

STUDENT ACTIVITIES

The Investigative Process

Student activity 1

Working individually:

- 1 Think about whether you feel most comfortable talking about your proposed work as 'research', 'inquiry' or 'investigation', and the reasons for your preference (in terms of the different implications of these words and/or the nature of the issue you are hoping to look at).
- 2 Think in a similar way about whether you see yourself as collecting 'data', 'information' or evidence.

In a small group:

- 3 Discuss your preferences and reasons.

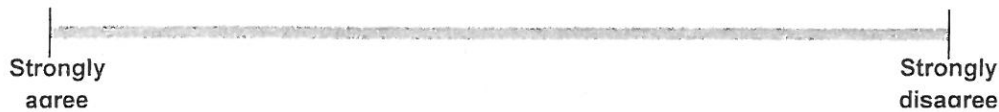
Student activity 2 a

Working in a small group, agree where to put an X on the scale beneath each statement below.

- 1 **Research needs to be scientific. You should therefore always seek objective measures and use statistical tests to determine the significance of your results.**



- 2 **For any research to be valid it is essential that all variables other than those you are interested in are carefully controlled so that they do not contaminate the results.**



- 3 **Most of the things that managers are interested in are not capable of being objectively measured. If you want to understand them, you will need to use subjective measures.**



4 What is really important in understanding management problems is the way in which different people are interpreting the situation. The important thing to investigate is therefore stakeholders' assumptions and interpretations.



5 It doesn't make sense to think of knowledge as something separate from action. Managers addressing practical issues need to focus on the usefulness of a concept, and its consequences



6 It would be foolhardy to ignore the complexities of business situations in the interests of rigour.



7 Different research methods are needed for different types of problem. Some may be more 'scientific' than others, and you may sometimes need to combine methods.



8 Whatever the nature of the problem, it is important to use a research method that is acceptable to your client.



9 Whether you are working with objective or subjective data you need to be careful about the trustworthiness of the conclusions you draw, and guard against bias.



10 Practical business research needs to proceed in a series of cycles of activity – if you design every feature of your research at the outset you will be unable to benefit from what you learn during the process.



11 It is really important to capture your own thought processes as they change during a research project. The way you are 'making sense' of the issue will have a strong influence on your findings.



If you have time consider the following:

Student activity 2 b

Individually:

- 1 Look at the chair you are sitting on.
- 2 How would you describe it? (Consider its construction, materials i.e. the objective features of the chair.)
- 3 Now describe the chair as a piece of art. (What emotional thoughts come into your head; what are your feelings about the chair; what adjectives would you use to describe it, etc?)

In a small group:

- 2 Discuss the range of views you have about the chair from each perspective.
- 3 Revise your list in the light of discussion.

Choosing a Topic

Student activity 3

Working in small groups (ideally of four), go through the following scenario, each group member taking it in turn to play 'you', a questioner or the observer:

- 1 You describe briefly the area in which you are considering a project, and if you already have an idea of an issue you want to explore with the project, describe the issue. (Maximum 5 minutes; others remain silent.)
- 2 Others ask questions for clarification (Maximum 3 minutes.)
- 3 Two others ask carefully phrased questions about:
 - stakeholders and their likely position(s)
 - how research in this area would further your career objectives
 - the benefits to the organisation
 - the risks you might encounter
 - the feasibility of research in this area.
- 4 The group member who has been observing the questioning now gives feedback on the effectiveness of the questioning in terms of helping 'you' think constructively about key issues.
- 5 All try to identify any new ideas/issues about either the topic choice or the questioning.

Student activity 4

Working in the same group as for Activity 1,

- 1 Identify the potential topic which is furthest developed.
- 2 Discuss possible research questions related to this topic.
- 3 Identify sources of information/data/evidence that could help you answer these questions.
- 4 Discuss the feasibility of obtaining this information, and any risks to a project of this nature.

Writing Your Research Question

Student activity 5: Surfacing your ideas

Working individually:

- 1 Think about two or three potential research questions that you might wish to focus your business research project on. Write each of them down in the top space of one of the boxes provided.

Potential research question No.1
My intentions:
The context:

Potential research question No.2
My intentions:
The context:

Potential research question No.3
My intentions:
The context:

- 2 Now make notes in the other spaces provided about your intentions behind doing that research and the context in which that research will be carried out.

Student activity 6: Feasibility

Working individually, and taking each of your potential research questions in turn:

- 1 Consider the feasibility of doing the research on this research question by noting down in the spaces provided the influential strengths and the limitations of a) the interest that there is in the subject, b) the literature on the subject that is available, c) your stakeholders and their requirements, d) the resources that are required and are available, and e) the methods you intend to use and the skills that are required and that you have.

Potential research question No.1		
	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
Interest		
Literature		
Stakeholders		
Resources		
Methods/skills		

Potential research question No.2		
	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
Interest		
Literature		
Stakeholders		
Resources		
Methods/skills		

Potential research question No.3		
	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
Interest		
Literature		
Stakeholders		
Resources		
Methods/skills		

- 2 Having completed this list, an analysis of it should enable you to see just how feasible each of your potential research questions is. Decide whether you wish to discard one or two of them forthwith, or whether you wish to hold on to them all for now and wait for feedback from your colleagues to help you to choose the one you will go with.

Student activity 7: Refining your question

Working individually, and taking each of your potential research questions in turn:

- 1 Consider and note down in the spaces provided how you might re-word each of your potential research questions so that it clearly conveys a) a central theme, b) a location, and c) a means of investigation.

Current wording of potential research question No.1:

Re-worded research question to convey a) a central theme, b) a location, and c) a means of investigation:

Current wording of potential research question No.2:

Re-worded research question to convey a) a central theme, b) a location, and c) a means of investigation:

Current wording of potential research question No.3:

Re-worded research question to convey a) a central theme, b) a location, and c) a means of investigation:

- 2 Decide which of these revised research questions you wish to take forward as the basis for your business research project.

Student activity 8: Research objectives

Working individually, and having selected your proposed research question:

- 1 Think about the research objectives you would need to set to help you answer the research question. Use the space provided to write down perhaps up to five of such objectives, and then try to structure them in the same logical order that you would address them in.

Selected research question:

Research objectives to help answer the research question:

in no particular order:

1

2

3

4

5

in logical sequence:

1

2

3

4

5

Literature review

Student activity 9

Working individually:

- 1 Consider and write down what you think are the *strengths* and the *limitations* of each of the following types of literature:

BOOKS	
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Limitations</i>

ACADEMIC JOURNALS	
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Limitations</i>

PROFESSIONAL JOURNALS	
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Limitations</i>

ORGANISATIONAL DOCUMENTS/INFORMATION	
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Limitations</i>

GOVERNMENT REPORTS	
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Limitations</i>

THESES AND DISSERTATIONS	
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Limitations</i>

CONFERENCE PAPERS	
<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Limitations</i>

2 Discuss your answers with your group.

Then:

3 See if there are any further answers you had not thought of in the list produced via your lecturer. Discuss them too if there are any.

Writing the Literature Review

Student activity 10

Below are two pairs of extracts from literature reviews. One of each pair would be characterised as good, the other would be characterised as poor.

- 1 Read through the first pair, making notes in the spaces provided of which you think is the good and which the bad, *and why*.

1 Transformational leadership and knowledge management

Extract A

'Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their shared purposes' (Daft, 1999: 5). Leadership has been thought about in a number of ways. First, the traits school of thinking claimed that leadership was something that an individual was born with – that people either were or were not a leader (Daft, *ibid*) – and if you were not born with the correct attributes, then you would simply never be a leader. Others (Blake and Mouton cited in Daft, 1999) see leadership as being a balance between a focus on task and a focus on relationships. That in order to influence people to achieve the goals that you have set them you need to balance a concern for the person with a concern for the job. Daft also notes a range of 'contingency approaches' in which features such as the nature of the follower group, the situation and the leader's style of decision-making all have an influence on the leader's ability to lead. Lastly, Daft talks about visionary leadership and the ways in which a vision can inspire people and create commitment. This commitment may include the sharing of knowledge within the organisation.

Extract B

Transformational leaders are often described as charismatic (Bass and Avolio, 2000), providing inspiration, motivation and a shared vision for those within the organisation. However, this vision is thought to do more than simply inspire and motivate the workgroup – it is seen by many as a means of creating a mechanism through which knowledge management (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995) can be introduced. Where people share in a vision, they share a vested interest in seeing that vision become a reality. Transformational leaders encourage people to share both their explicit and their tacit knowledge (Argyris and Schon, 1996), helping people to contribute more effectively to the organisation's goals. Although the human motivational aspects of this knowledge-sharing are important, Garcia-Morales *et al* (2008: 312) recognise a much more practical benefit, with their claim that 'Tacit knowledge enables the firm to obtain competitive advantage'. The benefits of knowledge management are therefore not simply altruistic; rather they are clearly intended to be of value to the success of the organisation as well as of value to the people who work within.

I think Extract A is good / poor because:

1

2

3

4

I think Extract B is good / poor because:

1

2

3

4

- 2 Read through the second pair, making notes in the spaces provided of which you think is the good and which the bad, *and why*.

2 The culture of the organisation

Extract 1

Culture is something that everybody is familiar with. It is something that people talk about at work, something that we read about in the newspapers and something that every organisation has. But culture has not always been a part of organisations. In the 1980s academics started writing about culture and suggesting that it might be used by managers as a means of controlling the workforce. Deal and Kennedy, Handy and Schein all produced models of culture which demonstrated how they characterised the concept. There was some criticism of these models – in particular, Handy's model. Many academics thought that the model that he produced was more a model of structure than a model of culture. As such this was not of use because managers wouldn't be clear which was which.

Extract 2

Culture is thought to be a borrowed concept (Reichers and Schneider, 1990; Sackman, 1992), existing for many years only in the academic fields of anthropology and sociology. However, by the 1980s, many people studying organisations (Pettigrew, 1979; Deal and Kennedy, 1982) had suggested that culture might be of value to the practice of management. The concept was transferred into the realms of management (Price, 2006), and a number of debates emerged. First was the debate regarding definition. Authors such as Schein (1984) were quite happy to offer definitions of the concept and to defend the usefulness of definitions, while others, such as Alvesson (1993: 2), noted that 'definitions seldom succeed in giving such concepts any crystal-clear meaning'. The second debate related to the difference between organisational culture and corporate culture. Although some writers (Hofstede, 1986; Kotter and Heskett, 1992) use the terms interchangeably, others, such as Linstead and Grafton-Small (1992), are keen to make a distinction between the two. Corporate culture they see as being that directed by management, whereas organisational culture is that which emerges from the workgroups within the organisation. It is therefore beyond the control of management. The third debate is closely linked with the distinction between corporate and organisational culture. Where culture is to be a value to managers it needs to be consistent across the organisation. The third debate highlights two schools of thought, one which sees culture as being homogenous and consistent across the organisation, and the other which characterises culture as being fragmented or differentiated (Parker, 2000; Martin, 2002).

I think Extract 1 is ☐ good / poor ☐ because:

1

2

3

4

I think Extract 2 is ☐ good / poor ☐ because:

1

2

3

4

- 3 Discuss your answers and your reasons with others of your group, noting down in the spaces provided above anything significant you might have missed the first time.
- 4 Discuss your group's responses in a plenary session.

Data, Evidence and Sampling

Student activity 11

Working in small groups:

- 1 Discuss why you cannot prove anything about a population from a sample.

Notes:

- 2 Consider what might make you more or less sure about any conclusions you drew from your sample.

Notes:

Student activity 12

Jack is in charge of a team (22 members) which carries out a range of marketing-related projects for a large number of very different internal and external customers. There have recently been an increasing number of complaints about the quality of service his team delivers, from both internal and external customers. Jack has decided that for his dissertation project he would like to do something about this.

In a small group, and including in your discussion ideas about types of data and sampling,

- 1 Discuss the sorts of data/information that Jack might consider collecting and analysing at different stages in his project, and how each type might help him achieve his overall purpose of improving the service provided by his team.

Notes:

- 2 Discuss how Jack might go about deciding which data might be of most use to him.

Notes:

Choosing a Research Method

Student activity 13

Referring to the methods and approaches you have just looked at [on the PowerPoint slides], use this activity to decide which methods are appropriate for your research. You will need to refer to the recommended textbook to complete this activity.

- 1 In the spaces provided write down what you think are the strengths and weaknesses of each *in relation to your particular research*.

PHILOSOPHIES	
Case study research	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Grounded Theory	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Action Research	
Strengths	Weaknesses

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES	
Questionnaires	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Interviews	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Focus groups	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Observations	
Strengths	Weaknesses

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Quantitative methods

Strengths

Weaknesses

Qualitative methods

Strengths

Weaknesses

MIXED METHODS	
Mixed methods	
Strengths	Weaknesses
Triangulation methods	
Strengths	Weaknesses

- 2 Refer back to these notes when you are reaching a conclusion in considering your research methods.

Student activity 15

1 Identify two ways that you would present each of the following

a. Univariate data

i.

ii.

b. Bivariate data

i.

ii.

2 Explain the difference between the following:

i. Parametrics (P)

ii. Non-parametrics (NP)

Student activity 16

- 1 What type of analysis uses?

Pearson's coefficient (r) (P)

Spearman's rank coefficient (r_s) (NP)

Chi squared (χ^2) test (NP)

- 2 In groups, discuss the types of data you would have in your research and describe the most appropriate representation of the data.
- 3 Compare two of your representations, and decide on their relative advantages and disadvantages as ways of communicating your findings.