeted at practising managers. Consequently, while findings might be useful to managers, the research upon which they are based is unlikely to be valid or reliable. Puerile science both lacks methodological rigour and is of limited practical relevance and, although unlikely to be found in refereed academic journals, can be found in other media. Finally, pragmatic science is both theoretically and methodologically rigorous and relevant.

In the past two decades, debate about the nature of management research has focused on how it can meet the double hurdle of being both theoretically and methodologically rigorous, while at the same time embracing the world of practice and being of practical relevance (Hodgkinson et al. 2001; Wensley 2011); practice being reframed recently more broadly than just the world of practice to being socially useful (Hodgkinson and Starkey 2011) and impactful (MacIntosh et al. 2017). Much of this debate centred initially around the work by Gibbons et al. (1994) on the production of knowledge and, in particular, the concepts of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge creation. **Mode 1** knowledge creation emphasises research in which the questions are set and solved by academic interests, emphasising a basic rather than applied nature, where there is little, if any, focus on utilisation of the research by practitioners. In contrast, **Mode 2** emphasises a context for research governed by the world of practice, highlighting the importance of collaboration both with and between practitioners (Starkey and Madan 2001) and the need for the production of practical relevant knowledge. Based upon this, Starkey and Madan (2001) observe that research within the Mode 2 approach offers a way of bringing the knowledge created in universities together with the needs of businesses, thereby overcoming the double hurdle. Bresnen and Burrell (2012: 25) suggest a further alternative, which they consider is a 'more insidious' form of knowledge production. This form, termed **Mode 0** knowledge creation, they argue has been around since the seventeenth century. It refers to knowledge production based on power and patronage, being particularly visible in the close relationships between sponsor and researcher, for example pharmaceutical industry sponsorship of medical research.

Drawing upon these debates, it could be argued that business and management research not only needs to provide findings that advance knowledge and understanding in this subject area, it also needs to address business issues and practical managerial problems. However, this would negate the observation that Mode 2 practices develop from Mode 1. It might also result in business and management research that appears to have little obvious commercial benefit being ignored. This, Huff and Huff (2001) argue, could jeopardise future knowledge creation, because as highlighted in the opening vignette, research that is initially not of commercial value can have value in the future. Building upon these ideas, Huff and Huff highlight a further form of knowledge production: Mode 3. **Mode 3** knowledge production focuses on an appreciation of the human condition as it is and as it might become, its purpose being to 'assure survival and promote the common good at various levels of social aggregation' (Huff and Huff 2001: 53); in other words the research is of benefit to humankind rather than business. This emphasises the importance of broader issues of the wider implications of research and, we consider, links to the idea of research being of benefit to society in general rather than just business. Consequently, in

addition to research that satisfies your intellectual curiosity for its own sake, the findings of business and management research might also contain practical implications, which may be far broader and complex than perhaps envisaged by Mode 2.

Tranfield and Denyer (2004) draw attention to concerns resulting from the separation of knowledge producers from knowledge users. This has introduced a schism, or what Starkey and Madan (2001) call the ‘relevance gap’, which has been the subject of considerable debate for more than a decade. Rousseau (2006) has drawn attention to ways of closing what she terms the prevailing ‘research–practice gap’ – the failure of organisations and managers to base practices on the best available evidence. She extols the virtues of ‘evidence-based management’, which derives principles from research evidence and translates them into practices that solve organisational problems. Research findings do not appear to have transferred well to the workplace. Instead of a scientific understanding of human behaviour and organisations, managers, including those with MBAs, continue to rely largely on personal experience, to the exclusion of more systematic knowledge. This has been discussed in articles and entire special issues of journals, including the *Journal of Management Studies* (2009, volume 46, number 3) and the *British Journal of Management* (2010, volume 21, supplement; volume 28, number 1), as well as in volumes such as Cassell and Lee’s (2011a) *Challenges and Controversies in Management Research*. Within these debates some maintain that the gap between academic research and practice is fundamentally unbridgeable because management researchers and the researched inhabit different worlds, are engaged in different activities and have different research orientations, while others disagree. Hodgkinson and Rousseau (2009), for example, argue that the research–practice gap is due to more than differences in style and language, and that management researchers can generate knowledge that is both useful to society and academically rigorous.

Not surprisingly, many managers and academics perceive the gap between research undertaken by academics and management as practiced as problematic. Saunders (2011) categorises these as differences between academics’ and practitioners’ orientations in relation to their foci of interest, methodological imperatives, the key outcomes and how each views the other. These we summarise in Table 1.2, the contrasting orientations indicating where tensions may occur.

Table 1.2 Practitioner and management researcher orientations

Management researcher		Practitioner
Basic understanding	Focus of interest	Usable knowledge
General enlightenment		Instrumental
Theoretical explanation		Practical problem solutions
‘Why’ knowledge		‘How to’ knowledge
Substantive theory building		Local theory-in-use
Theoretical and methodological rigour	Methodological imperative	Timeliness
Academic publication	Key outcome	Actionable results with practice impact
Disdain of practitioner	Views of other	Deprecate or ignore
Desire to make a difference to practice		Belief research can provide relevant (socially useful) fresh insights to managers’ problems

Source: Developed from Saunders (2011)

However, perhaps the most telling comment on the so-called ‘relevance gap’ is from Tranfield and Denyer (2004: 13), who assert that ignoring such a gap would be ‘unthinkable in other professional fields, such as medicine or engineering, where a national scandal would ensue if science base and practice were not inextricably and necessarily interlinked’. This relates to the idea of conceptualising management as a design science rather than a social science. From the design science perspective, the main purpose of academic management research is therefore only to develop valid knowledge to support organisational problem solving. Many researchers would probably agree that the purpose of management research, like other social sciences, can be undertaken from a wide variety of perspectives involving exploration, description, evaluation, explanation and prediction. However, taking a design science mission therefore focuses upon solution-orientated research to develop valid knowledge which supports practitioners in solving business problems (Van Aken 2005). The counter argument proposes that management practice is characterised by a wide variety of organisational phenomena that are often ambiguous, and may not be suited to rule-like explanations offered by design science, and that there needs to be a balance between the different purposes of research and a need for application (Pandza and Thorpe 2010).

More recently, debate has focussed on the impact of management research and, in particular, for whom, how and when this is created. MacIntosh et al. (2017) have argued that research’s impact is about the influence that it exerts on practice on both those engaged with academia (students, academics, practitioners) and those engaged in policy and practice communities such as professional bodies. New knowledge from research will result in, for example, new theories, models and frameworks, research agendas, methodologies and new curricula. This MacIntosh et al. consider is likely to act over time in one or more of four interrelated realms: changing ideas, influencing others, changing practice and changing self. The last of these highlights how you are likely to be shaped by your own research experiences.

Consequently, although increasing knowledge in a systematic way, the purpose and the context of your research project can differ considerably. For some research projects your purpose may be to understand and explain the impact of something, such as a particular policy. You may undertake this research within an individual organisation and suggest appropriate action on the basis of your findings. For other research projects you may wish to explore the ways in which various organisations do things differently. In such projects your purpose may be to discover and understand better the underlying processes in a wider context, thereby providing greater understanding for practitioners. For yet other research projects you may wish to place an in-depth investigation of an organisation within the context of a wider understanding of the processes that are operating.

Despite this variety, we believe that all business and management research projects can be placed on a continuum (Figure 1.1) according to their purpose and context. At one extreme of the continuum is research that is undertaken purely to understand the processes of business and management and their outcomes. Such research is undertaken largely in universities and largely as the result of an academic agenda. Its key impact is within the academic community, with relatively little attention being given to relevance to or impact on practice. This is often termed **basic, fundamental or pure research** and, although the focus may not have been on practical or commercial value, as illustrated in Box 1.2, the resultant model may be of considerable utility having impact in both academic and practitioner communities. Given our earlier discussion, it is unlikely that Mode 2 and Mode 3 business and management research would fulfil the criterion of being undertaken ‘purely to understand’ due to at least some consideration being given to the practical consequences of what has been found out. Through considering the practical consequences, the research would start to move towards the other end of the continuum (Figure 1.1). At this end is research that is impactful for practitioner communities being of direct and

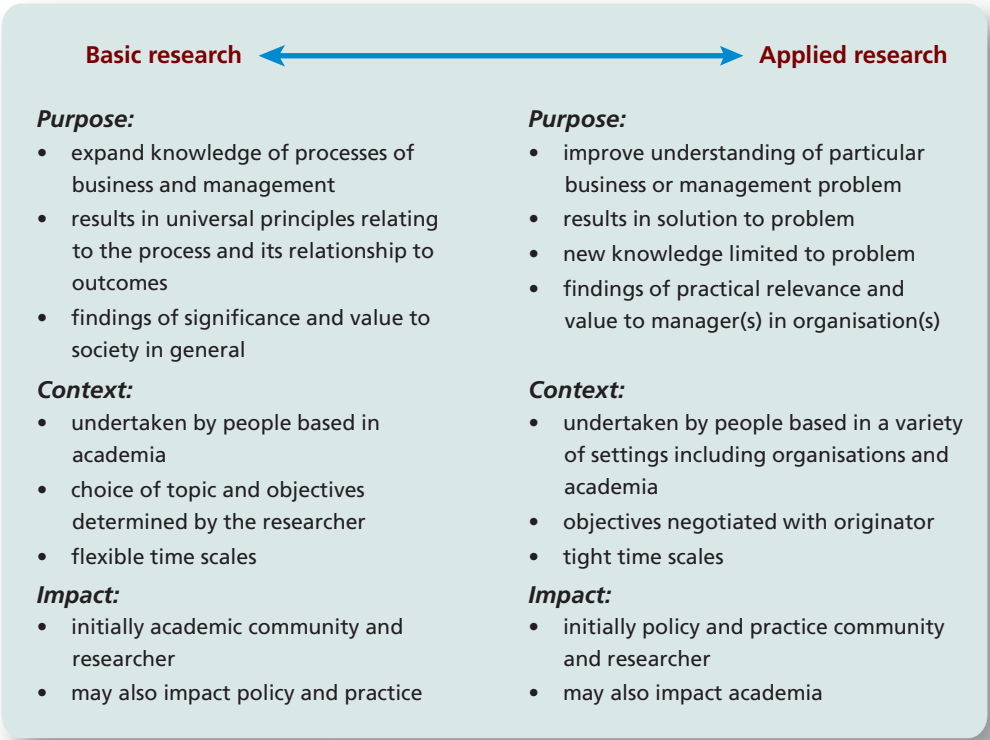


Figure 1.1 Basic and applied research
Sources: Authors' experience; Easterby-Smith et al. (2012); Hedrick et al. (1993), MacIntosh et al. (2017)

immediate use to managers, addresses issues that they see as important, and is presented in ways that they understand and can act on. This is termed **applied research**. In our view, applied research can be very similar to consultancy, particularly when the latter is conducted in a thorough manner.



Box 1.2
Focus on
management
research

The value of research

As part of an article in the *Journal of Management Inquiry*, Hitt and Greer (2012) consider the value of basic research as opposed to applied research. Within this they refer to Barney's (1991) article explaining the resource-based view of the firm published in the *Journal of Management*. They argue that Barney's article provides an example of how

basic research can have considerable practical value. They note how Barney's article made the ideas of the resource-based view of the firm clear and usable to many management scholars; offering evidence of its utility in terms of the thousands of citations (the citation count according to Google Scholar was over 60,000 at the time we were writing this chapter!), its wide use in textbooks, its wide use in applied research and publications as well as in the development and delivery of management development programmes. Building upon this, Hitt and Greer contend that such basic research both enhances the value of subsequent applied research and provides content for curricula.

Wherever your research project lies on this basic–applied continuum, and for each of the orientations in Table 1.2, we believe that you should undertake your research with rigour. To do this you will need to pay careful attention to the entire research process.

Inevitably, your own beliefs and feelings will impact upon your research. Although you might feel that your research will be value neutral (we will discuss this in greater detail later, particularly in Chapter 4), it is unlikely that you will stop your own beliefs and feelings influencing your research. Your choice of what to research is also likely to be influenced by topics that excite you, the way you collect and analyse your data and by the skills you have or are able to develop. (Similarly, as hinted by ‘timeliness’ in Table 1.2, in Chapter 2 we discuss practical considerations such as access to data and the time and resources you have available, which will also impact upon your research process.)

1.4 The research process

Most research textbooks represent research as a multi-stage process that you must follow in order to undertake and complete your research project. The precise number of stages varies, but they usually include formulating and clarifying a topic, reviewing the literature, designing the research, collecting data, analysing data and writing up. In the majority of these the research process, although presented with rationalised examples, is described as a series of stages through which you must pass. Articles you have read may also suggest that the research process is rational and straightforward. Unfortunately this is very rarely true, and the reality is considerably messier, with what initially appear as great ideas sometimes having little or no relevance. While research is often depicted as moving through each of the stages just outlined, one after the other, this is unlikely to be the case. In reality some stages will overlap and you will probably revisit each stage more than once. Each time you revisit a stage you will need to reflect on the associated issues and refine your ideas. In addition, as highlighted by some books, you will need to consider ethical and access issues during the process.

This book also presents the research process as a series of linked stages and gives the appearance of being organised in a linear manner. However, as you use the book you will see that we recognise the concurrent and iterative nature of the research process you will follow in the examples of research by well-known academic researchers, student research, how research is reported in the news and case studies, as well as our extensive use of cross-referencing. As part of this process we believe it is vital that you spend time formulating and clarifying your research topic. This we believe should be expressed as one or more research questions that your research must answer, accompanied by a set of objectives that your research must address. However, we would also stress the need to reflect on your ideas continually and revise both these and the way in which you intend to progress your research.

We believe that writing is an intrinsic part of developing your ideas and understanding your research. Indeed we, and our students, have found that it is not until we write our ideas that we discover where our arguments need further clarification. Often this will involve revisiting stages (including research question(s) and objectives) and working through them again. There is also a need to plan ahead, thereby ensuring that the necessary preliminary work for later stages has been undertaken. This is emphasised by Figure 1.2, which also provides a schematic index to the remaining chapters of the book. Within this flow chart (Figure 1.2) the stages you will need to complete as part of your research project are emphasised in the centre of the chart. However, be warned: the process is far messier than a brief glance at Figure 1.2 suggests!

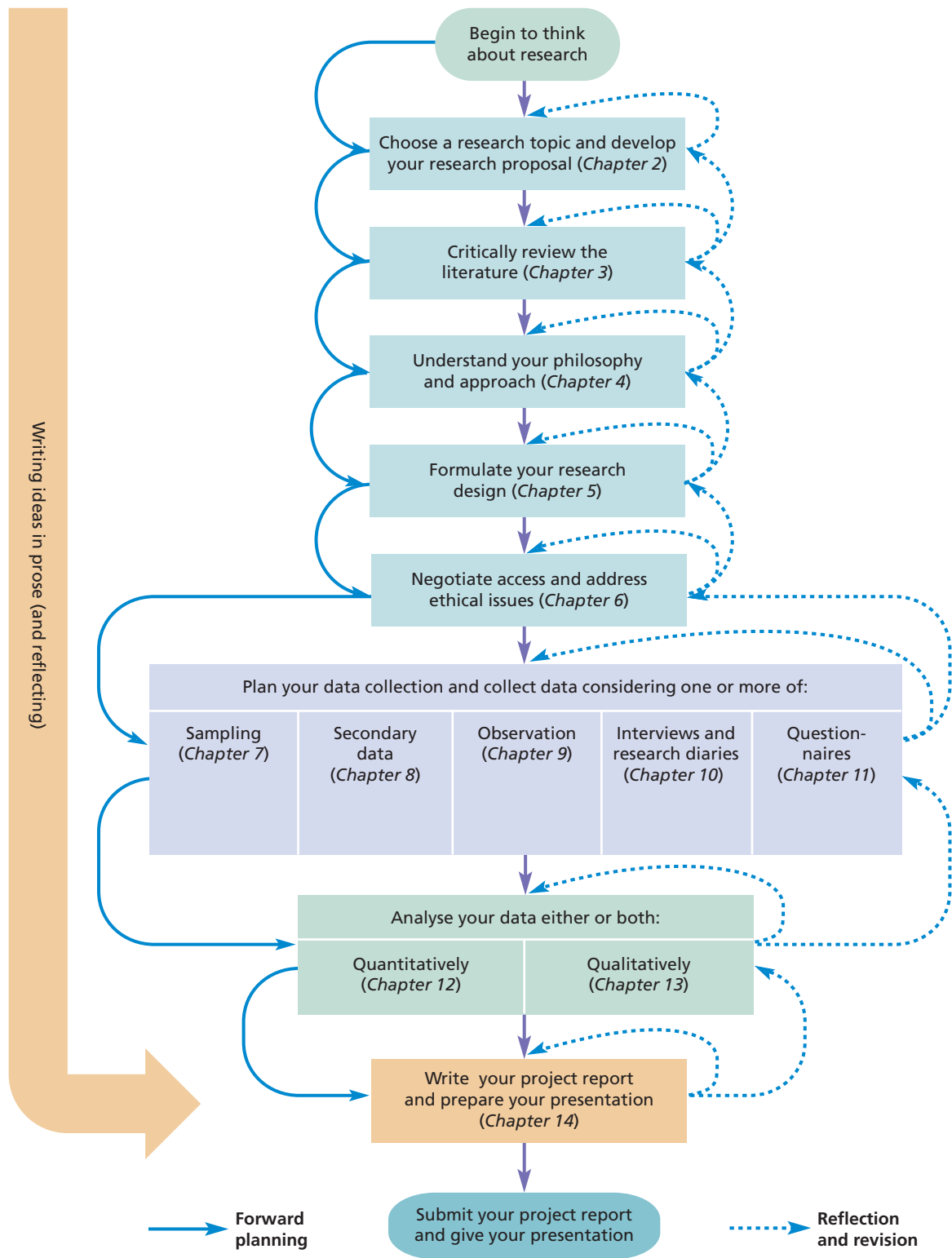


Figure 1.2 The research process
Source: © Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill 2018

1.5 Keeping a reflective diary or research notebook

You will notice in Figure 1.2 (page 12) that we include a series of arrows labelled 'reflection and revision'. During your research project you will find it helpful to keep a separate **reflective diary** in which you note down what has happened and the lessons you have learnt both from things that have gone well and things that have not gone so well during the research process, on a regular basis. Others keep a **learning journal** which uses a more free-flowing structure to describe, analyse and evaluate what has happened. Some researchers incorporate their reflective diary or journal into a **research notebook** in which they record chronologically other aspects of their research project such as useful articles they have read, notes of discussions with their project supervisor and other interesting conversations alongside their emergent thoughts about all aspects of their research. We have also found this helpful. The process of observing your own research practice and examining the way you do things is termed **reflection**. However, there is a more complex process incorporating interpretation as well as reflection and involving you in thinking about your experiences and questioning the way you have done things. This process, known as **reflexivity**, involves you being constantly aware of your effects on your research. You should therefore be thinking about and interpreting your role in the research and the way in which this is influenced by the object of the research; and acknowledging the way you affect both the processes of the research and the outcomes and how they have affected you (Haynes 2011; Box 1.3). (This is discussed further in Section 13.5.)



Box 1.3 Focus on student research

Keeping a reflective diary as part of a research notebook

As part of her master's research project, Amanda's project tutor had encouraged her to incorporate her reflective diary into a research notebook. Over time she began to realise that her diary entries were providing her with a useful way of not only recording her experiences, but also questioning her research practice. An extract from her reflective diary follows.

Monday 6th April 7:30 p.m.

I did my first observation today in a shop, watching and recording what people did when they came in, browsed the shoes and then, perhaps, made a purchase and left. Following what the textbook had told me, I sat as unobtrusively as possible in the corner on one of the sofas and used my tablet to make notes about the customer's and the sales assistant's behaviours. I'd prepared a checklist of what I was looking for. It all seemed to go well and, using the checklist, I

made some interesting observations about the sorts of interactions customers were having with the sales assistants when they purchased shoes. Also I feel my position was unobtrusive and I was not really noticed. What went less well was the fact I could not hear precisely what was being said. I was too far away from the sales assistant and the customer. I need to make adjustments and be closer next time, while still being unobtrusive.

10:00 p.m.

I have just watched a television documentary on retail shopping and the changing nature of such shops. I'm feeling worried that I might not have really observed all of what was happening. The programme makers had filmed the same purchase in a shop from three different views, presumably using different cameras. One camera filmed the purchase from low down and appeared to be quite a distance from the purchase. It seemed as if the camera operator was sitting on a sofa, rather like my observation. Another had filmed it more closely from behind the sales assistant so you could see the expressions on the customer's face and easily hear the conversation. The final camera had filmed from behind the customer and this time you could see the





Box 1.3 Focus on student research (continued)

Keeping a reflective diary as part of a research notebook

sales assistant's face; she looked really disinterested. I had never really thought about the impact of my position in the shop on what I would see and the data I would be able to collect until I saw that programme. I definitely need to think this through.

Tuesday 7th April, 7:30 a.m.

On reflection I really need to think more carefully about where would be the best place from which to observe

and collect my data. I have already thought about the data I need, but given my emphasis on the interaction with customers, I think I was not in the right place to collect it for my first observation. I need to be able to see both the customer and the sales assistant and to hear what is being said and the tones of the voices. But, at the same time, I need to be unobtrusive as well so my presence does not influence the interaction. Also, there is also only one of me, so I cannot be in three places at once! However, if I remember correctly, there was a place to sit and try on shoes next to the sales desk. Perhaps that would be a better place to observe. I cannot use videography to record what is happening as, if I ask for permission to do this, it will completely change the way the people react with each other. However, I could note down what I saw and heard immediately afterwards. I'll talk to my project tutor.

You will almost certainly remember from your earlier studies the work of Kolb and of Honey and Mumford on the learning cycle (Marchington et al. 2016). This views the learning process as going through a four-stage cycle of:

- 1 concrete experience;
- 2 observation and reflection in relation to the experience;
- 3 forming abstract concepts and generalisations from these observations and reflections;
- 4 testing these concepts and generalisations in new situations.

The learning cycle emphasises that for learning to happen you need to pass through the complete cycle, as without reflection there will be no learning from experience. Such reflection is the process of stopping and thinking about a concrete experience that has happened or is happening, and the subsequent forming of concepts and generalisations, so you can apply what you have learnt from your experiences to new situations. In other words, you need to have an inquiring imagination and persistently ask yourself 'why?', 'what if?' and 'so what?' (Gabriel 2015).

Given the benefits to learning, it is not surprising that many universities require students to write a reflective essay or a reflective practice statement as part of the assessment for their research project. In order to do this well, and more importantly to enhance your learning during the research process, we recommend that you keep a reflective diary research notebook or learning journal. You should write in this frequently regarding what has gone well, what has gone less well, what you have learnt from each experience and how you will apply this learning in the future (Box 1.3). Indeed, as you read on you will find that we ask you to do this at the end of each chapter in the section 'Progressing your research project'. Questions our students have found helpful to guide them when writing their diary entries are listed as a checklist in Box 1.4. Be warned, many students forget to write in their reflective diaries regularly; this makes writing a good reflective essay difficult as much of the learning will have been forgotten!



Box 1.4 Checklist of questions to ask yourself when making reflective diary entries

In relation to each experience...

- ✓ What has gone well?
 - Why has it gone well?
 - So what does this mean in relation to my research?

- ✓ What has not gone so well?
 - Why has it not gone so well?
 - So what does this mean in relation to my research?
- ✓ What adjustments will/did I make to my research following my reflection?

Looking back...

- ✓ How could I have improved on the adjustments made?
 - Why?
- ✓ What key themes have emerged over a number of entries?
- ✓ How will I apply what I have learnt from each experience to new situations?

1.6 The purpose and structure of this book

The purpose

As we stated earlier (Section 1.1), the overriding purpose of this book is to help you to undertake research. This means that early on in your research project you will need to be clear about what you are doing, why you are doing it and the associated implications of what you are seeking to do. You will also need to ensure that you can show how your ideas relate to research that has already been undertaken in your topic area and that you have a clear research design and have thought about how you will collect and analyse your data. As part of this you will need to consider the validity and reliability (or credibility and dependability) of the data you intend to use, along with associated ethical and access issues. The appropriateness and suitability of the analytical techniques you choose to use will be of equal importance. Finally, you will need to write and present your research project report as clearly and precisely as possible, making sure you meet all your university's assessment criteria.

The structure of each chapter

Each of the subsequent chapters deals with part of the research process outlined in Figure 1.2. The ideas, methods and techniques are discussed using appropriate terms, but as little jargon as possible. Where appropriate you will find summaries of these, using tables, checklists or diagrams. When new terms are introduced for the first time they are shown in **bold** and a definition or explanation follows shortly afterwards. They are also listed with a brief definition in the glossary. The use of appropriate information technology is considered in most instances as an integral part of the book. Discussion of information technology is not software specific but is concerned with general principles. However, we recognise that you may wish to find out more about how to use data analysis software packages and so have included tutorials for the quantitative data analysis software IBM SPSS Statistics and the spreadsheet Excel™ (with practice data sets) on this book's

companion website. These will enable you to utilise whatever software you have available most effectively. We have also included the Smarter Online Searching Guide to help you with your Internet searches. Chapters have been cross-referenced as appropriate, and an index is provided to help you to find your way around the book.

Included within each chapter are one or more boxes titled *Focus on student research*. These, like Box 1.3, reflect actual research projects, undertaken by students, in which points made in the book are illustrated. In many instances these examples illustrate possible pitfalls you may come across while undertaking your research. Further illustrations are provided by *Focus on management research* and *Focus on research in the news* boxes. *Focus on management research* boxes (such as Box 1.2) discuss recent research in business and management. These are normally derived from refereed academic journal articles and you are likely to be able to download the actual articles from online databases at your university. *Focus on research in the news* boxes, one of which you will have already read (Box 1.1), offer abridged versions of topical newspaper articles that illustrate pertinent research-related issues. All these will help you to understand the technique or idea and to assess its suitability or appropriateness for your research. Where a pitfall has been illustrated, it will, it is hoped, help you to avoid making the same mistake. There is also a series of boxed *Checklists* (such as Box 1.4) to provide you with further focused guidance for your own research. At the end of each chapter there is a *Summary* of key points, which you may look at before and after reading the chapter to ensure you digest the main points.

To enable you to check that you have understood the chapter, a series of *Self-check questions* is included at the end. These can be answered without recourse to other (external) resources. *Answers* are provided to all these self-check questions at the end of each chapter. Self-check questions are followed by *Review and discussion questions*. These suggest a variety of activities you can undertake to help you further develop your knowledge and understanding of the material in the chapter, often involving discussion with a friend. Self-test multiple choice questions with feedback are available on this book's companion website. Each chapter also includes a section towards the end headed *Progressing your research project*. This contains a series of questions that will help you to consider the implications of the material covered by the chapter for your research project. Answering the questions in the section *Progressing your research project* for each chapter will enable you to generate all the material that you will need to include in your project report and, where required, your reflective statement. These questions involve you in undertaking activities that are more complex than self-check questions, such as a library-based literature search or designing and piloting a questionnaire. They are designed to help you to focus on the aspects that are most appropriate to your research project. However, as emphasised by Figure 1.2, you will almost certainly need to revisit and revise your answers as your research progresses.

Each chapter is also accompanied by *References*, *Further reading* and a *Case study*. Further reading is included for two distinct reasons:

- to direct you to other work on the ideas and concepts contained within the chapter;
- to direct you to further examples of research where the ideas contained in the chapter have been used.

The main reasons for our choice of further reading are therefore indicated.

The new case studies towards the end of every chapter are drawn from a variety of business and management research scenarios and have been based on the case study's authors' and students' experiences when undertaking a research project. All case studies have been written to highlight real issues that occur when undertaking business and management research. To help to focus your thoughts or discussion on some of the pertinent issues, each case is followed by evaluative questions. Further case studies relating

to each chapter are available from the book's companion website. This provides hyperlinks to over 75 additional case studies.

An outline of the chapters

The book is organised in the following way.

Chapter 2 is written to assist you in the generation of ideas, which will help you to choose a suitable research topic, and offers advice on what makes a good research topic. If you have already been given a research topic, perhaps by an organisation or tutor, you will need to refine it into one that is feasible, and should still therefore read this chapter. After your idea has been generated and refined, the chapter discusses how to turn this idea into a clear research question(s), aim and objectives. (Research questions and objectives are referred to throughout the book.) Finally, the chapter provides advice on how to write your research proposal.

The importance of critically reviewing the literature for your research is discussed in Chapter 3. This chapter commences by explaining what is meant by 'critical', when reviewing literature. The chapter explains the purpose of reviewing the literature, highlighting the content and possible structures. The range of secondary and grey (also known as primary) literature sources are outlined, and a range of search strategies discussed. We also offer advice on how to plan your search strategy and undertake your searches using online databases and search engines, and how to record (reference) items, evaluate their relevance and subsequently draft your critical review, acknowledging the work of others to avoid plagiarism.

Chapter 4 addresses the issue of understanding different research philosophies, including positivism, critical realism, interpretivism, post modernism and pragmatism. Within this the functionalist, interpretive, radical humanist and radical structuralist paradigms are discussed. Deductive, inductive, abductive and retroductive approaches to theory development are also considered. In this chapter we challenge you to think about your own values and beliefs reflexively and the impact this will have on the way you undertake your research.

These ideas are developed further in Chapter 5, which explores formulating your research design. Your methodological choice of quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods is considered and, within this, whether the research is exploratory, descriptive, explanatory or evaluative. A variety of research strategies are explored and longitudinal and cross-sectional time horizons discussed. Consideration is given to the implications of research design for the quality of your research findings and conclusions.

Chapter 6 explores issues related to gaining access and to research ethics. It offers advice on how to gain physical and cognitive access both to organisations and to individuals using both traditional and Internet-mediated strategies. Potential ethical issues are discussed in relation to each stage of the research process and different data collection methods, stressing the need to research ethically. Issues of data protection are also introduced.

A range of the probability and non-probability sampling techniques available for use in your research is explained in Chapter 7. The chapter considers why sampling may be necessary, and looks at issues of sample size and likely response rates for both probability and non-probability samples. Advice on how to relate your choice of sampling techniques to your research topic is given, and techniques for assessing the representativeness of those who respond are discussed. The extent to which it is reasonable to generalise from a sample is also assessed.

Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11 are concerned with different methods of obtaining data. The use of secondary data is discussed in Chapter 8. This chapter introduces the variety of survey, document (text, audio and visual) and multiple source data that are likely to be

available, suggesting ways in which they can be used. Advantages and disadvantages of secondary data are discussed, and a range of techniques for locating these data is suggested. Chapter 8 provides an indication of the myriad of sources available via the Internet and also offers advice on how to evaluate the suitability of secondary data for your research.

In contrast, Chapter 9 is concerned with collecting data through observation. The chapter examines three types of observation: participant observation, structured observation and Internet-mediated observation, as well as the use of videography, audio recordings and static visual images in the collection of observational data. Practical advice on using each is offered, and particular attention is given to ensuring that data are obtained ethically and are both reliable and valid.

Chapter 10 is also concerned with collecting primary data, this time using interviews and diaries. The appropriateness of using different forms of interview and diary in relation to your research strategy is discussed. Advice on how to undertake semi structured, in-depth and group interviews is offered, including the conduct of focus groups, telephone, Internet-mediated (including online) interviews and visual interviews. We also consider the use of both quantitative and qualitative research diaries.

Chapter 11 is the final chapter concerned with collecting data. It introduces you to the use of both self-completed and interviewer-completed questionnaires, and explores their advantages and disadvantages. Practical advice is offered on the process of designing, piloting and delivering Internet, SMS (text), postal, delivery and collection, telephone and face-to-face questionnaires to enhance their response rates. Within this we consider the use of images in questionnaires.

Analysis of data is covered in Chapters 12 and 13. Chapter 12 outlines and illustrates the main issues that you need to consider when preparing and analysing data quantitatively. Different types of data are defined and advice is given on how to categorise and code text and visual data (including using content analysis) and create a data matrix and to code data. Practical advice is also offered on the analysis of these data using statistical analysis software. The most appropriate diagrams to explore and illustrate data are discussed and suggestions are made about the most appropriate statistics to use to describe data, to explore relationships and to examine trends.

Chapter 13 outlines and discusses the main approaches available to you to analyse data qualitatively both manually and using computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (**CAQDAS**). The diverse nature of qualitative data and issues associated with transcription are considered. The use of deductively based and inductively based analytical approaches is discussed and different techniques are outlined to analyse text, audio and visual qualitative data. A number of analytical aids that will help you analyse data and record your ideas as you progress your research are also discussed.

Chapter 14 helps you with the structure, content and style of your final project report and any associated oral and poster presentations. Above all, and as illustrated by Figure 1.2, it encourages you to see writing as an intrinsic part of the research process that should not be left until everything else is completed.

Appendices and glossary

This book contains four appendices designed to support you at different stages of your research project. In the early stages, as you begin to read, you will need to keep a reference of what you have read using a recognised system, the most frequently used of which are detailed in Appendix 1. When selecting your sample you may need to calculate the minimum sample size required and use random sampling numbers (Appendices 2 and 3). Finally, when designing your data collection tools and writing your project report you will

need to ensure that the language you use is non-discriminatory. Guidelines for this are given in Appendix 4. A separate glossary of over 700 research-methods-related terms is also included for quick reference.

1.7 Summary

- This book is designed to help you to undertake a research project whether you are an undergraduate or postgraduate student of business and management or a practising manager. It is designed as an introductory textbook and to support you through the entire research process.
- Business and management research involves undertaking systematic research to find out things. It is transdisciplinary and engages with both theory and practice.
- All business and management research projects can be placed on a basic–applied continuum according to their purpose and context.
- Wherever your research project lies on this continuum, you should undertake your research with rigour. To do this you will need to pay careful attention to the entire research process.
- In order to enhance your learning during your research we recommend you keep a reflective diary or notebook.
- In this book, research is represented as a multi-stage process; however, this process is rarely straightforward and will involve both reflecting on and revising stages already undertaken as well as forward planning.
- The text of each chapter is supported through a series of boxed examples. These include focus on student research, focus on management research and focus on research in the news. In addition, there are checklists, self-check questions and review and discussion questions, an assignment and a case study with questions. Answers to all self-check questions are at the end of the appropriate chapter.
- Answering the questions in the section ‘Progressing your research project’ for Chapters 1–13 will enable you to generate all the material that you will need to include in your project report and reflect on what you have learnt. When you have also answered the questions in this section for Chapter 14, you will have written your research report.

Self-check questions

Help with these questions is available at the end of the chapter.

- 1.1** Outline the features that can make business and management research distinctive from research in other disciplines.
- 1.2** What are the key differences between basic and applied research (and consultancy)?
- 1.3** Examine Figure 1.2. What does this suggest about the need to plan and to reflect on and revise your ideas?

Review and discussion questions

- 1.4** Agree with a friend to each read a different quality newspaper. Make a note of at least 10 articles in your newspaper that mention the word ‘research’. Now examine the articles one at a time. As you examine each article, does the reference to research:
 - refer to the collection of facts or information with no clear purpose?
 - refer to the reassembling and reordering of facts or information without interpretation?

- provide a means of getting the reader to respect what is being written?
 - refer to the systematic collection and interpretation of data with a clear purpose?
- Discuss your answers with your friend.

- 1.5** Revisit Table 1.2 and look at the differences in management researcher and practitioner orientations for foci of interest, methodological imperatives, key outcomes and how each views the other. For each of the continua implied by this table, where would you place yourself? To what extent do you believe that business and management research should meet the practitioner requirements? Give reasons for your answer.



Progressing your research project

Starting your reflective diary or notebook

- Find out if your university requires you to write a reflective practice statement, learning journal or keep a reflective diary or research notebook as part of your research project or research methods module.
- If the answer is 'yes', look carefully at precisely what is required by the assessment criteria and ensure

that your reflective diary or research notebook entries will enable you to meet fully the assessment criteria. In particular be sure to ascertain whether you are expected to be reflective or reflexive.

- When doing this, amend the questions in Box 1.4 to guide your diary or notebook entries as necessary.
- If the answer is 'no', we still believe it will be beneficial to your learning for your research project or research methods module if you keep a reflective diary or research notebook on a regular basis. Please use the questions in Box 1.4 to guide your reflective entries at the end of each chapter.

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Further reading

Bresnen, M. and Burrell, G. (2012) 'Journals à la mode? Twenty years of living alongside Mode 2 and the new production of knowledge', *Organization*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 25–37. A clear explanation of the differences between Modes, 1, 2 and 3, as well as the proposal of a new mode, 0.

Cassell, C. and Lee, B. (eds) (2011) *Challenges and Controversies in Management Research*. New York: Routledge. This edited volume consists of a series of chapters looking at the key challenges and controversies facing business and management research at the start of the twenty-first century. The opening chapter includes a useful overview of the rest of the book and will enable you to easily follow up those aspects that you feel are most pertinent.

Davis, G.F. (2015) 'What is management research actually good for?', *Harvard Business Review*, 28 May, pp. 2–6. This adaption of Davis' 2015 editorial in *Administrative Science Quarterly* discusses the purpose of management research emphasising the importance of knowing the constituency served by the research.

Salmon, P. (2003) 'How do we recognise good research?', *The Psychologist*, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 24–7. This short article looks at how we can evaluate research in general looking at rigour of method and 'fit' with what is being studied, clarity and coherence of what has been undertaken and its utility.

Case 1

Investigating diversity and inclusion at OilCo



Caitlin is studying for a Master's degree in Organisational Psychology at her local Business School. Her project tutor is conducting research about diversity and organisational change with a major international oil company (OilCo.) and has asked Caitlin whether she would like to use the company as the focus of her research project. There is the opportunity to do an additional but discrete piece of research about diversity in the company. Specifically, the company would like to run focus groups with some female staff at their large London headquarters site. A focus group is like an interview but it takes place in a group format with a number of people participating. It is a well-used method within market research and also popular with management researchers because a variety of views on the same topic can be accessed at the same time. Oilco are aware that minority groups within the organisation feel somewhat excluded from career development opportunities and their new Head of Diversity and Inclusion is interested in finding out why this may be the case. Caitlin's project tutor has suggested that she can set up and run the focus groups and use the data gathered for her Master's

research project. Her project tutor will offer advice on the design of the focus groups and how to analyse the data.

Caitlin is very enthused by this prospect. When her project tutor first mentioned it to her she wrote in her research diary that evening *'I am so excited about this. It was my favourite topic during the course, it is really hard to get people to take part in diversity research and here it seems to all be in place. Plus I will actually get the chance to make some real change in an actual organisation. I just hope I can make the most of it.'*

At the first meeting between the Head of Diversity for OilCo and Caitlin, the Head of Diversity set out her expectations of the work. The company will take responsibility for inviting people to be part of the focus groups and will organise the sessions at their headquarters. This will include making sure that staff have time off work to attend and sort out refreshments. Caitlin and her project tutor will be responsible for designing the content of the focus groups and Caitlin for running the sessions. Caitlin and her project tutor will retain exclusive publishing rights to the data, as long as the name of the company is kept confidential in all potential outputs, including Caitlin's project.

Once back at the University, Caitlin and her project tutor discuss how she will run the focus groups and what the interesting theoretical issues are that they would like to address. They are both interested in intersectionality theory and hope to capture some of that through the data analysis. Intersectionality theory suggests that there are a number of different characteristics upon which individuals can be discriminated against, for example race, gender and sexuality. Hence rather than focus upon one characteristic, intersectionality researchers focus upon the impact of the intersections between the different characteristics (Crenshaw 1989). Caitlin and her tutor also talk about Caitlin ensuring that she has University ethical approval for the project research, as her project tutor warns her that this can sometimes take a few weeks to come through.

When Caitlin gets home she looks at her research methods textbooks. Following advice, she decides that in choosing the participants the ideal would be to have mixed groups of staff of different ages from different parts of the country and ideally have some Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) women as part of the sample. This will enable her to look for any interesting

intersectionalities in diversity experiences. She also decides that the optimal number of focus groups would be three, and that there should be about six people in each group. She plans to audio-record the focus groups and analyse the qualitative data using template analysis, a form of qualitative data analysis strategy that she wrote an assignment on in her research methodology course. She notes all this down to discuss with her project tutor the next time she sees her.

Over the next week Caitlin spends more time familiarising herself with the literature on intersectionality. A week after the meeting at OilCo, Caitlin receives an email from the Head of Diversity. In it she says *'We are very much looking forward to the focus groups discussions. We have organised for five one-hour long focus groups to take place next Tuesday. There will be 15 people in each group. We have also organised for your findings to be presented to the Company HR Director at our regular catch-up meeting on the Monday after. I look forward to seeing you on Tuesday.'*

Caitlin is horrified by the email. She writes in her research diary, *'How could this have happened? How am I going to do five groups in a day, it will be exhausting. How will I be able to analyse all that qualitative data analysis in a week? And I haven't even filled in my ethics form yet. I might not have ethical clearance by then. What am I going to do? How can I explain to them that I can't do it? I can't see how I can do this but the worst thing would be to lose such a great opportunity. What is going to happen to my project now?'* Caitlin decides that she will see her project tutor as soon as she can to try and work out what to do next.

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Questions

- 1 How does Caitlin's experience illustrate the differences in approaches to research taken by academics and practitioners?
- 2 What, if anything, do you think Caitlin did wrong here? Give reasons for your answer.
- 3 What advice do you think Caitlin's project tutor will offer her about what to do next?

Additional case studies relating to material covered in this chapter are available via the book's companion website: **www.pearsoned.co.uk/saunders**.

They are:

- Isabelle's research dilemma;
- Reporting evidence from business and management research;
- Researching buyer–supplier relationships.



Self-check answers

- 1.1** The features you outline are likely to include:
- the transdisciplinary nature of business and management research;
 - the development of ideas that are related to practice and in particular the requirement for the research to have some practical consequence;
 - the need for research to complete the virtuous circle of theory and practice;
 - addressing problems that grow out of the interaction between the worlds of theory and practice.
- 1.2** The key differences between basic and applied research relate to both the purpose and the context in which it is undertaken. They are summarised in Figure 1.1.
- 1.3** Figure 1.2 emphasises the importance of planning during your research project. Forward planning needs to occur at all stages up to submission. In addition, you will need to reflect on and to revise your work throughout the life of the research project. This reflection needs to have a wide focus. You should both consider the stage you have reached and revisit earlier stages and work through them again. Reflection may also lead you to amend your research plan. This should be expected, although large amendments in the later stages of your research project are unlikely.

Get ahead using resources on the companion website at:

www.pearsoned.co.uk/saunders.

- Improve your IBM SPSS Statistics analysis with practice tutorials.
- Save time researching on the Internet with the Smarter Online Searching Guide.
- Test your progress using self-assessment questions.
- Follow live links to useful websites.

