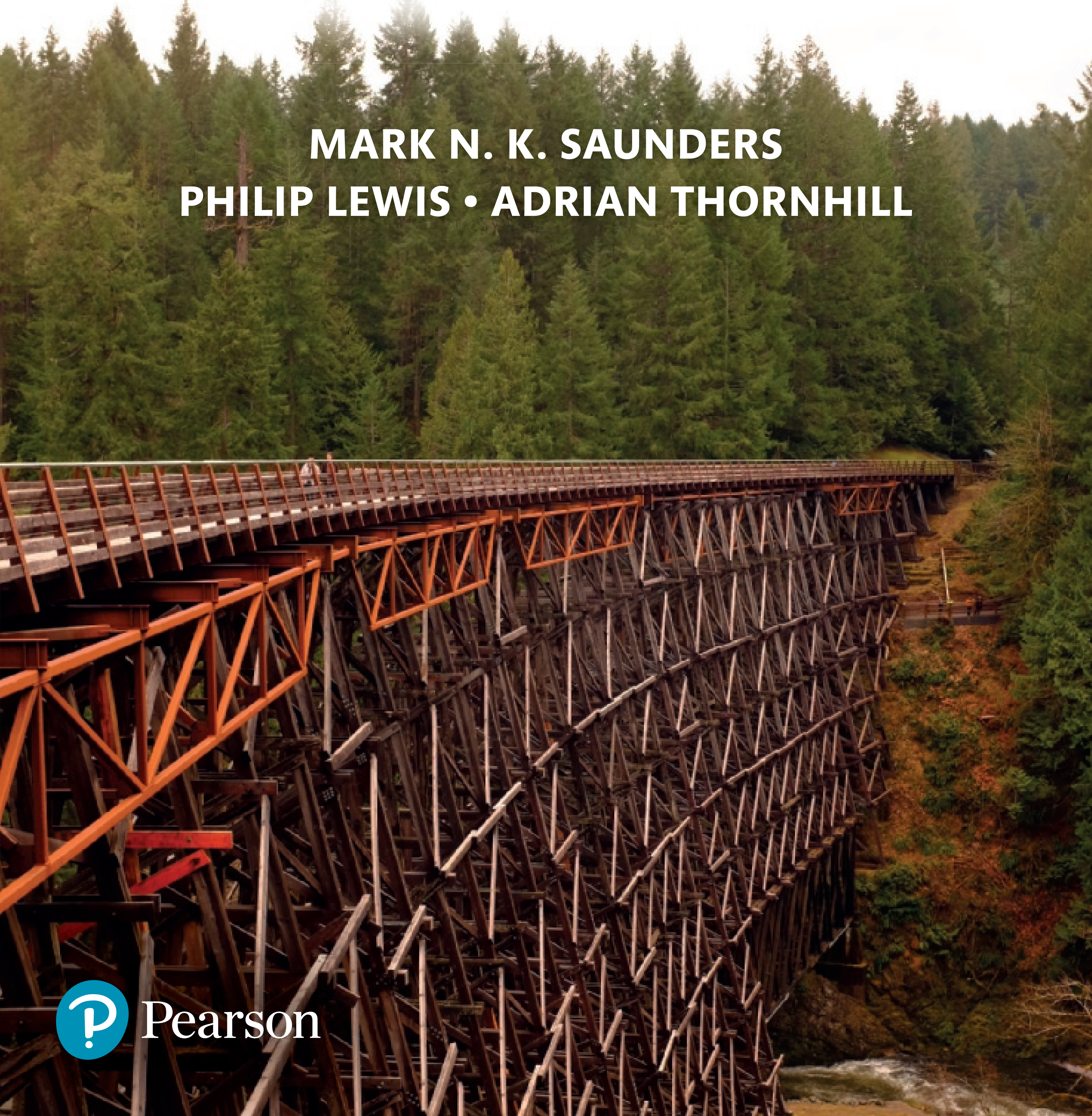
RESEARCH METHODS FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS

EIGHTH EDITION

MARK N. K. SAUNDERS
PHILIP LEWIS • ADRIAN THORNHILL

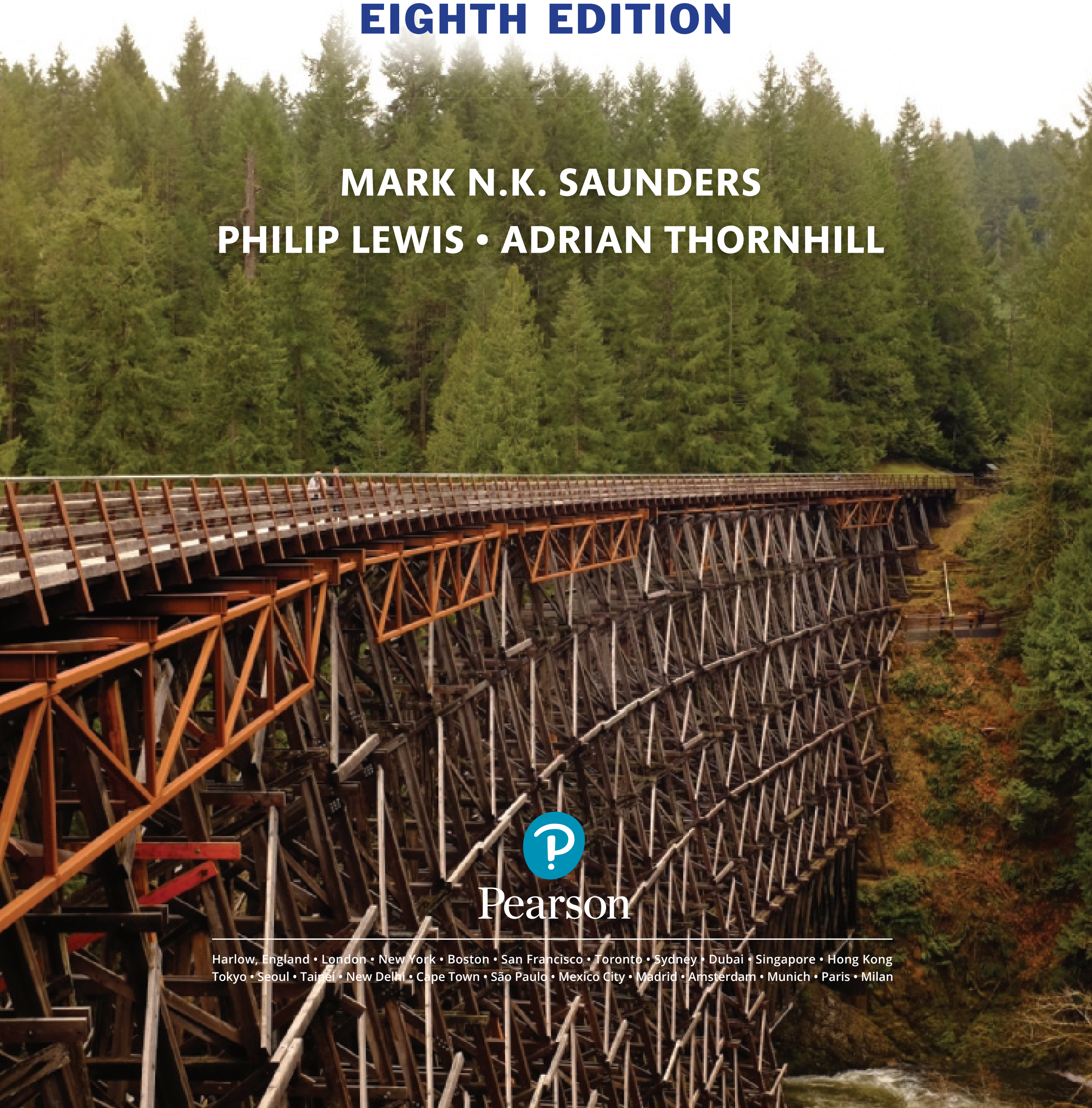


Pearson

Research Methods for Business Students

RESEARCH METHODS FOR BUSINESS STUDENTS

EIGHTH EDITION



MARK N.K. SAUNDERS
PHILIP LEWIS • ADRIAN THORNHILL

Pearson

Harlow, England • London • New York • Boston • San Francisco • Toronto • Sydney • Dubai • Singapore • Hong Kong
Tokyo • Seoul • Taipei • New Delhi • Cape Town • São Paulo • Mexico City • Madrid • Amsterdam • Munich • Paris • Milan

PEARSON EDUCATION LIMITED
KAO Two
KAO Park
Harlow CM17 9SR
United Kingdom
Tel: +44 (0)1279 623623
Web: www.pearson.com/uk

First published under the Pitman Publishing imprint in 1997
Second edition published 2000
Third edition published 2003
Fourth edition published 2007
Fifth edition published 2009
Sixth edition published 2012
Seventh edition published 2016
Eighth edition published 2019

ISBN: 978-1-292-20878-7

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for the print edition is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Saunders, M. N. K., author. | Lewis, Philip author. |
Thornhill, Adrian, author.
Title: Research methods for business students / Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis,
Adrian Thornhill.
Description: Eighth Edition. | New York : Pearson, [2019] | Revised edition
of the authors' Research methods for business students, 2015.
Identifiers: LCCN 2018058370 | ISBN 9781292208787 (print) | ISBN 9781292208800
(pdf) | ISBN 9781292208794 (epub)
Subjects: LCSH: Business—Research. | Business—Research—Data processing.
Classification: LCC HD30.4 .S28 2019 | DDC 650.072—dc23
LC record available at https://urldefense.proofpoint.com/v2/url?u=https-3A__lccn.loc.gov_2018058370&d=DwIFAg&c=0YLnzTkWOdJlub_y7qAx8Q&r=zKTI3XC-TUJM0AsOJA2ly8zK9anF7moqCccCkWx1Ygs&m=aFJFa_On9Bwi_ZE496eRa0RzNQg4o0hbQsJmY60F4S4&s=jnj_MFTdyrU7pKlt5YX8gCup6YtYmmqllMUMXs1Og7w&e=

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
23 22 21 20 19

Front cover image © Mark N.K. Saunders

Print edition typeset in 9.5/12 ITC Slimbach Std by Pearson CSC
Printed and bound by L.E.G.O. S.p.A., Italy

NOTE THAT ANY PAGE CROSS REFERENCES REFER TO THE PRINT EDITION

Brief contents

Contents

Supporting resources

Visit **www.pearsoned.co.uk/saunders** to find valuable online resources:

Companion Website for students

- Multiple-choice questions to test your learning
- Tutorials and datasets for Excel and SPSS
- Updated research datasets to practise with
- Updated additional case studies with accompanying questions
- Smarter Online Searching Guide – how to make the most of the Internet in your research
- Online glossary

For instructors

- Complete, downloadable Instructor's Manual
- PowerPoint slides that can be downloaded and used for presentations

Also: The regularly maintained Companion Website provides the following features:

- Search tool to help locate specific items of content
- Email results and profile tools to send results of quizzes to instructors
- Online help and support to assist with website usage and troubleshooting

For more information please contact your local Pearson Education sales representative or visit **www.pearsoned.co.uk/saunders**.

How to use this book

This book is written with a progressive logic, which means that terms and concepts are defined when they are first introduced. One implication of this is that it is sensible for you to start at the beginning and to work your way through the text, various boxes, self-check questions, review and discussion questions, case studies and case study questions. You can do this in a variety of ways depending on your reasons for using this book. However, this approach may not necessarily be suitable for your purposes, and you may wish to read the chapters in a different order or just dip into particular sections of the book. If this is true for you then you will probably need to use the glossary to check that you understand some of the terms and concepts used in the chapters you read. Suggestions for three of the more common ways in which you might wish to use this book follow.

As part of a research methods course or for self-study for your research project

If you are using this book as part of a research methods course the order in which you read the chapters is likely to be prescribed by your tutors and dependent upon their perceptions of your needs. Conversely, if you are pursuing a course of self-study for your research project, dissertation or consultancy report, the order in which you read the chapters is your own choice. However, whichever of these you are, we would argue that the order in which you read the chapters is dependent upon your recent academic experience.

For many students, such as those taking an undergraduate degree in business or management, the research methods course and associated project, dissertation or consultancy report comes in either the second or the final year of study. In such situations it is probable that you will follow the chapter order quite closely (see Figure P.1). Groups of chapters within which we believe you can switch the order without affecting the logic of the flow too much are shown on the same level in this diagram and are:

- those associated with data collection (Chapters 8, 9, 10 and 11);
- those associated with data analysis (Chapters 12 and 13).

Within the book we emphasise the importance of beginning to write early on in the research process as a way of clarifying your thoughts. In Chapter 1 we encourage you to keep a reflective diary, notebook or journal throughout the research process so it is helpful to read this chapter early on. We recommend you also read the sections in Chapter 14 on writing prior to starting to draft your critical review of the literature (Chapter 3).

Alternatively, you may be returning to academic study after a gap of some years, to take a full-time or part-time course such as a Master of Business Administration, a Master of Arts or a Master of Science with a Business and Management focus. Many students in such situations need to refresh their study skills early in their programme, particularly

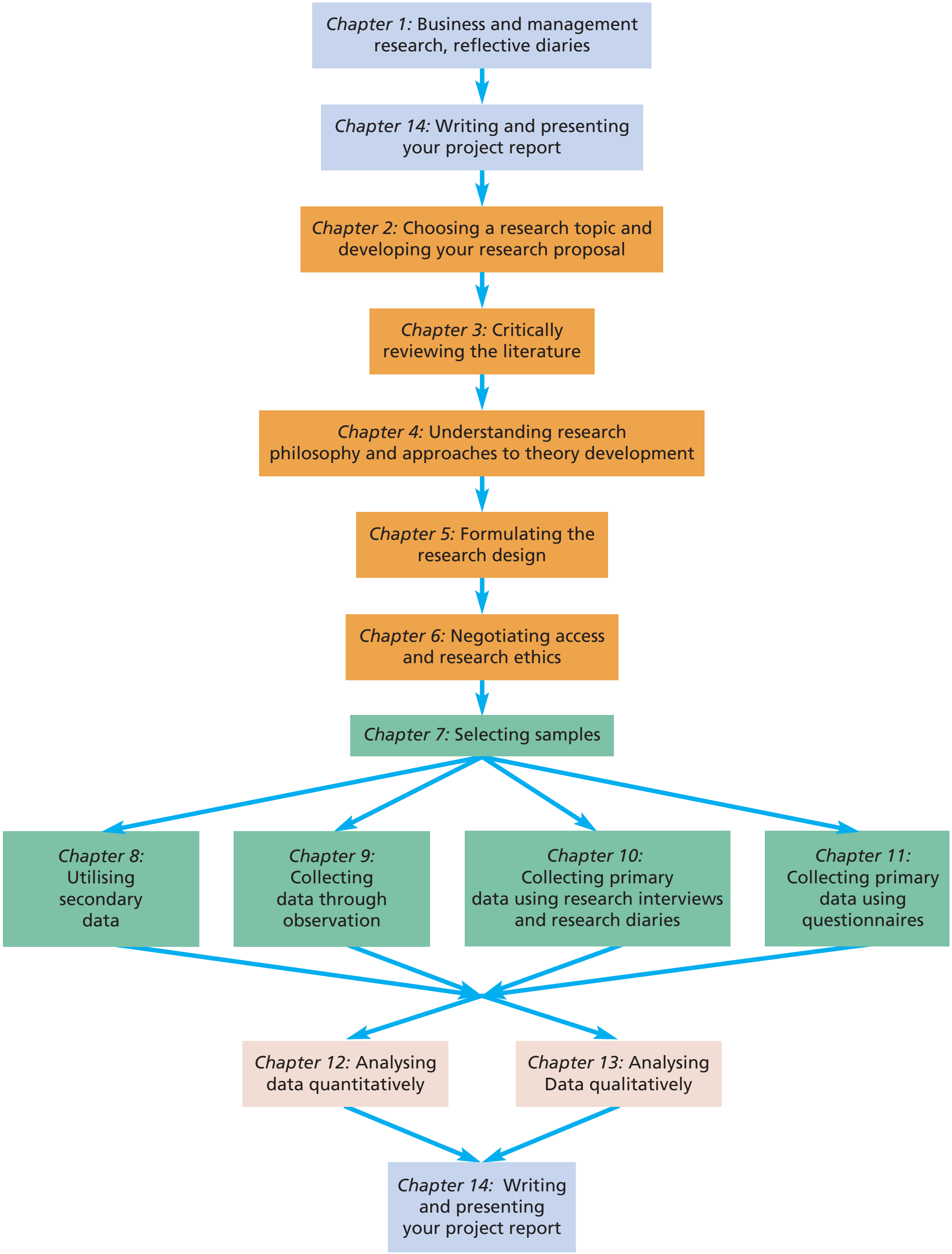


Figure P.1 Using this book for your research methods course and associated project those associated with critical reading of academic literature and academic writing. If you feel the need to do this, you may wish to start with those chapters that support you in developing and refining these skills (Chapters 3 and 14), followed by Chapter 8, which introduces you to the range of secondary data sources available that might be of use for other assignments (Figure P.2). Once again, groups of chapters within which we believe

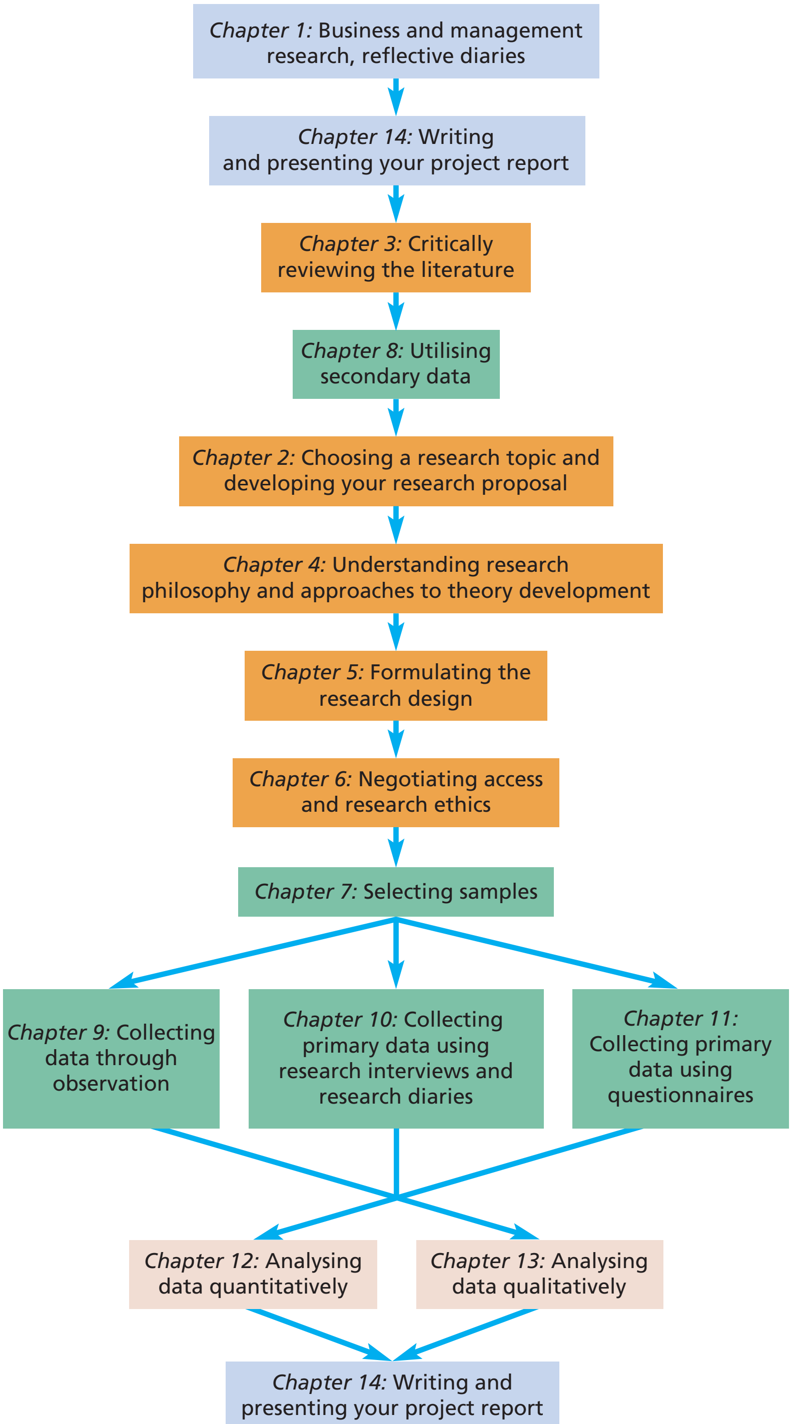


Figure P.2 Using this book as a new returner to academic study you can switch the order without affecting the logic of the flow too much are shown on the same level in the diagram and are:

- those chapters associated with primary data collection (Chapters 9, 10 and 11);
- those associated with data analysis (Chapters 12 and 13).

In addition, we would recommend that you re-read Chapter 14 prior to starting to write your project report, dissertation or consultancy report, or if you need to undertake a presentation.

Whichever order you choose to read the chapters, we would recommend that you attempt all the self-check questions, review and discussion questions and those questions associated with the case studies. Your answers to the self-check questions can be self-assessed using the answers at the end of each chapter. However, we hope that you will actually attempt each question prior to reading the answer! If you need further information on an idea or a technique, then first look at the references in the further reading section.

At the end of each chapter, the section headed 'Progressing your research project' lists a number of tasks. Such tasks might involve you in just planning a research project or, alternatively, designing and distributing a questionnaire of your own. They all include making an entry in your reflective diary or notebook. When completed, these tasks will provide a useful aide-mémoire for assessed work (including a reflective essay or learning log) and can be used as the basis for the first draft of your project report. It is worth pointing out here that many consultancy reports for organisations do not require you to include a review of the academic literature.

As a guide through the research process

If you are intending to use this book to guide you through the research process for a research project you are undertaking, such as your dissertation, we recommend that you read the entire book quickly before starting your research. In that way you will have a good overview of the entire process, including a range of techniques available, and will be better able to plan your work.

After you have read the book once, we suggest that you re-read Section 1.5 on keeping a reflective diary or notebook and Sections 14.2–14.8 on writing first. Then work your way through the book again following the chapter order. This time you should attempt the self-check questions, review and discussion questions and those questions associated with each case study to ensure that you have understood the material contained in each chapter prior to applying it to your own research project. Your responses to self-check questions can be assessed using the answers at the end of each chapter.

If you are still unsure as to whether particular techniques, procedures or ideas are relevant, then pay special attention to the 'Focus on student research', 'Focus on management research' and 'Focus on research in the news' boxes. 'Focus on student research' boxes are based on actual students' experiences and illustrate how an issue has been addressed or a technique or procedure used in a student's research project. 'Focus on management research' boxes discuss recent research articles in established refereed academic journals, allowing you to see how research is undertaken successfully. These articles are easily accessible via the main online business and management databases. 'Focus on research in the news' boxes provide topical news stories of how particular research techniques, procedures and ideas are used in the business world. You can also look in the 'Further reading' for other examples of research where these have been used. If you need further information on an idea, technique or procedure then, again, start with the references in the further reading section.

Material in some of the chapters is likely to prove less relevant to some research topics than others. However, you should beware of choosing techniques because you are happy with them, if they are inappropriate. Completion of the tasks in the section headed 'Progressing your research project' at the end of Chapters 2–13 will enable you to generate all the material that you will need to include in your research project, dissertation or consultancy report. This will also help you to focus on the techniques and ideas that are most appropriate to your research. When you have completed these tasks for Chapter 14 you will have written your research project, dissertation or consultancy report and also prepared a presentation using slides or a poster.

As a reference source

It may be that you wish to use this book now or subsequently as a reference source. If this is the case, an extensive index will point you to the appropriate page or pages. Often you will find a 'checklist' box within these pages. 'Checklist' boxes are designed to provide you with further guidance on the particular topic. You will also find the contents pages and the glossary useful reference sources, the latter defining over 700 research terms. In addition, we have tried to help you to use the book in this way by including cross-references between sections in chapters as appropriate. Do follow these up as necessary. If you need further information on an idea or a technique then begin by consulting the references in the further reading section. Wherever possible we have tried to reference books that are in print and readily available in university libraries and journal articles that are in the major business and management online databases.

Preface

In writing the eighth edition of *Research Methods for Business Students* we have responded to the many comments we have received regarding previous editions. In particular, this has led us to fully incorporate the use of visual research methods when both collecting and analysing data (Chapters 8 to 13). In addition: Chapter 3 now includes new sections on what it means to be 'critical', and the drafting of the critical literature review; Chapter 4 contains a more developed discussion of research paradigms; the section in Chapter 6 on data protection and management has been fully revised to take account of the main elements of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation; Chapter 7 now contains more detailed discussion about sample sizes and a new section on multi-stage sampling; Chapter 9 contains an enlarged section on ways to conduct observation using audio recordings and visual images as well as videography; Chapter 10 has a new section on the use of research diaries to collect data; Chapter 11 reflects the latest development use of online survey tools; Chapter 12 incorporates material on content analysis; Chapter 13 includes a new section on visual analysis; Chapter 14 includes advice for preparing and presenting a poster; and we have developed further the Glossary, which now includes over 700 research-related terms. New case studies at the end of each chapter have been developed with colleagues, providing up-to-date scenarios through which to illustrate issues associated with undertaking research. Alongside this we have also taken the opportunity to update examples and revise the tables of Internet addresses.

As in previous editions, we have taken a predominantly non-software-specific approach in our discussion of methods. By doing this, we have been able to focus on the general principles needed to utilise a range of analysis software and the Internet effectively for research. However, recognising that many students have access to sophisticated data collection and analysis software and may need help in developing these skills, we provide access to up-to-date 'teach yourself' guides to Qualtrics™, IBM SPSS Statistics™, Excel™ and Internet searching via the book's website (**www.pearsoned.co.uk/saunders**). Where appropriate, these guides are provided with data sets. In the preparation of the eighth edition we were fortunate to receive considerable feedback from colleagues and students in universities throughout the world. We are extremely grateful to all the reviewers who gave their time and shared their ideas.

Inevitably, the body of knowledge of research methods has developed further since 2016, and we have revised all chapters accordingly. Our experiences of teaching and supervising students and working through the methods in classes have suggested alternative approaches and the need to provide alternative material. Consequently, we have taken the opportunity to update and refine existing worked examples, remove those that were becoming dated, and develop new ones where appropriate. However, the basic structure remains much the same as the previous seven editions.

Other minor changes and updating have been made throughout. Needless to say, any errors of omission and commission continue to remain our responsibility.

As with previous editions, much of our updating has been guided by comments from students and colleagues, to whom we are most grateful. We should like particularly to thank students from University of Birmingham, and on the Research Methods Summer Schools and Doctoral Symposiums for their comments on all of the chapters. Colleagues in both our own and other universities have continued to provide helpful comments, advice and ideas. We are particularly grateful to Heather Cairns-Lee (University of Surrey), Fariba Darabi (Sheffield Hallam University), Andy Hodder (University of Birmingham), Emily Morrison (George Washington University) Phil Renshaw (Cranfield University), Jenny Robinson (Cranfield University), Céline Rojon (ITB Consulting, Bonn) and Andrew Thornhill (Shaw + Scott Ltd). Colleagues and friends again deserve thanks for their assistance in providing examples of research across the spectrum of business and management, co-authoring chapters, writing case studies and in reviewing parts of this book: Deborah Anderson (Kingston University, London), Frank Bezzina (University of Malta), Alexandra Bristow (The Open University), Vincent Cassar (University of Malta), Catherine Cassell (University of Birmingham), Zeineb Djebali (University of Surrey), Simon Grima (University of Malta), Will Harvey (University of Exeter), David Houghton (University of Birmingham), Colin Hughes (Dublin Institute of Technology), Neve Isaeva (University of Birmingham), Finola Kerrigan (University of Birmingham), Amanda Lee (University of Derby), Bill Lee (University of Sheffield), Alumuth McDowall (Birkbeck, University of London), Katherin Schwark, Andreas Paul Spee (University of Queensland), Matina Terzidou (Middlesex University, London), Catherine Wang (Brunel University), and Des Williamson (University of York).

We would also like to thank all of the staff at Pearson (both past and present) who supported us through the process of writing the eighth edition. Our thanks go, in particular, to Vicky Tubb, our commissioning editor, and Kay Richardson our online content developer for their support and enthusiasm throughout the process. We would also like to express our thanks to Andrew Muller as desk editor and Annette Abel as copy-editor.

MNKS
PL
AT
January 2019

Contributors

Mark N.K. Saunders, BA, MSc, PGCE, PhD, Chartered FCIPD, is Professor of Business Research Methods and Director of the PhD Programme at the Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham. He is a Fellow of the British Academy of Management and member of the Fellows' College and, in 2017, was awarded the Academy's medal for Leadership in recognition of his contribution to research capacity building. He currently holds visiting professorships at the Birkbeck, University of London, University of Surrey and the University of Worcester. Mark teaches research methods to master's and doctoral students as well as supervising master's dissertations and research degrees. He has published articles on research methods and human resource aspects of the management of change, including trust and organisational learning, in a range of journals such as *Annals of Tourism Research, British Journal of Management, Field Methods, Human Relations, Journal of Small Business Management, Management Learning* and *Social Science and Medicine.* Mark is book series editor of the *Handbooks of Research Methods* (Edward Elgar) and a co-series book editor of *Understanding Research Methods for Business and Management Students* (Sage). He is co-author with Phil and Adrian of three further books, all published by Pearson. He is lead editor of *Organizational Trust: A Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge University Press) and co-editor of the *Keeping your Research on Project on Track, Handbook of Research Methods on Human Resource Development* and the *Handbook of Research Methods on Trust* (all published by Edward Elgar). Mark has also written two books on business statistics, the most recent being *Statistics: What You Need to Know* (Open University Press), co-authored with Reva Berman-Brown. He continues to undertake consultancy in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. Prior to becoming an academic, he had a variety of research jobs in the public sector. Mark also enjoys hill walking, dinghy sailing and riding his motor-trike.

Philip Lewis, BA, PhD, MSc, Chartered MCIPD, PGDipM, Cert Ed, began his career in HR as a training adviser with the Distributive Industry Training Board. He then taught HRM and research methods in three UK universities. He studied part-time for degrees with the Open University and the University of Bath, from which he gained an MSc in industrial relations and a PhD for his research on performance pay in retail financial services. He is co-author with Adrian and Mark of *Employee Relations: Understanding the Employment Relationship* and with Mark, Adrian, Mike Millmore and Trevor Morrow of *Strategic Human Resource Management* and with Adrian, Mark and Mike Millmore of *Managing Change: A Human Resource Strategy Approach,* all published by Pearson. He has undertaken consultancy in both public and private sectors.

Adrian Thornhill, BA, PhD, PGCE, Chartered FCIPD. Prior to his career as a university lecturer and Head of Department, he worked as an industrial relations researcher and in training and vocational education. He has also undertaken consultancy and training for a range of private and public-sector organisations. He has taught a range of subjects, including HRM, the management of change and research methods, to undergraduate, postgraduate and professional students. He has experience of supervising undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations, professional management projects and research degrees.

Adrian has published a number of articles principally associated with employee and justice perspectives related to managing change and the management of organisational downsizing and redundancy. He is co-author with Phil and Mark of *Employee Relations: Understanding the Employment Relationship,* with Phil, Mark, Mike Millmore and Trevor Morrow of *Strategic Human Resource Management* and with Phil, Mark and Mike Millmore of *Managing Change: A Human Resource Strategy Approach,* all published by Pearson. He has also co-authored a book on downsizing and redundancy.

Dr Deborah Anderson is a National Teaching Fellow and an Associate Professor in Strategy, Marketing and Innovation and Kingston Business School, Kingston University, London.

Dr Alexandra Bristow is a Lecturer in People and Organisations at the Open University Business School.

Dr Frank Bezzina is Associate Professor in Applied Business Statistics and Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy, University of Malta.

Dr Vincent Cassar is Associate Professor in Organisational Behaviour and Deputy Dean of the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy, University of Malta.

Professor Catherine Cassell is Dean of the Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham.

Dr Zeineb Djebali is a Teaching Fellow in Management at the Surrey Business School, University of Surrey.

Dr Simon Grima is Senior Lecturer in Risk Management and Head of the Department of Insurance, University of Malta.

Professor William S. Harvey is Professor of Management and Co-Director of the Centre for Leadership Studies at the University of Exeter Business School.

Dr David Houghton is Assistant Head of School in Marketing at the Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham.

Colin Hughes is Assistant Head of School and Head of Department at the College of Business, Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin, Ireland.

Dr Neve Isaeva is a teaching fellow in Organisational Behaviour at Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham.

Dr Finola Kerrigan is Reader in Marketing and Consumption at Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham.

Dr Amanda Lee is a Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management at Derby Business School, University of Derby.

Professor Bill Lee is Professor of Accounting at The Management School University of Sheffield.

Professor Almuth McDowall is Professor of Organizational Psychology and Head of the Department of Organizational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London.

Kathrin Schwark is a Junior Product Manager within the cosmetics industry and is based in Germany.

Dr Andreas Paul Spee is an Associate Professor in Strategy at the University of Queensland Business School.

Dr Matina Terzidou is a Lecturer in Tourism at Middlesex University, London.

Professor Catherine L. Wang is Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship at Brunel Business School, Brunel University.

Dr Des Williamson is a Lecturer in Business Strategy at the York Management School, University of York.

Publisher's acknowledgements

Text

p.5 The Financial Times Ltd: Abridged article by James Pickford, FT.com, 30 June 2017. Copyright © 2017 *The Financial Times;* p.6 John Wiley & Sons, Inc: Tranfield, D. and Starkey, K. (1998) 'The nature, social organization and promotion of management research: Towards policy', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 9, pp. 341–353; p.6 British Journal of Management: Hodgkinson, G.P., Herriot, P. and Anderson, N. (2001) 'Re-aligning the stakeholders in management research: Lessons from industrial, work and organizational psychology', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 12, Special Issue, pp. 41–48. 7 John Wiley & Sons, Inc: Huff, A.S. and Huff, J.O. (2001) 'Re-focusing the business school agenda', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 12, Special Issue, pp. 49–54; p.9 Taylor & Francis: Tranfield, D. and Denyer, D. (2004) 'Linking theory to practice: A grand challenge for management research in the 21st century?', *Organization Management Journal,* Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 10–14; p.8 Routledge: Saunders, M.N.K. (2011) 'The management researcher as practitioner', in B. Lee and C. Cassell (eds) *Challenges and Controversies in Management Research.* New York: Routledge, pp. 243–257; p.27 Penguin Random House: Carroll, L. (1989) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.* London: Hutchinson; p.28 SAGE Publications: Lincoln, Y.S., Lynham, S.A. and Guba, E.G. (2011) 'Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences, revisited', in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (4th edn). London: Sage; p.34 Academy of Management: Wang, H., Tong, L., Takeuchi, R. and George, G. (2016) 'Corporate Social Responsibility: An overview and new research directions', *Academy of Management Journal,* Vol. 59, No. 2, pp. 534–544; p.37 The Financial Times Ltd: Murray, Sarah (2017) 'Where real-life crises provide valuable lessons', *Financial Times,* 19 June. Copyright 2017 The Financial Times Limited; p.47 SAGE Publications: Saunders, M.N.K., Gray, D.E, Tosey, P. and Sadler-Smith, E (2015) 'Concepts and theory building', in Anderson, L., Gold, J., Stewart, J. and Thorpe, R. (eds.) *Professional doctorates in business and management*: London: Sage. pp. 35–56; p.49 SAGE Publications: Sutton, R. and Staw, B. (1995) 'What theory is not', *Administrative Science Quarterly,* Vol. 40, No. 3, pp. 371–384; p.59 Microsoft: Screenshot of Microsoft; p.66 Pearson Education: Kotler, P., Keller, K. L., Brady, M., et alia. (2009). *Marketing Management.* 1st ed. Essex: Pearson Education Limited; p.73; J Sainsbury plc: © 2018 Sainsbury's Argos. Reproduced with permission; p.76 SAGE Publications: Mingers, J. (2000) 'What is it to be critical? Teaching a critical approach to management undergraduates', *Management Learning,* Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 219–237; p.77 Pearson Education: Dees, R. (2003) *Writing the Modern Research Paper* (4th edn). Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon; p.81 Elsevier: Terzidou, M., Scarles, C. and Saunders, M.N.K. (2017). Copyright © Elsevier, Reproduced by permission of the publisher; p.89 The Financial Times Ltd: Marriage, M. (2018) 'Accounting watchdogs find "serious problems" at 40% of audits'. FT.com 11 March. Available at: https://www.ft.com/content/b9dbd1cc-23a5-11e8-ae48-60d3531b7d11 [Accessed 16 March 2018]. Copyright 2018 Financial Times Limited; p.99 EBSCO Industries, Inc: EBSCO Industries, Inc 101 Google LLC: Google LLC 103 Emerald Group Publishing: Saunders et al. (2014). Copyright © 2014 Emerald Group Publishing (https://www.emeraldinsight.com.ezproxyd.bham.ac.uk/doi/abs/10.1108/EJTD-07-2013-0073). Reproduced by permission of the publisher; p.104 SAGE Publications: Wallace, M. and Wray, A. (2016) *Critical Reading and Writing for Postgraduates* (3rd edn). London: Sage; p.104 SAGE Publications: Wallace, M. and Wray, A. (2016) *Critical Reading and Writing for Postgraduates* (3rd edn). London: Sage; p.132 Alexandra Bristow: © 2018 Alexandra Bristow and Mark N.K. Saunders; p.138 The Financial Times Ltd: Why do entrepreneurs get such a bad rap? Janan Ganesh (2017) *Financial Times* 25 August. Copyright © 2017 The Financial Times Ltd; p.140 Taylor & Francis Group: Burrell, G. and Morgan, G. (2016) *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis.* Abingdon: Routledge (originally published by Heinemann 1979); p.148 Developed from Bhaskar: Bhaskar, R. (2008) *A Realist Theory of Science.* London: Verso (originally published by Harvester Press 1978); p.151 Emerald Publishing Limited: Rutherford, B.A. (2016). 'Articulating accounting principles', *Journal of Applied Accounting Research.*, Vol.17, No. 2, pp. 118–135; p.158 Taylor & Francis: Hakim, C. (2000) *Research Design: Successful Designs for Social and Economic Research* (2nd edn). London: Routledge; p.158 Taylor & Francis Group: Buchanan, D., Boddy, D. and McAlman, J. (2013) 'Getting in, getting on, getting out and getting back', in A. Bryman (ed.) *Doing Research in Organisations.* London: Routledge, pp. 53–67 (originally published by Routledge 1988); p.161 Alexandra Bristow: HARP and all materials relating to HARP are copyright © 2014 A. Bristow and M.N.K. Saunders; p.176 SAGE Publications: Walsh, I., Holton, J.A., Bailyn, L., Fernandez, Levina, N. and Glaser, B. (2015b) 'Rejoinder: Moving the management field forward', *Organizational Research Methods,* Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 620–628; p.186 SAGE Publications: Molina-Azorin, J.F., Bergh, D.D., Corley, K.G. and Ketchen, Jr., D.J. (2017) 'Mixed methods in the organizational sciences: Taking stock and moving forward', *Organizational Research Methods,* Vol. 20, No. 2, pp. 179–192; p.187 Penguin Random House: Naipaul, V.S. (1989) *A Turn in the South.* London: Penguin; p.194 The Financial Times Ltd: Source of extract: Warwick-Ching, L. (2017) 'Young people rely on parents and credit cards to cover costs', *Financial Times,* 20 October. Copyright The Financial Times Limited; p.195 SAGE Publications: Lee, B. (2012) 'Using documents in organizational research', in G. Symon and C. Cassell (eds) *Qualitative Organisational Research Core Methods and Current Challenges.* London: Sage, pp. 389–407; p.197 Elsevier: Dubois, A. and Gadde, L-E. (2002) 'Systematic combining: An abductive approach to case research', *Journal of Business Research,* Vol. 55, pp. 553–560; p.203 SAGE Publications: Coghlan, D. and Brannick, T. (2014). *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organisation* (4th edn). London: Sage. Useful for Action Research strategy; p.203 SAGE Publications: Reason, P. (2006) 'Choice and quality in action research practice', *Journal of Management Inquiry,* Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 187–202; p.204 John Wiley & Sons, Inc: Eden, C. and Huxham, C. (1996) 'Action research for management research', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 7, No. 1, pp. 75–86; p.207 SAGE Publications: Isabelle Walsh et al. (2015) 'What grounded theory is ... a critically reflective conversation among scholars', *Organizational Research Methods* 1–19; p.207 SAGE Publications: Locke, K. (2015) 'Pragmatic reflections on a conversation about grounded theory in management and organization studies', *Organizational Research Methods,* Vol. 18, No. 4, pp. 612–619; p.210 SAGE Publications: Gabriel, Y. and Griffiths, D.S. (2004) 'Stories in organizational research', in C. Cassell and G. Symon (eds) *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research.* London: Sage, pp. 114–126; p.211 SAGE Publications: Musson, G. (2004) 'Life histories', in C. Cassell and G. Symon (eds) *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research.* London: Sage, pp. 34–46; p.213 Taylor & Francis: Raimond, P. (1993) *Management Projects.* London: Chapman & Hall; p.213 Hachette UK: Rogers, C.R. (1961) *On Becoming a Person.* London: Constable; p.219 Taylor & Francis: Raimond, P. (1993) *Management Projects.* London: Chapman & Hall; p.220 SAGE Publications: Tietze, S. (2012) 'Researching your own organization', in G. Symon and

C. Cassell (eds) *Qualitative Organisational Research Core Methods and Current Challenges.* London: Sage, pp. 53–71; p.238 Taylor & Francis: Buchanan, D., Boddy, D. and McCalman, J. (2013) 'Getting in, getting on, getting out and getting back', in A. Bryman (ed.) *Doing Research in Organisations.* London: Routledge Library Edition, pp. 53–67; p.242 JISC: Call for Participants (2017) Researchers page. Available at https://www.callforparticipants.com/ [Accessed 11 December 2017]; p.245 John Wiley & Sons, Inc: Saunders, M.N.K., Gray, D.E. and Bristow, A. (2017) 'Beyond the single organization: Inside insights from gaining access for large multiorganization survey HRD research', *Human Resource Development Quarterly,* Vol. 28, No. 3, pp. 401–425; p.245 Taylor & Francis: Buchanan, D., Boddy, D. and McCalman, J. (2013) 'Getting in, getting on, getting out and getting back', in A. Bryman (ed.) *Doing Research in Organisations.* London: Routledge Library Edition, pp. 53–67; p.248 Taylor & Francis: Buchanan, D., Boddy, D. and McCalman, J. (2013) 'Getting in, getting on, getting out and getting back', in A. Bryman (ed.) *Doing Research in Organisations.* London: Routledge Library Edition, pp. 53–67; p.257 Health Research Authority: Health Research Authority (2017) *Is my study research? Decision Tool.* Available at: http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/ [Accessed 12 December 2017]; p.262 Association of Internet Researchers: Markham, A. and Buchanan, E. (2012) *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee* (Version 2.0). Available at: http://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf [Accessed 14 December 2017]; p.262 Association of Internet Researchers: Markham, A. and Buchanan, E. (2012) *Ethical Decision-Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee* (Version 2.0). Available at: http://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf [Accessed 14 December 2017]; p.262 The British Psychological Society: British Psychological Society (2017) *Ethics Guidelines for Intermediated Research.* INF206/04.2017 Leicester: British Psychological Society. Available at: https://www.bps.org.uk/sites/beta.bps.org.uk/files/Policy-Files/Ethics-Guidelines-Internet-mediated-Research-2017.pdf [Accessed 14 December 2017]; p.265 Cambridge University Press: Rowlinson, K., Appleyard, L. and Gardner, J. (2016) 'Payday lending in the UK: the regul(aris)ation of a necessary evil?', *Journal of Social Policy,* Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 527–523; p.259 Social Research Association: Social Research Association (2001) *A Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers.* Available at: http://the-sra.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/safety_code_of_practice.pdf [Accessed 12 December 2017]; p.276 European Union: Official Journal of the European Union (2016) *Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of The European Parliament and of The Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC.* Vol 59, L119, pp. 1–88. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2016:119:FULL&from=EN [Accessed 06 May 2018]; p.277 European Union: Official Journal of the European Union (2016) *Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of The European Parliament and of The Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural per-sons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC.* Vol 59, L119, pp. 1–88. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2016:119:FULL&from=EN [Accessed 06 May 2018]; p.279 The Financial Times Ltd: Extracts from 'Companies need to embrace data laws regardless of burden. The General Data Protection Regulation will next year protect EU citizens' data', Sarah Gordon (2017) *Financial Times,* 14 June. Copyright © 2018 The Financial Times Limited; p.278 European Union: Official Journal of the European Union (2016) *Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of The European Parliament and of The Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive 95/46/EC.* Vol 59, L119, pp. 1–88. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:L:2016:119:FULL&from=EN [Accessed 06 May 2018]; p.301 The Financial Times Ltd: Source: Extract from O'Connor, S (2017) 'Britain's gig economy is a man's world, FT.com, 27 April. Available at https://www.ft.com/content/5b74dd26-2a96-11e7-bc4b-5528796fe35c [Accessed 10 May 2017] Copyright © 2017 *The Financial Times;* p.317 British Journal of Management: Saunders, M.N.K. and Townsend, K. (2016). 'Reporting and justifying the number of participants in organisation and workplace research'. *British Journal of Management.* Vol. 27, pp. 837–852; p.346 Kingston Smith LLP: Gray, D.E., Saunders, M.N.K. and Farrant, K. (2016) *SME Success: Winning New Business.* London: Kingston Smith LLP; p.350 SAGE Publications: Carton, A.M. (2018) '"I'm not mopping floors, I'm putting a man on the moon" : How NASA Leaders enhanced the meaningfulness of work by changing the meaning of work', *Administrative Science Quarterly,* Vol. 63, No. 2, pp. 323–369; p.350 SAGE Publications: Carton, A.M. (2018) '"I'm not mopping floors, I'm putting a man on the moon": How NASA Leaders enhanced the meaningfulness of work by changing the meaning of work', *Administrative Science Quarterly,* Vol. 63, No. 2, pp. 323–369; p.352 Cambridge University Press: Kanji, S. (2017) 'Grandparent care: A key factor in mothers' labour force participation in the UK', *Journal of Social Policy,* pp. 1–20. Available at: doi:10.1017/S004727941700071X; p.354 Crown Copyright: Office for National Statistics 2014c; p.354 University of Chicago Press: Becker, H.S. (1998) *Tricks of the Trade.* Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press; p.356 The Financial Times Ltd: Source: 'EU presses tech groups to do more to tackle 'fake news' Rochelle Toplensky, FT.Com, 26 April 2018. *The Financial Times;* p.357 The Financial Times Ltd: Source: Abridged from 'Lawyers trump listeners in China's online music world', Duan Yan, *FT Confidential Research,* 3 May 2018. Copyright © 2018 The Financial Times Ltd; p.359 SAGE Publications: Tinati, R., Halford, S., Carr, L. and Pope, C. (2014) 'Big Data: Methodological challenges and approaches for sociological analysis', *Sociology,* Vol. 48. No. 4, pp. 663–681; p.362 Morgan Motor Company: © Morgan Motor Company, 2018. Reproduced with permission; p.365 European Communities: Eurostat (2018) Copyright © European Communities 2018. Reproduced with Permission; p.365 European Communities: Eurostat (2018) Copyright © European Communities 2018. Reproduced with Permission; p.366 Taylor & Francis: Hair, J.F., Celsi, M., Money, A.H., Samouel, P. and Page, M.J. (2016) *Essentials of Business Research Methods* (3rd edn). New York: Routledge; p.400 Taylor & Francis Group: Clark, A., Holland, C., Katz, J. and Peace, S. (2009) 'Learning to see: lessons from a participatory observation research project in public spaces', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology,* Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 345–360; p.401 The Financial Times Ltd: Extract from 'Opinion FT Magazine How Facebook is changing democracy', Simon Kuper (2017) *Financial Times,* 15 June. Copyright © 2017 The Financial Times Ltd; p.408 SAGE Publications: Kozinets, R.V. (2015) *Netnography: Redefined* (2nd edn). London: Sage; p.416 SAGE Publications: Jarzabkowski, P., LeBaron, C., Phillips, K. and Pratt, M. (2014) 'Call for papers; Feature topic: Video-based research methods', *Organizational Research Methods,* Vol. 17, No. 1, pp. 3–4; p.422 The Financial Times Ltd: 'Encryption is out of sight for camera makers', Kana Inagaki (2017) *Financial Times,* 25 May. Copyright © 2017 The Financial Times Ltd; p.471 SAGE Publications: David-Barrett, E., Yakis-Douglas, B., Moss-Cowan, A. and Nguyen, Y. (2017) 'A Bitter Pill? Institutional Corruption and the Challenge of Antibribery Compliance in the Pharmaceutical Sector', *Journal of Management Inquiry,* Vol. 26, No. 3, pp. 326–347; p.475 SAGE Publications: Irvine, A. (2011) 'Duration, Dominance and Depth in Telephone and Face-to-Face Interviews: A Comparative Exploration', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods,* Vol. 10, No. 3, pp. 202–220; p.475 Academy of Management: Banks, G.C., Pollack, J.M., Bochantin, J.E., Kirkman, B.L., Whelpley, C.E. and O'Boyle, E.H. (2016) 'Management's Science-Practice Gap: A Grand Challenge for All Stakeholders', *Academy of Management Journal,* Vol. 59, No. 6, pp. 2205–2231; p.477 The Financial Times Ltd: How AI helps recruiters track job-seekers' emotions', Patricia Nilsson, *Financial Times,* 28 February 2018. Copyright © 2018 The Financial Times Ltd; p.479 Oxford University Press: Vermaak, M. and de Klerk, H.M. (2017) 'Fitting room or selling room? Millennial female consumers' dressing room experiences', *International Journal of Consumer Studies,* Vol. 41, pp. 11–18; p.485 Qualitative

Research in Psychology: Day. M and Thatcher, J. (2009) '"I'm Really Embarrassed That You're Going to Read This …": Reflections on Using Diaries in Qualitative Research', *Qualitative Research in Psychology,* Vol. 6, No. 4, pp. 249–259; p.511 Qualtrics: This screenshot was generated using Qualtrics software, of the Qualtrics Research Suite. Copyright © 2018 Qualtrics. Qualtrics and all other Qualtrics product or service names are registered trademarks or trademarks of Qualtrics, Provo, UT, USA. http://www.qualtrics.com. The authors are not affiliated to Qualtrics; p.521 The Financial Times Ltd: Adapted from 'Piety gives way to secularism and heavy metal worship', Matthew Engel, *Financial Times,* 15 Dec. 2012. Copyright © 2012 The Financial Times Ltd; p.523 Qualtrics: This question was generated using Qualtrics software, of the Qualtrics Research Suite. Copyright © 2018 Qualtrics. Qualtrics and all other Qualtrics product or service names are registered trademarks or trademarks of Qualtrics, Provo, UT, USA. http://www.qualtrics.com. The authors are not affiliated to Qualtrics; p.524 Yu and Zellmer: Yu and Zellmer-Bruhn, 2018: 347; p.525 SurveyMonkey Inc: Question created by SurveyMonkey Inc. (2018) San Mateo, Reproduced with permission; p.528 SurveyMonkey Inc: Question created by SurveyMonkey Inc. (2018) San Mateo, Reproduced with permission; p.523 Qualtrics: This question was generated using Qualtrics software, of the Qualtrics Research Suite. Copyright © 2018 Qualtrics. Qualtrics and all other Qualtrics product or service names are registered trademarks or trademarks of Qualtrics, Provo, UT, USA. http://www.qualtrics.com. The authors are not affiliated to Qualtrics; p.528 SurveyMonkey Inc: Question created by SurveyMonkey Inc. (2018) San Mateo, Reproduced with permission; p.530 The Financial Times Ltd: The tale of the Brexit referendum question', David Allen Green, *Financial Times,* 3 Aug 2017; p.540 McGraw-Hill Education: Bell, J. and Waters, S. (2014) *Doing Your Research Project* (6th edn). Maidenhead: Open University Press; p.545 Qualtrics: This question was generated using Qualtrics software, of the Qualtrics Research Suite. Copyright © 2018 Qualtrics. Qualtrics and all other Qualtrics product or service names are registered trademarks or trademarks of Qualtrics, Provo, UT, USA. http://www.qualtrics.com. The authors are not affiliated to Qualtrics; p.557 American Psychological Association: The PsycINFO® Database screenshot is reproduced with permission of the American Psychological Association, publisher of the PsycINFO database, all rights reserved. No further reproduction or distribution is permitted without written permission from the American Psychological Association; p.557 The International Journal of Human Resource Management: Brough, P., Timms, C., O'Driscoll, M. P., Kalliath, T., Siu, O.-L., Sit, C., & Lo, D. (2014). 'Work-Life balance: a longitudinal evaluation of a new measure across Australia and New Zealand workers', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management,* Vol. 25, No. 19, pp. 2724–2744; p.565 The Economist: The Economist (2017) The Big Mac Index: global exchange rates, to go. Available at http://www.economist.com/content/big-mac-index; p.583 Adapted from Eurostat (2017) © European Communities 2017: Eurostat (2017) Environment and energy statistics – primary production of renewable energies; p.586 Adapted from Eurostat (2017) © European Communities 2017: Eurostat (2017) Environment and energy statistics – primary production of renewable energies; p.587 Adapted from Harley-Davidson Inc. (2017): Harley-Davidson Inc. (2017) Harley-Davidson Inc. Investor Relations: Motorcycle Shipments; p.588 Adapted from Harley-Davidson Inc. (2017): Harley-Davidson Inc. (2017) Harley-Davidson Inc. Investor Relations: Motorcycle Shipments; p.589 Adapted from Harley-Davidson Inc. (2017): Harley-Davidson Inc. (2017) Harley-Davidson Inc. Investor Relations: Motorcycle Shipments; p.632 Developed form Bezzina and Grima (2012): Bezzina, F.H. & Grima, S. (2012). "Exploring factors affecting the proper use of derivatives: An empirical study with active users and controllers of derivatives", *Managerial Finance,* Vol. 38, No. 4, pp. 414–435; p.716 SAGE Publications: Carole Doherty, Charitini Stavropoulou, Mark N.K. Saunders and Tracey Brown (2017) 'The consent process: Enabling or disabling patients' active participation?', *Health,* Vol. 21, No. 2, p. 205. Reproduced with permission; p.719 The Financial Times Ltd: Extract from 'Staff bonuses:

there is no right way to reward employees', Dylan Minor (2018) *Financial Times,* 4 April. Copyright © 2018 The Financial Times Ltd; p.726 John Wiley & Sons, Inc: Watson, T.J. (2011) 'Ethnography, reality, and truth: The vital need for studies of "how things work" in organizations and management', *Journal of Management Studies,* Vol. 48, No. 1, pp. 202–217; p.734 Penguin Random House: Wright Mills, C. (1970) 'On intellectual craftsmanship', in C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination.* London: Pelican; p.736 Oryx Press: Day, R.A. (1998) *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper* (5th edn). Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press; p.744 Emap Healthcare Ltd: Rawlins, K. (1999) *Presentation and Communication Skills: A Handbook for Practitioners.* London: Emap Healthcare Ltd; p.791 Pearson Education: Morris, C. (2012) *Quantitative Approaches in Business Studies* (8th edn). Harlow: Pearson; p.565 © The Economist (2017): © The Economist (2017), reproduced with permission; p.573 Simon & Schuster: Berelson, B. (1952) *Content Analysis in Communication Research.* Glencoe, IL: Free Press; p.578 Microsoft Corporation: Screenshot of Microsoft Excel; p.581 Oxford University Press: Kosslyn, S.M. (2006) *Graph Design for the Eye and Mind.* New York: Oxford University Press; p.595 The Financial Times Ltd: *The three ages of tax and welfare* by Vanessa Houlder OCTOBER 5, 2017; p.614 Oxford University Press: Wang, Z., Mao, H., Li, Y.J. and Liu, F. (2017) Smile big or not?, Effects of smile intensity on perceptions of warmth and competence. *Journal of Consumer Research.* Vol. 43, pp.787–805; p.624 The Financial Times Ltd: 'United Utilities hit three-year low after HSBC downgrade', Bryce Elderr (2017) *Financial Times,* 17 November. Copyright © The Financial Times Ltd; p.651 Taylor & Francis Group: Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) 'Using thematic analysis in psychology', Qualitative *Research in Psychology,* Vol. 3, No. 2, pp. 77–101; p.656 John Wiley & Sons, Inc: McConville, D., Arnold, J. and Smith, A. (2016) 'Employees share ownership, psychological ownership and work attitudes and behaviours: a phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology,* Vol. 89, No. 3, pp. 634–651; p.659 Taylor & Francis Group: Dey, I. (1993) *Qualitative Data Analysis.* London: Routledge; p.664 SAGE Publications: Johnson, P. (2004) 'Analytic induction', in G. Symon and C. Cassell (eds) *Essential Guide to Qualitative Methods and Analysis in Organizational Research.* London: Sage, pp. 165–179; p.676 John Wiley & Sons, Inc: Heikkinen, S. and Lämsä, A-M. (2017) 'Narratives of Spousal Support for the Careers of Men in Managerial Posts', *Gender, Work and Organization,* Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 171–193; p.679 The Financial Times Ltd: East Coast rail line failure leaves Chris Grayling with stark choices', Tanya Powley and Jim Pickard (2018) *Financial Times,* 6 February. Copyright © The Financial Times Ltd; p.680 SAGE Publications: Holstein, J.A. and Gubrium, J.F. (2011) 'The constructionist analytics of interpretive practice', in N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research.* London: Sage; p.680 Pearson Education: Fairclough, N. (2010) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (2nd edn). Harlow: Pearson Education; p.681 Developed From Fairclough (1992): Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and Social Change.* Cambridge: Polity Press; p.686 Elsevier: Clarke, J. and Holt, R. (2017) 'Imagery of adventure: Understanding entrepreneurial identity through metaphor and drawing'. *Journal of Business Venturing,* Vol. 32, pp. 476–497; p.686 SAGE Publications: Rose, G. (2016) *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (4th edn.). London: Sage; p.686 SAGE Publications: Rose, G. (2016) *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (4th edn.). London: Sage; p.690 SAGE Publications: Miles, M.B., Huberman, A.M. and Saldana, J. (2014) *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook* (3rd edn). London: Sage; p.694 CAQDAS: Developed from QUIC Working Paper software reviews available from the CAQDAS Networking Project and Qualitative Innovations in CAQDAS Project (QUIC) website hosted by the University of Surrey and/or software producers' websites; p.715 Emerald Group Publishing: Emerald Group Publishing (2018) Developed from advice on the Emerald website, www.emeraldgrouppublishing.com/authors/guides/write/abstracts.htm. Reproduced with permission; p.728 SAGE Publications: Charmaz, K. (2014) *Constructing Grounded Theory*

(2nd edn). London: Sage; p.746 Chaiyatorn Limapornvanich: © Chaiyatorn Limapornvanich 2018; p.791 Pearson Education: Morris, C. (2012) *Quantitative Approaches in Business Studie*s (8th edn). Harlow: Pearson.

Photographs

p.3 Mark N.K. Saunders: Post-it® notes in use © Mark N.K. Saunders 2018; p.23 Shutterstock: Jaochainoi/Shutterstock; p.28 Shutterstock: Kaspars Grinvalds/Shutterstock; p.65 123RF: Jennifer Barrow/123RF; p.122 Shutterstock: michaeljung/Shutterstock; p.129 Shutterstock: John Gomez/Shutterstock; p.167 Shutterstock: Monkey Business Images/Shutterstock; p.227 Shutterstock: Scott Prokop/Shutterstock; p.233 Shutterstock: 9nong/Shutterstock; p.286 123RF: Pressmaster/123rf.com; p.294 Shutterstock: Ollyy/Shutterstock; p.332 Shutterstock: Westend61/Shutterstock; p.339 Mark N.K. Saunders: © Mark N.K. Saunders 2018; p.339 Mark N.K. Saunders: © Mark N.K. Saunders 2018; p.428 Matina Terzidou: © 2018 Matina Terzidou; p.435 Shutterstock: drserg/Shutterstock; p.496 Finola Kerrigan: © Finola Kerrigan 2017; p.497 Finola Kerrigan: © Finola Kerrigan 2017; p.503 Shutterstock: Matej Kastelic/Shutterstock; p.522 Mark N.K. Saunders: © 2018 Mark N.K. Saunders; p.555 Shutterstock: Dusit/Shutterstock; p.587 Mark N.K. Saunders: © Mark N.K. Saunders; p.624 Alamy: PA Images/Alamy Stock Photo; p.631 Shutterstock: Tobias Steinert/Shutterstock; p.637 Mark N.K. Saunders: © Mark N.K. Saunders 2018; p.684 Getty Images: designalldone/ DigitalVision Vectors/Getty Images; p.689 Mark N.K. Saunders: © Mark N.K. Saunders; p.689 Mark N.K. Saunders: © Mark N.K. Saunders; p.689 Mark N.K. Saunders: © Mark N.K. Saunders; p.700 Shutterstock: Oliver Jackson/Shutterstock; p.707 Shutterstock: Vladislav Gajic/Shutterstock; p.743 Mark N.K. Saunders: Mark N.K. Saunders; p.750 Shutterstock: Andresr/Shutterstock.

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.

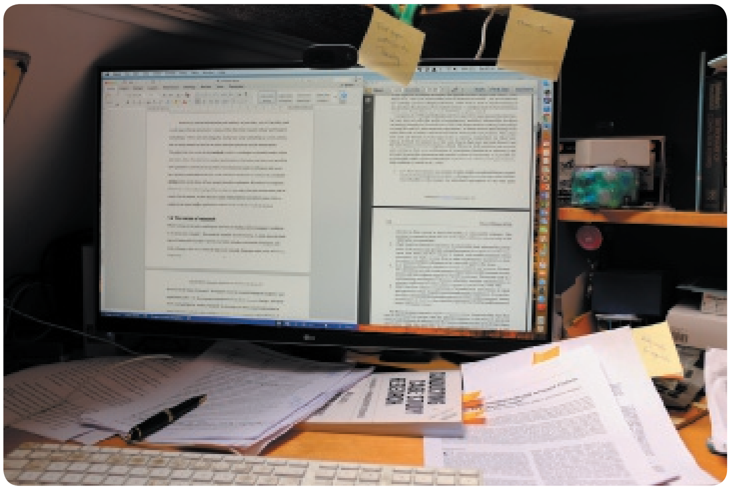
1.1 Introduction

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



Post-it® notes in use
Source: © Mark Sanders 2018

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 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.

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 General enlightenment Theoretical explanation 'Why' knowledge Substantive theory building	**Focus of interest**	Usable knowledge Instrumental Practical problem solutions 'How to' knowledge Local theory-in-use
Theoretical and methodological rigour	**Methodological imperative**	Timeliness
Academic publication	**Key outcome**	Actionable results with practice impact
Disdain of practitioner Desire to make a difference to practice	**Views of other**	Deprecate or ignore 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

Basic research ⟷ **Applied research**

Basic research

Purpose:
- expand knowledge of processes of business and management
- results in universal principles relating to the process and its relationship to outcomes
- findings of significance and value to society in general

Context:
- undertaken by people based in academia
- choice of topic and objectives determined by the researcher
- flexible time scales

Impact:
- initially academic community and researcher
- may also impact policy and practice

Applied research

Purpose:
- improve understanding of particular business or management problem
- results in solution to problem
- new knowledge limited to problem
- findings of practical relevance and value to manager(s) in organisation(s)

Context:
- undertaken by people based in a variety of settings including organisations and academia
- objectives negotiated with originator
- tight time scales

Impact:
- initially policy and practice community and researcher
- may also impact academia

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!

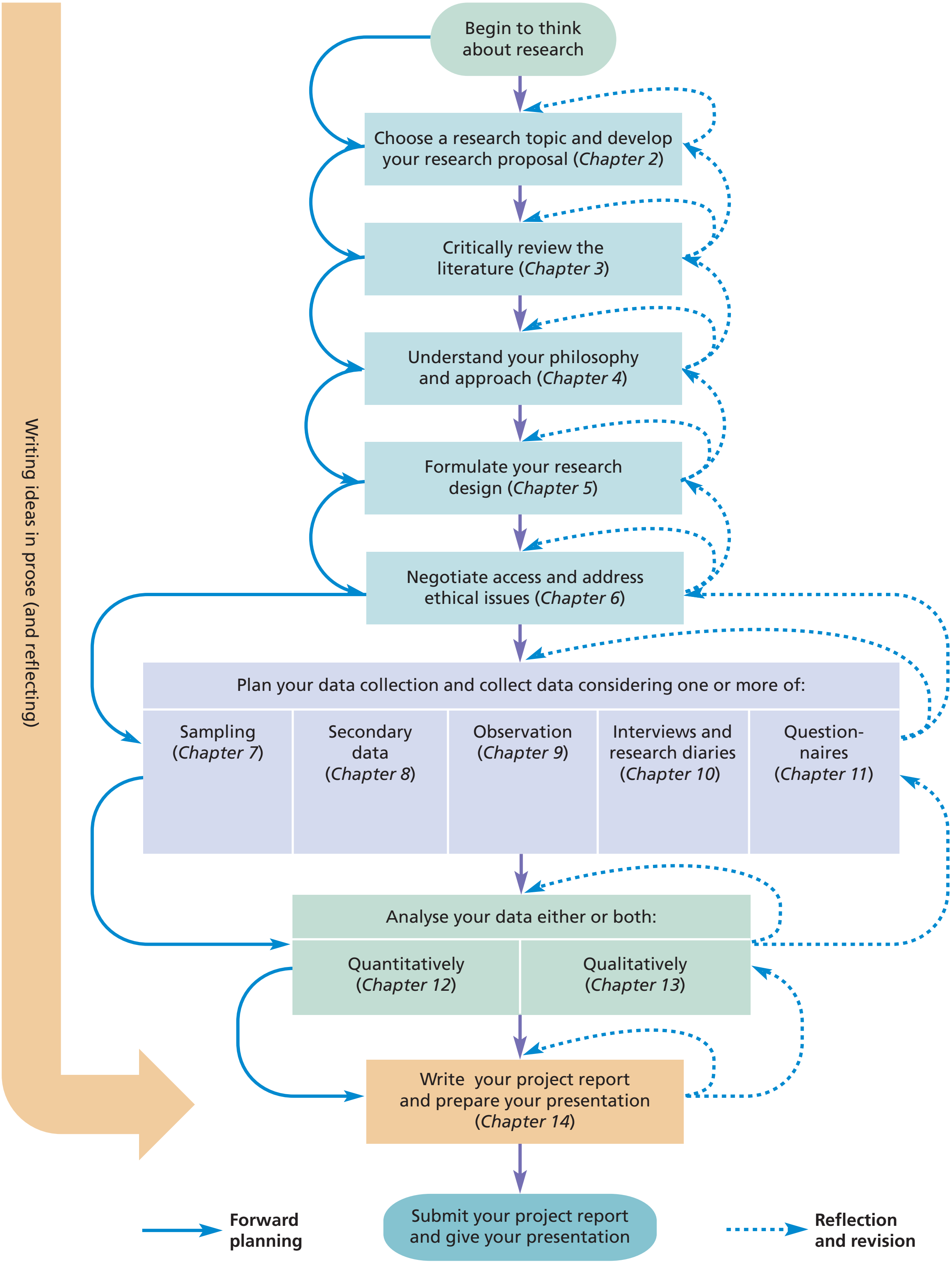


Figure 1.2 The research process

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.

References

Barney, J.B. (1991) 'Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage', *Journal of Management,* Vol. 17, pp. 99–120.

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.

Cassell, C. and Lee, B. (eds) (2011a) *Challenges and Controversies in Management Research.* New York: Routledge.

Cassell, C. and Lee, B. (2011b) 'Introduction: Key debates, challenges and controversies in management research', in C. Cassell and B. Lee (eds) *Challenges and Controversies in Management Research.* New York: Routledge, pp. 1–16.

Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R., Jackson, P. and Lowe, A. (2012) *Management Research* (4th edn). London: Sage.

Gabriel, Y. (2015) 'Reflexivity and beyond – a plea for imagination in qualitative research methodology', *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal,* Vol. 10, No. 4, pp. 332–36.

Ghauri, P. and Grønhaug, K. (2010) *Research Methods in Business Studies: A Practical Guide* (4th edn). Harlow: FT Prentice Hall.

Gibbons, M.L., Limoges, H., Nowotny, S., Schwartman, P., Scott, P. and Trow, M. (1994) *The New Production of Knowledge: The Dynamics of Science and Research in Contemporary Societies.* London: Sage.

Haynes, K. (2011) 'Reflexivity in qualitative research', in C. Cassell and B. Lee (eds) *Challenges and Controversies in Management Research.* New York: Routledge, pp. 72–89.

Hedrick, T.E., Bickmann, L. and Rog, D.J. (1993) *Applied Research Design.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hitt, M.A.S. and Greer, C.R. (2012) 'The value of research and its evaluation in business schools: Killing the goose that laid the golden egg?', *Journal of Management Inquiry,* Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 236–40.

Hodgkinson, G.P., Herriot, P. and Anderson, N. (2001) 'Re-aligning the stakeholders in management research: Lessons from industrial, work and organizational psychology', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 12, Special Issue, pp. 41–8.

Hodgkinson, G.P. and Rousseau, D. (2009) 'Bridging the rigour–relevance gap in management research. It's already happening!', *Journal of Management Studies,* Vol. 46, No. 3, pp. 534–46.

Hodgkinson, G.P. and Starkey, K. (2011) 'Not simply returning to the same answer over and over again: Reframing relevance', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 22, pp. 355–69.

Huff, A.S. and Huff, J.O. (2001) 'Refocusing the business school agenda', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 12, Special Issue, pp. 49–54.

MacIntosh, R. Beech, N., Bartunek, J., Mason, K. Cooke, B. and Denyer, D. (2017) 'Impact and management research: Exploring relationships between temporality, dialogue, reflexivity and praxis', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 28, N0.1, pp. 3–13.

Marchington, M., Wilkinson, A., Donnelly, R. and Kynighou, A. (2016) *Human Resource Management at Work* (6th edn). London: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, Kogan Page.

Pandza, K. and Thorpe, R. (2010) 'Management as design, but what kind of design? An appraisal of the design science analogy for management', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 171–86.

Post-it (2018) *About Post-it® Brand.* Available at https://www.3m.co.uk/3M/en_GB/post-it-notes/contact-us/about-us/ [Accessed 7 June 2018].

Rousseau, D. (2006) 'Is there such a thing as "Evidence-Based Management"?', *Academy of Management Review,* Vol. 31, No. 2, pp. 256–69.

Saunders, M.N.K. (2011) 'The management researcher as practitioner', in B. Lee and C. Cassell (eds) *Challenges and Controversies in Management Research.* New York: Routledge, pp. 243–57.

Starkey, K. and Madan, P. (2001) 'Bridging the relevance gap: Aligning stakeholders in the future of management research', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 12, Special Issue, pp. 3–26.

Tranfield, D. and Denyer, D. (2004) 'Linking theory to practice: A grand challenge for management research in the 21st century?', *Organization Management Journal,* Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 10–14.

Tranfield, D. and Starkey, K. (1998) 'The nature, social organization and promotion of management research: Towards policy', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 9, pp. 341–53.

Van Aken, J.E. (2005) 'Management research as a design science: Articulating the research products of Mode 2 knowledge production in management', *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 19–36.

Walliman, N. (2011) *Your Research Project: A Step by Step Guide for the First-Time Researcher* (3rd edn). London: Sage.

Wensley, R. (2011) 'Seeking relevance in management research', in C. Cassell and B. Lee (eds) *Challenges and Controversies in Management Research.* New York: Routledge, pp. 258–74.

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.

References

Crenshaw, K. (1991) 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color'. *Stanford Law Review,* Vol. 43, No. 6, pp. 1241–99.

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.

Chapter 2

Choosing a research topic and developing your research proposal

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- identify the characteristics of a good research topic;
- generate and refine ideas to choose a suitable research topic;
- express your research topic as a clear research question(s), and as an aim and objectives;
- understand the relationship between the research question(s), research aim and research objectives;
- recognise the role of theory in developing the research question(s), research aim and research objectives;
- develop a written research proposal that outlines your proposed research project.

2.1 Introduction

Many students think that choosing their research topic is the most exciting part of their course. After all, this is something that they get to decide for themselves rather than having to complete a task decided by their tutors. We will stress in this chapter that it is important to choose something that will sustain your interest throughout the months that you will need to complete it. You may even decide to do some research on something that forms part of your leisure activities!

We live in a world where we are exposed to a wide range of mainstream, online and social media. Such sources of news and information may present partial interpretations of and personal assertions about events. Media associated with a particular viewpoint are likely to attract people who are sympathetic to the views being expressed while repelling others who take a contrary view (the opening vignette outlines cross-national evidence on this issue). Rather than accepting any such interpretations and assertions at face value, as researchers we need to ask, 'What evidence do they have for saying this, or claiming that?' We may also ask, 'Why are they making such statements or claims?' Research involves obtaining, analysing and interpreting data.

Your interpretation flows from your analysis of data, taking into account its strengths and limitations. 'Research' should never be based on partial interpretations, personal assertions or prejudged conclusions. Recognising this will be important in choosing a research topic and developing your research proposal.

Before you start your research, you need to have at least some idea of what you want to do. This is probably the most difficult, and yet the most important, part of your research project.

Digital news media, existing beliefs and bias

The *Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017* examines a number of themes related to the use of digital news. These include how people source their news, by choosing between established news brands that have gone online, social media or other, aggregative news platforms; how people use different news media, such as polarisation (where people favour particular news channels they believe are sympathetic to their existing beliefs, such as their political orientation, and personal biases) or avoidance (news users who nevertheless avoid some news); and how people feel about the news media, such as their levels of trust or distrust about the news they use.

Based on a survey conducted in 36 countries of over 70,000 participants completing an online questionnaire, and follow-up focus group interviews held in four countries, the report highlights a number of changes including the polarisation of how different groups source their news. The younger the age group, the more likely they are to source news online and from social media; often using mobile phones. Printed newspapers are in decline generally, and television news is more likely to be watched by older age groups. Messaging apps are a growing source for finding, sharing and discussing news. Online newsfeeds from social media, searches and aggregative news platforms are now more important than going directly to a news brand website or receiving an email or mobile alert from one in many countries.

The report highlights a number of concerns. These include news source polarisation, news avoidance, fake news and trust and distrust of sources. The level of polarisation appears to be increasing in some countries although there are also large national differences. Almost 30 per cent of the Reuters sample reported that they sometimes or often avoided news. Concerns about fake news appeared to be particularly pronounced in relation to use of social media, although there are also concerns about mainstream news media. Low to moderate levels of overall trust in news media were prevalent, exacerbated by social media, the Internet and perceptions of bias in the mainstream media.

Up until now most of your studies will probably have been concerned with answering questions that other people have set. The start of this chapter is intended to help you think about choosing a research topic. If you are not clear about what you are going to research, it will be difficult to plan how you are going to research it. This reminds us of a favourite quote in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. This is part of Alice's conversation with the Cheshire Cat. In this Alice asks the Cat (Carroll 1989: 63–4):

> 'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?'
> 'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to', said the Cat.
> 'I don't much care where', said Alice.
> 'Then it doesn't matter which way you walk', said the Cat.

Choosing a research topic is unlikely to involve you in a single moment of inspiration. Even if it does, arriving at a clearly defined research topic is still likely to be iterative, involving you in a process of formulating, clarifying and re-formulating your research idea(s) until it becomes an acceptable and practical topic. Part of this process will involve you devising one or more research questions, a related aim and set of research objectives. Once you are clear about your research topic, and the research question(s), aim and objectives that operationalise it, you will be better able to choose the most appropriate research strategy and data collection and analysis techniques. The processes involved in choosing your research topic and developing your research proposal will be time consuming and will probably take you up blind alleys (Saunders and Lewis 1997). However, without spending time on this you are far less likely to achieve a successful project. This is likely to be the case even when you have been given an embryonic research topic, perhaps by an organisation or a tutor. Whether you start with such a research topic or formulate one for yourself, it is also important to work on something that will sustain your interest throughout the months that you will need to complete it.

We commence this chapter by looking briefly and generally at the characteristics of a good research topic (Section 2.2). Choosing a research topic starts with the generation of ideas and we discuss ways in which to generate and refine research ideas in Section 2.3. Taking your research idea(s) and chosen topic and developing a research proposal will involve a number of tasks. You will need to formulate a research question(s), a research aim and a set of research objectives. You will also need to consider how your research topic fits into existing theory. Using theory may help you to clarify your research topic. It will also inform your research question, aim and objectives, and your research proposal more generally. We discuss these aspects in Section 2.4. The process of developing your research proposal will result in a written document. We discuss the rationale for and structure of a written research proposal in Section 2.5. Once approved, your research proposal will act as the guide for the rest of your research project.

Choosing your research project is a developmental exercise; not just in terms of generating and refining possible ideas and developing your research proposal, but also in terms of your self-development. Undertaking a research project will involve engaging in personal reflectivity and reflexivity. In Section 1.5 we referred to the experiential learning cycle, where personal reflection is vital to learning from experience. Choosing your research topic and developing your research proposal will involve you in a period of intense intellectual activity that will provide you with many opportunities to learn from this experience. You will be able to make a number of entries in your reflective diary or learning journal to record your actions in choosing your research topic and developing your research proposal, and the learning points that emerge for you from this process. Related to this will be personal reflexivity.

Lincoln et al. (2011: 124) define **reflexivity** as 'the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher'. As we say elsewhere in this book, research is like going on a journey.

It is a journey that involves you making a number of decisions. Being reflexive will ensure you reflect on why you choose a research topic, why you prefer one research strategy over another, how you engage with those whom you wish to take part in your research, how you use the data they reveal to you, how you deal with any problems that confront you during your project, and so on. It will allow you to surface any preconceived ideas that you may have about your topic and what you expect to find, and help you to be aware of your own biases. Through doing this you will recognise your role or 'self' within the process of the research, remaining critically reflective and being open to new learning. This chapter is intended to encourage a reflective and reflexive approach and we would encourage you to retain these qualities as your research progresses.

Critical reflectivity may be approached not just through an introspective examination of the ways your attitudes and actions affect your role as researcher, but also in relation to the way broader social assumptions and context may influence it (see, for example: Charmaz 2017; Mortari 2015). Many preconceived ideas and personal biases have a social basis. The following vignette illustrates how recent changes in the way people use digital news media may reflect and reinforce such existing beliefs and bias. This may have consequences for the research environment in terms of the need for researchers not only to reflect on their own predilections, preconceived ideas and bias, but also on those of potential participants in a research project. Such reflections may be appropriate as you choose and refine your research topic and develop your research proposal.

2.2 Characteristics of a good research topic

The attributes of a business and management research topic do not vary a great deal between universities, although there will be differences in the emphasis placed on these attributes. Some of these characteristics reflect the need to fulfil the specification set for the research project and meet the assessment criteria. We outline these under the heading, 'Appropriateness'. Other characteristics of a good research topic will reflect the feasibility of it being undertaken and the associated developmental opportunities. We consider some of these briefly under the headings of 'Capability' and 'Fulfilment'. There may be other characteristics of a good research topic that become evident to you in relation to your own research project. Identifying these should be helpful in terms of choosing a research topic and developing your research project. You may also find it useful to discuss them with your project tutor.

Appropriateness

The scope of the research topic that you choose and the nature of the research proposal that you produce will need to meet the requirements of your examining body (such as your university, professional body or other accredited organisation). This means that you must choose a research topic and develop your research proposal with care. For example, some universities require students to collect their own data as part of their research project, whereas others allow them to base their project on data that have already been collected. Alternatively, some ask you to undertake an organisation-based piece of applied research, while others simply say that it must be within the subject matter of your course or programme. You therefore need to check the assessment criteria for your research project and ensure that your choice of topic and the specification of your proposal will enable you to meet these criteria. If you are unsure, you should discuss any uncertainties with your project tutor.

It will be important to use existing theory from the academic literature to inform your choice of research topic and in the development of your research proposal. As part of your assessment criteria you are almost certain to be asked to consider the theoretical context of your research topic in your research proposal. As we discussed earlier, using existing theory should help you to clarify your research topic and to inform your research question, aim and objectives. Using theory should also help you to develop clear definitions of the concepts that you use in your research (Podsakoff et al. 2016). We consider the role of theory further in Section 2.4 and the critical review of the literature that discusses it in Section 3.3.

Most project tutors will argue that one of the characteristics of a good topic is a clearly defined research question(s), aim and set of objectives (Section 2.4). These will, along with a good knowledge of the literature (Chapter 3), enable you to assess the extent to which your research is likely to provide new insights into the topic. Many students believe this is going to be difficult. Fortunately there are numerous ways in which such insight can be defined as new (Sections 2.3 and 2.4).

It is also important that your topic will have **symmetry of potential outcomes**: that is, your results will be of similar value whatever you find out (Gill and Johnson 2010). Without this symmetry you may spend a considerable amount of time researching your topic, only to find an answer of little importance. Whatever the outcome, you need to ensure you have the scope to write an interesting project report.

Capability

Your research topic must also be something you are capable of undertaking. Capability can be considered in a variety of ways. At the personal level you need to feel comfortable that you have, or can develop, the skills that will be required to research the topic. We hope that you will develop your research skills as part of undertaking your project, such as those related to data analysis. However, some skills, for example, learning a new foreign language, may be impossible to acquire in the time you have available.

Your ability to find the financial and time resources to undertake research on the topic will also affect your capability. This relates, in part, to the concept of feasibility (which we return to in Section 2.5 and also discuss in Section 6.2). Some topics are unlikely to be possible to complete in the time allowed by your course of study. This may be because they require you to measure the impact of an intervention over a long time period or because of their complexity. Similarly, topics that are likely to require you to travel widely or use expensive equipment or specialist software not available at your university should also be disregarded unless financial resources permit.

Capability also means you must be reasonably certain of gaining access to any data you might need to collect. Many people start with ideas where access to data will prove difficult. Certain, more sensitive topics, such as financial performance or decision making by senior managers, are potentially fascinating. However, they may present considerable access problems. You should, therefore, discuss this with your project tutor after reading Sections 6.2–6.4.

Fulfilment

Your research topic needs to be one that excites your imagination and in which you have or will develop a genuine interest. Most research projects are undertaken over at least a four-month period. A topic in which you are only vaguely interested at the start is likely to become one in which you have no interest and with which you will fail to produce your

Box 2.1 Checklist

Characteristics of a good research topic

Appropriateness

- ✔ Does the research topic fit the specifications and meet the standards set by the examining institution?
- ✔ Does the research topic contain issues that have a clear link to theory?
- ✔ Are you able to state your research question(s), aim and objectives clearly?
- ✔ Will the proposed research be able to provide fresh insights into this topic?
- ✔ Are the findings for this research topic likely to be symmetrical: that is, of similar value whatever the outcome?

Capability

- ✔ Do you have, or can you develop within the project time frame, the necessary research skills to undertake the research topic?
- ✔ Is the research topic achievable within the available time?
- ✔ Is the research topic achievable within the financial resources that are likely to be available?
- ✔ Are you reasonably certain of being able to gain access to data you are likely to require for this research topic?

Fulfilment

- ✔ Does the research topic really interest and motivate you?
- ✔ Will the research topic help towards the achievement of your future aspirations or career goals?

best work. It may also be important to consider your future aspirations. If you wish to obtain employment or pursue a career in a particular subject area, it is sensible to use this opportunity to start to develop some expertise in it.

It is almost inevitable that the extent to which these characteristics apply to you will depend on your research topic and the reasons why you are undertaking the research. However, most are likely to apply. For this reason it is important that you check and continue to check any potential research topic against the summary checklist contained in Box 2.1.

2.3 Generating and refining research topic ideas

Many business and management students are expected to generate and refine their own research ideas, whereas some others, particularly those on professional and post-experience courses, are provided with an embryonic research idea by their employing or sponsoring organisation. In the initial stages of their research they are expected to refine this to a clear and feasible idea that meets the requirements of the examining organisation. If you have already been given a research idea we believe you will still find it useful to read the next sub-section, which deals with generating research ideas. Many of the techniques that can be used for generating research ideas can also be used for subsequent refining.

If you have not been given a **research idea** there is a range of techniques that can be used to find and select a topic that you would like to research. These can be divided into two groups: those that predominantly involve **rational thinking** and those that involve more **creative thinking** (Table 2.1).

The precise techniques that you choose to use and the order in which you use them are entirely up to you. However, we believe you should choose those that you believe are going to be of most use to you and which you will enjoy using. By using one or more creative techniques you are more likely to ensure that your heart as well as your head is in

Table 2.1 More frequently used techniques for generating and refining research ideas

Rational thinking	Creative thinking
Examining your own strengths and interests	Keeping a notebook of your ideas
Examining academic staff research interests	Exploring personal preferences using past projects
Looking at past project titles	Exploring relevance to business using the literature
Discussion	Relevance trees
Searching existing literature	Brainstorming
Scanning the media	

your research project. In our experience, it is usually better to use both rational and creative techniques. In order to do this you will need to have some understanding of the techniques and the ways in which they work. We therefore list the techniques in Table 2.1 and then discuss possible ways they might be used to generate research ideas. These techniques will generate one of two outcomes:

- one or more possible project ideas that you might undertake;
- few ideas that relate to your interests. In this case you may want to revise the area in which you are interested, either by choosing another area or by refining and perhaps narrowing or widening your original area of interest.

In either instance we suggest that you make some notes and arrange to talk to your project tutor.

Rational thinking techniques for generating research ideas

Examining your own strengths and interests

It is important that you choose a topic in which you are likely to do well and, if possible, already have some academic knowledge. One way of doing this is to look at completed assignments for which you have received good grades (Box 2.4). Many, if not most, of these assignments are likely to be in subject areas in which you have an interest. These assignments will provide you with subject areas in which to search and find a research idea. In addition, you may, as part of your reading, be able to focus more precisely on the sort of ideas about which you wish to conduct your research.

As noted in Section 2.2, there is the need to think about your future. If you plan to work in financial management it would be sensible to choose a research project in the financial management field. One part of your course that will inevitably be discussed at any job interview is your research project. A project in the same field will provide you with the opportunity to display clearly your depth of knowledge and your enthusiasm.

Examining academic staff research interests

Your university's website will have profile pages of academic staff, which may be helpful in exploring and generating research ideas that could be of interest for your own project. These pages usually outline the subject area or areas taught by each member of staff (e.g. accounting, international management, marketing, strategic management) and are also likely to list their particular research interests (e.g. regulation of accounting standards, transnational management, pricing and price promotions, organisational learning). In many cases, academic staff provide short commentaries on their research interests offering more detail. Lists of publications and conference papers with hyperlinks to online copies may also be included. These provide even more detail about the exact nature of their research interests. Working through this information may allow you to generate ideas for your own research and guide you to some initial reading to test this interest.

Looking at past project titles

Many of our students have found looking at past projects a useful way of generating research ideas. For undergraduate and taught master's degrees these are often called **dissertations**. For research degrees they are termed **theses**. A common way of doing this is to scan a list of past project titles for anything that captures your imagination. Titles that look interesting or which grab your attention should be noted, as should any thoughts you have about the title in relation to your own research idea. In this process the fact that the title is poorly worded or the project report received a low mark is immaterial. What matters is the fact that you have found a topic that interests you. Based on this you can think of new ideas in the same general area that will enable you to provide fresh insights.

Scanning actual research projects may also produce research ideas. However, you need to beware. The fact that a project is in your library is no guarantee of the quality of the arguments and observations it contains. In some universities all projects are placed in the library whether they are bare passes or distinctions.

Discussion

Colleagues, friends and university tutors are all potentially good sources of possible research ideas. Often project tutors will have ideas for possible student projects, which they will be pleased to discuss with you.

Ideas can also be obtained by talking to people who work in, or have direct experience of, the topic area in which you are interested to develop a research idea. People who have experience of a topic area may include managers and other practitioners such as accountants, business analysts, marketing executives, human resource administrators, purchasing or sales staff as well as others. Self-employed people and small business owners may be useful to talk to depending on your proposed topic area. Members of professional groups or workplace representatives may also provide you with insights that help to generate research ideas. Your contact with such people at this early stage may be fortuitous, relying on being able to talk to someone you already know such as those in an organisation in which you have undertaken a work placement. If such people are willing to spare some time to talk to you, it may be worthwhile to help you towards generating a research idea. It is important that as well as discussing possible ideas you also make a note of them. What seemed like a good idea in the coffee shop may not be remembered quite so clearly after the following lecture!

Searching existing literature

As part of your discussions, relevant literature may also be suggested. There are various types of literature that are of particular use for generating research ideas. These include:

- articles in academic journals;
- articles in professional journals;
- reports;
- books.

Academic journal articles nearly always contain a section that reviews literature relevant to the article's topic area. Given the nature of published research, such articles are generally highly specialised, focusing on a particular aspect of a management subject. You will need to be prepared to undertake an extensive search lasting some hours (or even days) to find articles that might be helpful in generating research ideas related to your broader topic of interest. The (advanced) search facilities available to you within the online research databases that you have access to through your university or professional association will be very helpful here (Sections 3.5 and 3.6). You may also consider signing up to and using one or more of the online platforms used by academics to share their research papers. Millions of academics share pre-publication copies of their academic journal articles, research reports and conference papers on platforms such as acadmia.edu and ResearchGate. Although these copies are unlikely to be the final version for copyright reasons, they can provide access to those articles, reports and conference papers that are not available through those online databases for which your university's library has subscriptions.

Browsing journals online and using available search facilities should help you to identify possible research ideas and potential topics. The advent of the feature known as 'online publication ahead of print' or 'advance online publication' may also mean that you can gain early online access to articles in journals before they are formally published. These 'early view articles' are the final version (except for their volume numbering and pagination) and are usually made available through the specific journal's website some months ahead of being included in a specific volume/issue.

Of particular use, where you can find suitable ones, are academic **review articles**. Some journals such as the *International Journal of Management Reviews* only publish review articles – so look out for these! These articles contain a considered review of the state of knowledge in a particular topic area and are therefore likely to contain a wealth of ideas about that area (Box 2.2). These ideas will act as pointers towards aspects where further research needs to be undertaken.

For many subject areas your project tutor will be able to suggest recent review articles, or articles that contain recommendations for further research. Reports may also be of use. The most recently published are usually up to date and, again, often contain recommendations that may form the basis of your research idea. Books by contrast may be less up to

Box 2.2 Focus on management research

Corporate social responsibility

An article published in an issue of the *Academy of Management Journal (AMJ)* in 2016 reviews the development of, and literature relating to, corporate social responsibility. The aim of corporate social responsibility is defined as, 'businesses bearing a responsibility to society and a broader set of stakeholders beyond its shareholders' (Wang et al. 2016: 534). The authors of this review undertook a content analysis (see also Section 12.2) of 87 articles that had been published in *AMJ* over nearly 60 years to determine trends in corporate social responsibility research on a decade-by-decade basis. They present and discuss these in this review article.

This review article also serves as an introduction to seven articles that make up this thematic issue of *AMJ*. The authors of the review article also include a discussion of possible directions for corporate social responsibility research. Referencing many of the articles from *AMJ* that they included in their content analysis, plus several others related to this topic area, this review article has an extensive list of references relating to corporate social responsibility. Any researcher setting out to explore and generate research ideas relating to corporate social responsibility would therefore need to include this review article in their first batch of reading, after conducting a preliminary search of the existing literature on this topic.

date than other written sources. They often, however, contain a good overview of research that has been undertaken, which may suggest ideas to you.

Alvesson and Sandberg (2011) report that articles published in academic management journals are predominantly based on research that finds new ways to investigate existing theoretical perspectives. They call this approach 'gap spotting', suggesting it results in incremental changes in theory. They identify a more critical and reflexive but rarer approach to research that challenges the assumptions underpinning existing theoretical perspectives and which has the potential to lead to more interesting and high-impact theories. Given the difficulties associated with designing an assumption-challenging study, it is much more likely that you will adopt the 'gap spotting' approach. We discuss this further when we consider the importance of theory in writing research questions and objectives in Section 2.4.

Searching for publications is only possible when you have at least some idea of the area in which you wish to undertake your research. One way of obtaining this is to re-examine your lecture notes and course textbooks and to note those subjects that appear most interesting (discussed earlier in this section) and the names of relevant authors. This will give you a basis on which to undertake a **preliminary search** (using techniques outlined in Sections 3.5 and 3.6). When you have located a series of articles, reports and other relevant items it is often helpful to look for statements on the absence of research and possibly unfounded assertions in some types of publication, as these are likely to contain or suggest ideas that may help you to choose a research topic.

Scanning the media

Keeping up to date with items in the news can be a very rich source of ideas. The stories which occur every day in the 'broadsheet' or 'compact' newspapers, in both online and traditional print versions, may provide ideas which relate directly to the item (e.g. the extent to which items sold by supermarkets contravene the principles of 'green consumerism' by involving excessive 'food miles' in order to import them). Please note, however, that some of these online media are only available by subscription. The stories in these media may also suggest other ideas which flow from the central story (e.g. the degree to which a company uses its claimed environmental credentials as part of its marketing campaign).

Creative thinking techniques for generating research ideas

Keeping a notebook of your ideas

One of the more creative techniques that we all use is to keep a **notebook of ideas**. This involves simply noting down any interesting research ideas as you think of them and, of equal importance, what sparked off your thought. You can then pursue the idea using more rational thinking techniques later. Mark keeps a notebook by his bed so he can jot down any flashes of inspiration that occur to him in the middle of the night!

Exploring personal preferences using past projects

One way to generate and evaluate possible project ideas is to explore your personal preferences by reading through a number of past project reports from your university. To get started you need to search through these and select a number that you like and a number that you do not like.

For each project that you like, note down your first thoughts in response to each of the following questions:

1 What do you like in general about the project?
2 Why do you like the project?
3 Which ideas in the project appeal to you?

For each project that you do not like, note down your first thoughts in response to each of the following questions:

1 What do you dislike in general about the project?
2 Why do you dislike the project?
3 Which ideas in the project do not appeal to you?

When you have completed this task, you may find it helpful to spend some time reflecting on each set of notes – for the projects you like and those you do not. By reflecting on and thinking about each list you should begin to understand those project characteristics that are important to you and with which you feel comfortable. Of equal importance, you will have identified those with which you are uncomfortable and should avoid.

This process has two benefits. Firstly, it may help you to generate possible research ideas. Secondly, you may use the project characteristics that emerge from exploring your personal preferences as parameters against which to evaluate possible research ideas.

Exploring relevance to business using the literature

There is an enormous amount of research published in business and management journals. The nature of these journals varies considerably, ranging from those with a more applied focus to those that are more esoteric. As a result, there will be many ways in which you may explore the relevance to business of ideas published in the literature. The relevance to business practice of academic business research and education remains a key issue (Box 2.3). Even more esoteric journal articles contain a wealth of ideas that may be explored for their relevance to business. Such articles can contain ideas that you may be able to translate, make operational and test in practice in a given setting, such as a particular organisation, albeit using a simpler methodology than that in the published study. The 'Discussion' section in many business and management journals routinely includes an 'Implications for practice' sub-section, which may guide you towards developing a research idea to explore the relevance of the theory in the article to a particular business setting, such as your employing organisation.

Articles based on empirical studies may also provide you with research ideas. A published empirical study may have been undertaken as a case study. It may have been based in a particular sector or industry, and it may have been based in a particular organisation or type of organisation. Reading it may lead you to think that you could undertake a similar study, albeit possibly scaled down, in a different type of organisation, in a different industry or sector.

There may be scope for you to undertake a case study that seeks to apply the findings from a large sample statistical study to a particular organisational context or type of organisation. This will allow you to test the applicability of these previous findings and to convert them into a relevant and accessible form for a particular context.

Creatively approaching the literature to convert existing work into a relevant and specifically applied study, in the ways we have described, may provide you with a rich and valuable research idea.

Box 2.3 Focus on research in the news

Where real-life crises provide valuable lessons

By Sarah Murray

It is not unusual for the opening sessions of executive finance courses to focus on markets and the role of banks as intermediaries. However, real events helped to underpin dramatically what was being taught to students during one Master of Science in Global Finance programme when it was launched 10 years ago.

"It was clear that the role of the intermediary was not what it used to be, not just taking deposits and lending," says Charmaine Cheuk, a real estate investment executive who was a student on the first MSc in Global Finance course run jointly by New York University's Stern School of Business and the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST) Business School in 2007.

Hong Kong-born Ms Cheuk says she realised that she was watching a revolution take place as the 2008 financial crisis developed and the role of complex products such as subprime loans and collateralised debt obligations – which played a big part in the meltdown – became more obvious.

For Menachem Brenner, co-academic director of the programme, the crisis sharpened his ambitions for the programme. "It had so many lessons for us worldwide," he says. "And one of the things I saw as a mission was to bring into the programme those lessons drawn from the crisis."

Ms Cheuk remembers how the daily events added an unexpected dimension to her studies. "It was exciting. It was not just textbook in terms of what you were studying, it was literally in front of you every day."

The constant flux in the financial world has meant the content needs to be regularly updated. For example, two courses have recently been added, one in fintech and the other in behavioural finance, which combines behavioural and cognitive psychological theory with conventional economics and finance. The latter course has been able to draw on recent Chinese stock volatility to examine financial markets through a psychological lens.

"The financial market experience in China, with the recent crash in stock prices, is a great illustration of where we have a hard time as economists describing market behaviour using rational modelling," says Prof Nielsen.

FT *Source of extract:* Murray, Sarah (2017) 'Where real-life crises provide valuable lessons', *Financial Times,* 19 June.

Relevance trees

Relevance trees may also prove useful in generating research topics. In this instance, their use is similar to that of mind mapping (Buzan 2011) in which you start with a broad concept from which you generate further (usually more specific) topics. Each of these topics forms a separate branch from which you can generate further, more detailed sub-branches. As you proceed down the sub-branches more ideas are generated and recorded. These can then be examined and a number selected and combined to provide a research idea. This technique is discussed in more detail in Section 3.5 (and illustrated in Box 3.6).

Brainstorming

The technique of **brainstorming** (Box 2.4), taught as a problem-solving technique on many business and management courses, can also be used to generate and refine research ideas. It is best undertaken with a group of people, although you can brainstorm on your own. Brainstorming involves a number of stages:

1 *Defining the problem*. This will focus on the sorts of ideas you are interested in – as precisely as possible. In the early stages of formulating a topic this may be as vague as, 'I am interested in marketing but don't know what to do for my research topic'.
2 *Asking for suggestions*. These will relate to the problem.
3 *Recording suggestions*. As you record these you will need to observe the following rules:
   - No suggestion should be criticised or evaluated in any way before all ideas have been considered.
   - All suggestions, however wild, should be recorded and considered.
   - As many suggestions as possible should be recorded.
4 *Reviewing suggestions*. You will seek to explore what is meant by each as you review these.
5 *Analysing suggestions*. Work through the list of ideas and decide which appeal to you most as research ideas and why.

Box 2.4 Focus on student research

Brainstorming

George's main interest was football. In his university city he worked part-time in the retail store of the local football club and thought he would like to carry out his research project in this setting.

When he finished university he wanted to work in marketing, preferably for a sports goods manufacturer or retailer. He had examined his own strengths and discovered that his highest marks were in marketing. He wanted to do his research project on some aspect of marketing, preferably linked to the football club, but had no real research idea. He asked three friends, all taking business management degrees, to help him brainstorm the problem.

George began by explaining the problem in some detail. At first the suggestions emerged slowly. He noted them down on some flipchart sheets. Soon a number of sheets of paper were covered with suggestions and pinned up around the room. George counted these and discovered there were over 100.

Reviewing individual suggestions produced nothing that any of the group felt to be of sufficient merit for a research project. However, George recalled an article they had been asked to read based on a case study of an English Premier League football club (Ogbonna and Harris 2014). He had found this interesting because of its subject. He recalled that it was about organisational culture being perpetuated within organisations that have a long history of success, and stakeholder groups such as football fans who have a strong sense of identity.

George's recollections of this article encouraged the group to discuss their suggestions further. Combining a number of suggestions from the flipchart sheets with their discussion about organisational cultural perpetuation, George noted a possible research idea as: 'The impact of factors that perpetuate organisational culture on the development of marketing strategies – help or hindrance?'

George thought this idea could be based on his local football club.

George arranged to see his project tutor to discuss how to refine the idea they had just generated.

Refining research topic ideas

The Delphi technique

An approach that our students have found useful to refine their research ideas is the **Delphi technique** (Box 2.5). The standard Delphi method involves a researcher using a purposive sample of participants who are knowledgeable about the topic to be discussed; asking these participants to write down their answers anonymously to some initial questions to gather their opinions and perceptions; analysing these answers thematically; using this to generate a second round of questions to gain participants' feedback to the initial responses; repeating this process until a consensus is reached about the topic in order to inform decision-making, policy or practice. The initial round of questions is likely to be 'open' or 'semi-open', while subsequent rounds of questions are likely to be more focussed and structured. (Brady 2015).

One use of this technique, known as 'Policy Delphi', draws on these characteristics albeit in an informal and face-to-face way. Its intention is to encourage the identification of refinements or alternatives to an initial research idea. You use a small purposive sample (Section 7.3) of your classmates or colleagues who have some subject knowledge about and interest in your initial research idea, to generate related ideas, evaluate these and perhaps to arrive at a consensus around a specific research idea (Paraskevas and Saunders 2012). To use this technique you need:

1 to brief the members of the group about the initial research idea (they can make notes if they wish);
2 to encourage group members to seek clarification and more information as appropriate at the end of the briefing;

Box 2.5 Focus on student research

Using a Delphi Group

Tim explained to the group that his research idea was concerned with understanding the decision-making processes associated with mortgage applications and loan advances. His briefing to the three other group members, and the questions that they asked him, considered aspects such as:

- the particular situation of potential first-time house buyers;
- the way in which the nature of contact between potential borrowers and financial institutions might influence decision making.

The group then moved on to generate a number of more specific research ideas, among which were the following:

- the effect of being a first-time house purchaser on mortgage application decision making;
- the effect of websites and mobile apps that facilitate property searching and links to mortgage specialists on decision making;
- the effect of interpersonal contact on mortgage decisions;
- the attributes that potential applicants look for in financial institutions operating in the mortgage market.

These ideas were considered and commented on by all the group members. At the end of the second cycle Tim had, with the other students' agreement, refined his research idea to:

- an evaluation of the factors that influence potential first-time buyers' choice of lending institution.

Tim now needed to pursue this idea by undertaking a preliminary search of the literature.

3 to ask each member of the group, including the originator of the research idea, to generate independently up to three alternative research ideas based on the initial idea (they can also be asked to provide a justification for their specific ideas);
4 to collect the research ideas in an unedited and non-attributable form and to distribute them to all members of the group to reflect on;
5 to encourage group members to comment on each research idea, including giving reasons for their opinions;
6 a second cycle of steps 2 to 5 to encourage further refinements or new options in light of what others have said during the first cycle;
7 subsequent cycles of the process until an outcome is reached. This may be a consensus around a particular research idea. It may occur when saturation occurs – no further ideas are forthcoming. It may also occur when participants become tired and less productive. In practice, three cycles of this technique are likely to produce an effective outcome.

This process works well, not least because people enjoy trying to help one another. In addition, it is very useful in forming cohesive groups.

The preliminary inquiry

Having generated a research idea you will need to refine it to choose a suitable topic and express it as a clear research question(s), an aim and objectives. This will involve searching for and evaluating literature and other related sources. Even if you searched the literature to generate your initial research idea, it is likely to be necessary to conduct another search of it in order to refine this idea into a workable research question. Once you have your initial research idea you can re-visit the literature with a much clearer focus to understand how this helps you to refine your research idea, choose your topic and to develop the research question(s), aim and set of objectives (Section 2.4).

This search activity to refine, focus and operationalise your initial research idea into a suitable research topic and then into a research question(s), aim and objectives involves a **preliminary inquiry** or initial inquiry. This may lead to the first iteration of your critical literature review, or help to inform it (Figure 3.1). It is instructive to see how researchers make the transition from initial ideas to actual research questions, and how their preliminary inquiry facilitates this. Unfortunately, because journal articles are word limited and the 'methods' section of an article only describes the research methodology and techniques used in the actual study, research is often presented as an unproblematic (and not a 'messy') process. While it is therefore helpful to locate articles that show how a preliminary inquiry was conducted to refine research ideas and develop research questions it is not easy to find these!

For some researchers the preliminary inquiry may include informal discussions with people who have personal experience of and knowledge about your research ideas. It may also involve **shadowing** employees who are likely to be important in your research and who may therefore be able to provide some initial insights. If you are planning on undertaking your research within an organisation, it is also important to gain a good understanding of your host organisation (McDonald 2005).

At this stage you should test your ideas using the checklist in Box 2.1 and, where necessary, amend them. It may be that after a preliminary inquiry, or discussing your ideas with colleagues, you decide that the research idea is no longer feasible in the form in which you first envisaged it. If this is the case, do not be too downhearted. It is far better to revise your research ideas at this stage than to have to do it later, when you have undertaken far more work.

Integrating ideas

Another, or complementary, way to refine, focus and operationalise your initial research idea into a suitable topic and then into a research question(s), aim and objectives is to integrate ideas generated using a number of different techniques. Integrating ideas will help your research to have a clear purpose and direction. Jankowicz (2005: 34–6) offers an integrative process that our students have found most useful. This he terms 'working up and narrowing down'. It involves classifying each research idea first into its area, then its field, and finally the precise aspect in which you are interested. These represent an increasingly detailed description of the research idea. For example, your initial area, based on examining your coursework, might be accountancy. After searching through relevant journal articles and holding a discussion with colleagues this might become more focused on the field of financial accounting methods. After a further literature search and reading, the use of a Delphi technique and discussion with your project tutor you decide to focus on the aspect of activity-based costing.

Refining topics given by your employing organisation

As a part-time student, your manager may provide you with an embryonic research topic. This may be something that affects your work and in which you have an interest. You may have discussed this with your manager and relish the opportunity to tackle this topic.

It may, however, be a topic in which you are not particularly interested. In this case you will have to weigh the advantage of doing something useful to the organisation against the disadvantage of a potential lack of personal motivation. You therefore need to achieve a balance. Often the research project your manager wishes you to undertake is larger than is appropriate for your course. In such cases, it may be possible to complete both by isolating an element of the larger organisational project that you find interesting and treating this as the project for your course.

One of our students was asked to do a preliminary investigation of the strengths and weaknesses of her organisation's pay system and then to recommend consultants to design and implement a new system. She was not particularly interested in this project. However, she was considering becoming a freelance personnel consultant. Therefore, for her research project she decided to study the decision-making process in relation to the appointment of personnel consultants. Her organisation's decision on which consultant to appoint, and why this decision was taken, proved to be a useful case study against which to compare management decision-making theory.

In this event you would write a larger report for your organisation and a part of it for your project report. Section 14.4 offers some guidance on writing two separate reports for different audiences.

Other problems may involve your political relationships in the organisation. For example, there will be those keen to commission a project which justifies their particular policy position and see you as a useful pawn in advancing their political interests. It is important to have a clear stance with regard to what you want to do, and your personal objectives, and to stick to this.

A further potential problem may be one of your own making: to promise to deliver research outcomes to your employer and not do so.

Conducting research in your own organisation is also likely to be problematic because of your role as an internal researcher (Tietze 2012). We return to discuss a range of issues related to this role in Section 5.12.

2.4 Developing your research proposal

You will know when the process of generating and refining ideas is complete as you will be able to say, 'I'd like to do some research on ...'. At this point, you will have chosen your research topic based on a clearly defined research idea! Obviously there is still a big gap between this and being able to start serious work on your research project. You will, however, be in position to develop your research proposal, commencing with expressing your research topic as a research question(s), related research aim and set of research objectives. We now discuss writing research questions, research aims and research objectives, the relationship between these, and the role of theory in their development.

Expressing your topic as a research question(s)

It will be important for you to express your research topic as a clearly defined **research question** before commencing the research process. As a student, you are likely to be required to include a research question in your written research proposal (Section 2.5). The importance of creating a clearly defined research question cannot be overemphasised. A research question will allow you to say what the issue or problem is that you wish to study and what your research project will seek to find out, explain and answer. One of the key criteria of your research success will be whether you have developed a set of clear conclusions from the data you have collected. The extent to which you can do that will be determined largely by the clarity with which you have posed your research question (Box 2.6).

This research question will be at the centre of your research project. It will influence your choice of literature to review, your research design, the access you need to negotiate, your approach to sampling, your choice of data collection and analysis methods, and help to shape the way in which you write your project report. This overarching research question is sometimes referred to as a 'general research question', 'general focus research question' or 'central research question'. It will also be used to generate a set of more detailed research objectives or investigative questions to guide your research, discussed later.

However, it is also important to recognise that some research approaches and research strategies start off in a more exploratory and emergent direction (Chapter 5). For a researcher undertaking this type of research, her or his finalised research question may only emerge during the process of data collection and analysis as she or he discovers the

Box 2.6 Focus on student research

Defining the research question

Imran was studying for a BSc in Business Management and undertaking his placement year in an advanced consumer electronics company. When he first joined the company he was surprised to note that the company's business strategy, which was announced in the company newsletter, seemed to be inconsistent with what Imran knew of the product market.

Imran had become particularly interested in corporate strategy in his degree. He was familiar with some of the literature which suggested that corporate strategy should be linked to the general external environment in which the organisation operated. He wanted to do some research on corporate strategy in his organisation for his research project.

After talking this over with his project tutor, Imran decided on the following research question: 'Why does [organisation's name]'s corporate strategy not seem to reflect the major factors in the external operating environment?'

exact focus of her or his research project and refines its direction. Such an approach is open ended and time consuming and may not be practical where you are undertaking a time-limited research project. Despite this, some of the mainly qualitative strategies (discussed in Chapter 5), including Ethnographic Studies and Grounded Theory, are exploratory and emergent and will often lead you, where you use one of these, to refine your initial research question and project as you progress. Most tutors will say here that it is part of the process to refine your original research question as your project progresses to reflect the direction of your emerging research. It is always advisable to discuss such developments with your project tutor! The key point is that if you use such a research approach it is still important to define a clear research question at the outset of your project to focus your research, even if you then refine your research question accordingly.

Defining research questions, rather like generating research ideas (Section 2.3), is not a straightforward matter. It is important that the question is sufficiently involved to generate the sort of project that is consistent with the standards expected of you (Box 2.1). A question that only prompts a descriptive answer – for example, 'What is the proportion of graduates entering the UK civil service who attended top universities?' – is far easier to answer than: 'Why are graduates from top universities more likely to enter the UK civil service than graduates from other universities?' However, answering the first question is unlikely to satisfy your examining body's requirements as it only needs description.

Questions may be divided into ones that are exploratory, descriptive, explanatory or evaluative (Section 5.7). Any research question you ask is likely to begin with or include either 'What', 'When', 'Where', 'Who', 'Why', or 'How'. Each of these will lead to an answer that is partly descriptive and sometimes entirely descriptive, such as: 'How much did the marketing campaign for the new range of products cost?' Exploratory questions are likely to begin with 'How' or 'What'. For example, 'How has the corporate rebranding strategy affected consumer attitudes?' Questions that seek explanations will either commence with 'Why' or contain this word within the question. For example, a question may ask customers what they think about a new product and why they like or dislike it. Questions that are evaluative are also likely to begin with 'How' or 'What' but unlike the 'How much…?' or 'How has…?' questions, an evaluative question might ask, 'How effective was the marketing campaign for the new range of products?' Another way of wording this type of question might be, 'To what extent was the marketing campaign effective and why?' We discuss further the relationship between 'How', 'What' and 'Why' questions later in this section.

While some questions may be too simple, it is perhaps more likely that you might fall into the trap of asking research questions that are too difficult. The question cited earlier, 'Why are graduates from top universities more likely to enter the UK civil service than graduates from other universities?', is a case in point. It would probably be very difficult to gain sufficient access to the inner portals of the civil service to get a good grasp of the subtle 'unofficial' processes that go on at staff selection which may favour one type of candidate over another. Over-reaching yourself in the definition of research questions is a danger.

Clough and Nutbrown (2012) use what they call the '**Goldilocks test**' to decide if research questions are either 'too big', 'too small', 'too hot' or 'just right'. Those that are too big probably need significant research funding because they demand too many resources. Questions that are too small are likely to be of insufficient substance, while those that are too 'hot' may be so because of sensitivities that might be aroused as a result of doing the research. This may be because of the timing of the research or the many other reasons that could upset key people who have a role to play, either directly or indirectly, in the research context. Research questions that have been written to take into account

Table 2.2 Examples of research ideas and resulting general focus research questions

Research idea	Research question
Media campaign following product recalls	How effective is a media campaign designed to increase consumer trust in [company name] following a series of product recalls?
Graduate recruitment via the Internet	To what extent and in what type of context is Internet-based recruitment and selection of graduates effective and why?
Supermarket coupons as a promotional device	In what ways does the issue of coupons at supermarket checkouts affect buyer behaviour?
Challenger banks and small businesses	How has the emergence of challenger banks impacted upon small businesses' financing and why?

the researcher's capabilities and the availability of resources, including time and the research setting, are more likely to be about right.

The pitfall you must avoid at all costs is asking a research question that will not generate new insights (Box 2.1). This raises the question of the extent to which you have consulted the relevant literature. It is perfectly legitimate to replicate research because you have a genuine concern about its applicability to your research setting (for example, your organisation). However, it certainly is not legitimate to display your ignorance of the literature.

In order to clarify a research question, Clough and Nutbrown (2012) talk of the Russian doll principle. This means refining a draft research question until it reflects the essence of your research idea without including any unnecessary words or intentions. By stripping away any unnecessary layers (the larger outer dolls), the clearly defined research question (the smallest doll) that you reveal should provide you with an appropriately focused starting point for your research project.

Writing your research questions will be, in most cases, your task but it is useful to get other people to help. An obvious source of guidance is your project tutor. Consulting your project tutor will avoid the pitfalls of the questions that are too easy or too difficult or have been answered before. Discussing your area of interest with your project tutor will lead to your research questions becoming much clearer.

Prior to discussion with your project tutor you may wish to conduct a brainstorming session with your peers or use the Delphi technique (Section 2.3). Your research questions may flow from your initial examination of the relevant literature. As outlined in Section 2.3, journal articles reporting primary research will often end with a conclusion that includes the consideration by the author of the implications for future research of the work in the article. This may be phrased in the form of research questions. However, even if it is not, it may suggest possible research questions to you.

Table 2.2 provides some examples of general focus research questions.

Writing a research aim and set of research objectives

As well as your research question, you may also be required to formulate a **research aim**. A research aim is a brief statement of the purpose of the research project. It is often written as a sentence stating what you intend to achieve through your research. To illustrate this, the examples of research questions in Table 2.2 have been matched to their research aims in Table 2.3. You will see the close relationship between these – one stated as a question, the other as an aim.

Table 2.3 Examples of research questions and related research aims

Research question	Research aim
How effective is a media campaign designed to increase consumer trust in [company name] following a series of product recalls?	The aim of this research is to assess the effectiveness of a media campaign by [company name] designed to increase consumer trust following a series of recalls of its products.
In which situations and to what extent is Internet-based recruitment and selection of graduates effective and why?	The aim of this research is to understand situations within which Internet-based recruitment and selection of graduates is effective and why.
In what ways does the issue of coupons at supermarket checkouts affect buyer behaviour?	The aim of this research is to explore how the issue of coupons at supermarket checkouts affects buyer behaviour.
How has the emergence of challenger banks impacted upon small businesses' financing and why?	The aim of this research is to explore how the emergence of challenger banks has impacted upon small businesses' financing and why.

Your research question and research aim are complementary ways of saying what your research is about. However, neither gives sufficient detail about the steps you will need to take to answer your question and achieve your aim.

To do this you will need to devise a set of investigative questions or research objectives. Your research question may be used to generate more detailed investigative questions, or you may use it as a base from which to write a set of **research objectives**. Objectives are more generally acceptable to the research community as evidence of the researcher's clear sense of purpose and direction. Once you have devised your research question and research aim, we believe that research objectives are likely to lead to greater specificity than using investigative questions. It may be that either is satisfactory. Do check whether your examining body has a preference.

Research objectives allow you to **operationalise** your question – that is, to state the steps you intend to take to answer it. A similar way of thinking about the difference between questions, aims and objectives is related to 'what' and 'how'. Research questions and aims express 'what' your research is about. Research objectives express 'how' you intend to structure the research process to answer your question and achieve your aim. In this way, research objectives can be seen to complement a research question and aim, through providing the means to operationalise them. They provide a key step to transform your research question and aim into your research project.

Writing useful research objectives requires you to fulfil a number of fit-for-purpose criteria. Table 2.4 sets out criteria to help you devise research objectives to operationalise your research question and aim. Each of these criteria is also rephrased as a short question, which you can use as a checklist to evaluate your own draft research objectives.

Box 2.7 provides an example set of objectives at the stage when a student's research question and aim were developed into a sequence of research objectives.

The importance of theory in writing research questions and objectives

Section 4.4 outlines the role of theory in helping you to decide your approach to research design. However, your consideration of theory should begin earlier than this. It should inform your research questions and research objectives.

Table 2.4 Criteria to devise useful research objectives

Criterion	Purpose
Transparency (What does it mean?)	The meaning of the research objective is clear and unambiguous
Specificity (What I am going to do?)	The purpose of the research objective is clear and easily understood, as are the actions required to fulfil it
Relevance (Why I am going to do this?)	The research objective's link to the research question and wider research project is clear
Interconnectivity (How will it help to complete the research project?)	Taken together as a set, the research objectives illustrate the steps in the research process from its start to its conclusion, without leaving any gaps. In this way, the research objectives form a coherent whole
Answerability (Will this be possible?) (Where shall I obtain data?)	The intended outcome of the research objective is achievable. Where this relates to data, the nature of the data required will be clear or at least implied
Measurability (When will it be done?)	The intended product of the research objective will be evident when it has been achieved

Box 2.7 Focus on student research

Writing a set of research objectives

Diane worked for a medium-sized technology company that had been taken over by a much larger, multidivisional firm. This company was gradually being integrated into its larger parent. Originally, the company had been incorporated as one division of the parent firm, although recently one of its most successful product areas had been reallocated into a different division. This had adverse consequences for many employees because it narrowed their scope to work across the company and to seek development opportunities. Many of the original employees had already left the company's employment. However, a significant number of the original employees remained and others who had joined since the take-over had been assimilated into the organisational culture that still prevailed from before the merger.

Diane was undertaking a management course as a part-time student. This course included a substantial research project and Diane thought that it would be fascinating to explore how employees felt about the changes at this company and how these affected their perceptions of working there. She searched literature related to organisational change, the impact of organisational structures on those who work within them, organisational culture and climate and then selected those that she felt were most relevant to read. She brainstormed some ideas related to this topic and spent time evaluating these. She then decided to discuss her research idea with two people whose advice she valued.

First she spoke to one of her tutors. Her tutor felt that this idea had merit but took time to discuss two possible concerns that focused around access and ethical issues. One focused on the likely sensitive nature of this research topic for both the company and those employees from whom Diane would need to collect data. The other focused on the fact that, as Diane worked for the company and alongside those from whom she would need to collect data, there were concerns about confidentiality and anonymity. However as they discussed this research idea they agreed that, if addressed in a sensitive way that absolutely ensured confidentially and anonymity, it could be possible to use her ideas to develop a suitable research project.

Second she spoke to one of the senior managers in the company. This manager knew that Diane was a part-time student on a management course and needed to undertake an organisationally-based research project.

She explained her research idea to this manager carefully and her justification for wishing to undertake it. This manager had been employed in the company for several months, having been recruited from outside both the company and the parent firm. This manager had experience of organisational change and integration and had been recruited in part because of this background. The manager was aware that some employees had spoken of their concerns about the ways in which the nature of work and scope for development had changed as a result of the take-over and structural changes.

This manager told Diane that there were significant concerns associated with her research idea. In particular, the manager thought there would be a risk of generating greater negativity with real consequences for the company. However, the manager also said that if conducted with sensitivity, her project might prove to be helpful. This the manager felt might be achieved by promoting a positive outcome from the research project by asking research participants to indicate how they could become re-engaged with and more committed to the company in spite of the changes that had occurred.

This manager also recognised that if employees felt the company was seen as being behind this research idea, they might be suspicious of Diane and refuse to share meaningful data with her. They discussed this and agreed that if she was going to proceed with this research idea, she should let potential participants know that the data produced would only be used for the purpose of her dissertation; she would separately produce a short summary document for senior managers that would only focus on recommendations for improvement based on an aggregated level of analysis to ensure confidentiality and anonymity.

These two discussions gave Diane a great deal to think about. She decided to undertake a preliminary inquiry to help refine her ideas about her research topic. Without referring to the discussion she had held with the manager to ensure confidentiality, she also held a Delphi group with a small trusted group of colleagues to refine her ideas and to build in scope for a positive focus. She also sought to integrate her ideas by working them up and narrowing them down. After this, she made an appointment to see her tutor. She took a draft research question, aim and set of objectives to this meeting.

The research question read, 'How have employee engagement, commitment and development been affected in [company name] and how may these be promoted following recent organisational change.' The research aim was, 'The aim of this research is to evaluate employee engagement, commitment and development in [company name] and explore how these may be promoted following recent organisational change.' The set of objectives were:

1. To describe the nature and cause of recent organisational changes in the company;
2. To define clearly the concepts used (employee engagement, employee commitment and employee development) to evaluate the impact of organisational change;
3. To evaluate the impact of recent organisational change on employee engagement and commitment;
4. To evaluate the impact of recent organisational change on employees' perceptions about their scope for development and future progression;
5. To explore ways to promote employee engagement, commitment, development and progression following recent organisational change in the company;
6. To make recommendations to promote employee engagement, commitment, development and progression in [company name].

To help you to think about this, we ask four questions that relate to the role of theory. What is theory? Why is theory important? How is theory developed? What types of theoretical contribution might be made? These questions lead into the discussion in Section 4.4.

What is theory?

The term **theory** is used to refer to 'a systematic body of knowledge grounded in empirical evidence which can be used for explanatory or predictive purposes' (Saunders et al. 2015: 37). Theories are therefore based upon the development and examination of concepts, the clear definition of concepts being essential for testing and developing theory (Box 2.7). A theory uses related facts and concepts to provide an explanation or predict an outcome. The explanatory power of a theory is based on its ability to explain relationships between concepts. These explanations need to be capable of being confirmed, refined or contradicted as understandings develop and change based on further research.

To explore the question 'what is theory?' in more detail we use the influential work of Whetten (1989). Whetten identified that theory is composed of four elements, related to 'what', 'how', 'why' and a fourth group of 'who', 'where' and 'when'. The first of these may be summarised as: what are the concepts or variables that the theory examines? For example, in Box 2.7, the concepts in Diane's research question are organisational change, employee engagement, employee commitment and employee development.

The second element may be summarised as: how are these concepts or variables related? Diane's research question was designed to examine the relationships between organisational change, on the one hand, and employee engagement, commitment and development, on the other hand. A key aspect here is **causality**. Theory is concerned with cause and effect. In her research, Diane was interested to explore how organisational change affected employee engagement, employee commitment and employee development. In other words, how did change have an effect on each one of these?

The third element may be summarised as: why are these concepts or variables related? This is the critical element in a theory because it explains the reasons for relationships between the concepts or variables. According to Whetten, 'what' and 'how' are descriptive; it is 'why' that explains the relationship. This point is worth developing, as you may be asking, 'what is the difference between "how" and "why" in this context?' In the case of Diane's research, she found that organisational change had affected employee engagement, commitment and development respectively. Diane's data allowed her to recognise a number of relationships that she could describe. However, this description did not explain why these outcomes had occurred and in fact the reasons for them were complex. For example, different categories of employee provided different explanations for the impact of organisational change upon themselves. Diane needed to analyse her data further (and where necessary to extend its collection) to answer the question, 'why do these relationships exist in my data?'

Once a good theory has been developed it may be used not only to explain why any relationship exists, but also to predict outcomes in a similar situation or where one or more of these theoretical variables are manipulated (changed). In the case of Diane's research, her theory may be used to predict a similar impact on employee engagement and commitment where change in another albeit similar organisation is implemented in the same way. Her theory may also be used to predict different outcomes for employee engagement and commitment where organisational change is managed differently.

While good theory has the power to explain and predict, it may also be subject to limitations. The scope of many theories will be limited by one or more constraints. The fourth group of elements that Whetten identified may therefore be summarised as: who does this theory apply to; where does this theory apply; when does this theory apply? In the case of Diane's research, she recognised that some of her theoretical conclusions applied more to professional-grade staff but less so to administrative staff. She also recognised that with the introduction of new policies to re-engage employees and offer development opportunities, the applicability of some of her conclusions would need to be re-evaluated in the future.

In this way, the explanations of the cause-and-effect relationships between variables in a theory may be contextual and time limited, indicating constraints to their generalisability. Another important contribution that addresses the question 'what is theory?' starts from the opposite perspective by discussing 'What theory is not' (Sutton and Staw 1995). This is a helpful contribution to our understanding and provides a complementary approach to that of Whetten (1989) (Box 2.8).

Box 2.8 Focus on management research

Clarifying what theory is not

Sutton and Staw (1995) make a helpful contribution to the question 'What is theory?' by defining what it is not. In their view theory is not:

1. *References.* Listing references to existing theories and mentioning the names of such theories may look impressive. However, alluding to the theory developed by other researchers may only provide a smokescreen. Instead researchers need to identify the concepts, causal relationships and logical explanations that they are using from previous theoretical work in relation to their own work.
2. *Data.* Data are important to be able to confirm, revise or overturn existing theory and to be able to develop new theory. However, data are used to describe the relationships or patterns that are revealed from their collection and analysis. Description by itself does not equal theory. Theory also requires logical explanations to discuss why such relationships or patterns were revealed, or why they might be expected to be revealed when testing existing theory (Section 4.3).
3. *Lists of variables.* Variables are important in the process of theory development but simply presenting or listing these by themselves does not represent a theory.
4. *Diagrams.* Diagrams are often helpful to show observed or expected causal relationships and how different relationships are related or how they are expected to be related. However, by themselves diagrams or figures are not theory. Sutton and Staw (1995: 376) state: 'Good theory is often representational and verbal.' They say that clear explanations can be represented graphically but that, to be able to develop a rich theoretical understanding, these will also require written discussion to explain why these relationships exist.
5. *Hypotheses or predictions.* In a similar manner to point 3, hypotheses are an important part of the process of developing and testing theory, in particular theoretical approaches (Experiment in Section 5.8), but they do not constitute a theory by themselves.

You are likely to use research questions rather than hypotheses in your research design and we would add to point 5 that the propositions or concepts that inform your research questions are also not theory by themselves.

Why is theory important?

There is probably no word that is more misused and misunderstood in education than the word 'theory'. It is thought that material included in textbooks is 'theory', whereas what is happening in the 'real world' is practice. Students who saw earlier editions of this book remarked that they were pleased that the book was not too 'theoretical'. What they meant was that the book concentrated on giving lots of practical advice. Yet the book is full of theory. Advising you to carry out research in a particular way (variable A) is based on the theory that this will yield effective results (variable B). This is the cause-and-effect relationship referred to in the definition of theory developed earlier and is very much the view of Kelly (1955). Kelly argues that the individual who attempts to solve the daily problems which we all face goes about this activity in much the same way as the scientist. Both continuously make and test hypotheses and revise their concepts accordingly. Both organise their results into what are called schemata and then into a system of broader schemata which are called theories. Kelly asserts that we need such schemata and theories in order to make sense of the complexity of the world in which we live. Without these organising frameworks we would be overwhelmed by the unconnected detail we would have to recall.

Implicitly each of us uses theory in our lives and in the jobs that we undertake. For example, the marketing manager who believes that issuing coupons in the supermarket chain for which he or she works makes customers less likely to shop regularly at a competitor supermarket (Table 2.2). This is a theory even though the marketing manager would probably not recognise it as such. He or she is less likely to refer to it as a theory, particularly in the company of fellow managers. Many managers are very dismissive of any talk that smacks of 'theory'. It is thought of as something that is all very well to learn about at business school but which bears little relation to what goes on in everyday organisational life. Yet the coupons example shows that it has everything to do with what goes on in everyday organisational life. By issuing coupons (variable A), the supermarket is attempting to influence the behaviour of customers (variable B). As every supermarket chain issues their own coupons, the marketing manager's personal theory that this encourages loyalty may begin to seem inadequate when confronted by a range of other complementary and innovative strategies to encourage customers to switch where they shop.

The use of coupons may become just one variable among many as supermarkets compete by offering extra loyalty card bonus points on particular goods, double or treble points if customers spend over a certain amount, the opportunity to redeem the value from accumulated bonus points against a range of discounted offers, and so on. In this case, research will provide the marketing manager with a much greater understanding of the effectiveness of the strategies used within her or his supermarket chain. The data collected will allow theoretical explanations to be developed, based on causal relationships that may then be used to predict which of these strategies is more effective. It may also indicate that different strategies will be effective in different locations and perhaps that specific strategies are more effective at particular times of the year, or that specific strategies should be targeted at particular socioeconomic groups. The ability to make these predictions potentially allows the supermarket chain to compete more effectively against its rivals. Valid theoretical explanations may lead to predictions that offer the supermarket chain increased opportunities for influence and control and the possibility of increasing market share.

If theory is so rooted in our everyday lives, it is something that we need not be apprehensive about. If it is implicit in all of our decisions and actions then recognising its importance means making it explicit. In research, the importance of theory must be recognised: therefore it must be made explicit.

How is theory developed and how does theory inform your research question and research objectives?

So far we have defined the elements of theory and discussed the need to recognise it in your research, even as you start to plan this. At this point, you may be asking, 'why is it important for me to recognise theory at this early stage, when writing my research question and research objectives?' Apart from its capacity to inform your research ideas (discussed earlier), the answer to this relates to the ways in which theory may also inform your research question and how theory is developed.

Theory published in the literature may inform your proposed research question in several ways. It will help you to formulate a research question that should lead to a theoretical explanation, rather than just a descriptive answer. It will allow you to find out whether others have asked similar questions to the question you propose. Where you find that a similar research question to yours has been addressed in the literature, you will be able to learn about the context within which it was explored and how the research was conducted. This may help to focus your question to provide you with a set of variables to test, or concepts to explore, to determine whether, how and why they are related in the context of your own research project (Box 2.9).

Box 2.9 Focus on student research

Writing a research question based on theory

Justine was a final-year marketing undergraduate who was interested in the theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger 1957). She wanted to apply this to consumer-purchasing decision making in the snack foods industry (e.g. buying potato crisps) in the light of the adverse publicity that the consumption of such foods has as a result of 'healthy eating' campaigns.

Justine applied Festinger's theory by arguing in her research project proposal that a consumer who learns that eating too many snacks is bad for her health will experience dissonance, because the knowledge that eating too much snack food is bad for her health will be dissonant with the cognition that she continues to eat too many snacks. She can reduce the dissonance by changing her behaviour, i.e. she could stop eating so many snacks. (This would be consonant with the cognition that eating too many snacks is bad for her health.) Alternatively, she could reduce dissonance by changing her cognition about the effect of snack overeating on health and persuade herself that it does not have a harmful effect on health. She would look for positive effects of eating snacks, for example by believing that it is an important source of enjoyment which outweighs any harmful effects. Alternatively, she might persuade herself that the risk to health from snack overeating is negligible compared with the danger of car accidents (reducing the importance of the dissonant cognition).

Justine's research question was, 'To what extent does adverse "healthy eating" campaign publicity affect the consumer's decision to purchase snack foods and why?'

Using relevant theory to inform your research question will also sensitise you to the nature and level of importance of the research topic surrounding your question. You may find that a considerable body of relevant work exists, either in business and management or in another subject domain, for example in psychology, economics or sociology. Discovering this may help you to focus your research question so that later on you can firmly connect your findings and conclusions to this existing theory. It is unlikely that you will fail to find any literature that relates to your proposed question, although where you find that you are working in a more specialised topic area, this discovery may also help to focus your research question to relate to the theory that you locate. It will be important to discuss how the results of your research relate to theory, to be able to assess that theory in the context of your work and to demonstrate the theoretical contribution, no matter how limited, of your research.

Where you simply find it difficult to formulate a research question from your research idea, using existing theory may also help you to achieve this.

How theory is developed also provides a crucial reason for recognising relevant theory when writing your research question and objectives. Your research project will be designed to test a theory or to develop a theory. Where you wish to adopt a clear theoretical position that you will test through the collection of data, your research project will be theory driven and you will be using a **deductive approach**. Where you wish to explore a topic and develop a theoretical explanation as the data are collected and analysed, your research project will be data driven and you will be adopting an **inductive approach**.

We discuss approaches to theory development, also introducing the abductive approach, in much greater detail later (Section 4.5). However, it is useful to introduce this fundamental difference in the way theory is developed to be able to show why you need to think about this when drafting your research question and research objectives. A deductive approach will require you to identify a clear theoretical position when you draft the research question that you will then test. This is the approach we outlined earlier (Box 2.9).

An inductive approach does not rely on identifying an existing theoretical position, but it is likely that if you adopt this approach you will still need to familiarise yourself with theory in your chosen subject area before you draft your research question. Using an inductive approach does not mean disregarding theory as you formulate your research question and objectives. An inductive approach is intended to allow meanings to emerge from data as you collect them in order to identify patterns and relationships to build a theory, but it does not prevent you from using existing theory to formulate your research question and even to identify concepts that you wish to explore in the research process (Section 4.4). In this way, all researchers are likely to commence their research with knowledge of relevant literature and the theory it contains.

There is a further relationship between theory and your research question that is important to recognise when drafting your research question. In our discussion of theory we recognised that it is crucial to be able to explain how variables or concepts are related and why they are related. Research questions may therefore play a crucial role in encouraging research that is designed to produce theoretical explanations, no matter how limited these explanations might be (see the following sub-section). A question that only encourages a descriptive outcome will not lead to a theoretical explanation. For example, compare the following questions. 'How satisfied are employees with recent changes in the department's business strategy?' 'What are the implications of recent changes in the department's business strategy for employee satisfaction and why?' The first question is written to produce a descriptive outcome. The second question has the potential to explore and test relationships and to arrive at theoretical explanations to explain why these might exist.

What types of theoretical contribution might be made?

This discussion of theory has probably left you asking, 'what does this mean for me?' While you will be expected to produce a theoretical explanation, you will not be expected to develop a momentous theory that leads to a new way of thinking about management! Not all theoretical contributions are the same and it is reassuring to look at the threefold typology of theories shown in Figure 2.1.

'Grand theories' are usually thought to be the province of the natural scientists (e.g. Newton's theory of gravity, Darwin's theory of evolution or Einstein's theory of relativity). These may be contrasted with 'middle-range theories', which lack the capacity to change the way in which we think about the world but are nonetheless of significance. Some theories such as Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs and Herzberg et al.'s (1959) two-factor theory of motivation are well known to managers and would be in this category. However, most of us are concerned with 'substantive theories' that are restricted to a particular time, research setting, group or population or problem.

For example, studying the implications of a cost-saving strategy in a particular organisation would be an example of a substantive theory. Although they may be restricted, a host

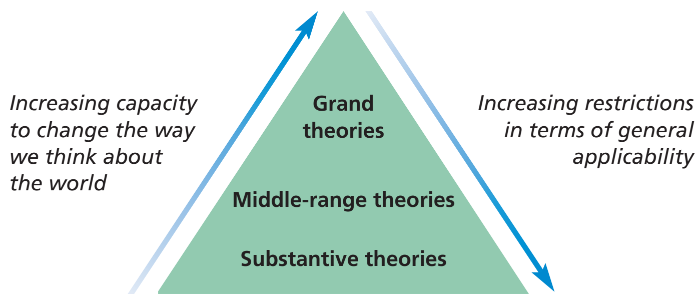


Figure 2.1 Grand, middle range and substantive theories

Box 2.10 Focus on management research

What makes a theoretical contribution?

Corley and Gioia's (2011) study found that the theoretical contribution of management research can be measured along two dimensions. One of these relates to what they call the 'originality' of the contribution. This they divide into a contribution that is either 'incremental' or 'revelatory'. An incremental theoretical contribution is one that adds to or builds on a theory, perhaps by applying it in a new context. A revelatory theoretical contribution is more profound, offering a new theory to make sense of a problem or explain a phenomenon. The other dimension relates to what they call the 'utility' or 'usefulness' of a contribution. This they divide into a contribution that has 'scientific usefulness' or 'practical usefulness'. A scientifically useful contribution is one that emphasises methodological rigour and usefulness to an academic audience. A practically useful contribution emphasises organisational application and usefulness to organisational practitioners.

However, while theoretical contributions on the first dimension are likely to be exclusively either 'incremental' or 'revelatory' (it's unlikely that a contribution could be both!), this does not have to be the case on the second dimension. Corley and Gioia focus much of their article on discussing how to achieve research that is capable of being both academically and practically useful. They refer to designing research that has scope to be theoretically relevant to both academics and organisational practitioners. They consider ways in which this type of theoretical contribution may be achieved. This includes a continuing emphasis on examining the links between theoretical abstractions and practice implications. In interpreting their results, researchers also need to go beyond narrow generalisations and look for insights that can inform organisational practice. In a similar way, when developing theory, researchers need to look not only at the validity of their theories, but also their usefulness and applicability. Researchers also need to exercise some foresight when choosing their research topics so they pursue research that has, and will have, relevance to the problems and issues faced by organisations and organisational practitioners.

of 'substantive theories' that present similar propositions may lead to 'middle-range theories'. By developing 'substantive theories', however modest, we are doing our bit as researchers to enhance our understanding of the world about us. A grand claim, but a valid one!

Another way to examine the theoretical contributions of research into business and management is to assess its practical usefulness for organisations and those who work in them (Box 2.10).

2.5 Writing your research proposal

The **research proposal**, occasionally referred to as a protocol or outline, is a structured plan of your proposed research project. In this section we discuss why it is necessary and how it may be structured, but it is important to recognise that a competent research proposal needs to draw on material discussed in subsequent chapters. Before you can write your research proposal you will need to be aware of available literature and appropriate theory (Section 2.4 and Chapter 3), the research philosophy and approach that you wish to use (Chapter 4), your research design including methodological choice, research strategy and time frame (Chapter 5), access and ethical issues (Chapter 6), sample selection (Chapter 7), data collection methods and data analysis techniques (Chapters 8–13).

Why is a research proposal necessary?

Creating a clear specification to guide your research project

Your research project is likely to be a large element in your course. It is also yours! You will be responsible for conceiving, conducting and concluding this project and creating the report, dissertation or thesis. Apart from applying your research methods training and the advice you receive from your project tutor, it will be your piece of work. From this perspective, developing a research proposal offers you the opportunity to think carefully about your research project (Box 2.11).

We do not suggest that you use these questions to provide headings under which you write responses, but we feel that they should be helpful as a guide and as a checklist against which to evaluate your research proposal before submitting it to your tutor. A well-thought-out and well-written research proposal has the potential to provide you with a clear specification of the what, why, how, when and where of your research project.

Producing a research proposal is demanding: thinking through what you wish to do and why, identifying and synthesising literature and then envisaging all of the stages of your research will be time consuming, as will the necessary revisions to create a coherent and clearly written proposal. However, the effort is likely to prove to be very worthwhile. As you juggle several activities during the period of your research project, there may be occasions when you pick up your research proposal and feel glad that you spent so much time producing a clear specification to guide your project through its various stages.

Meeting the requirements of those who approve and assess your project

It is likely that your research proposal will be assessed before you are allowed to carry on with your research project. A proportion of the overall marks available for your project report may be given for the research proposal. Alternatively, a research proposal may be subject to approval before you are permitted to proceed with your research project. In either case, it will be necessary to reach a certain standard before being allowed to

Box 2.11
Checklist to guide and evaluate your research proposal

- ✔ Have I explained what am I going to do?
- ✔ Have I explained why I am doing this?
- ✔ Have I said why it is worth doing?
- ✔ Have I explained how it relates to what has been done before in my subject area?
- ✔ Have I stated which theory or theories will inform what I am doing and how I will use it or them?
- ✔ Have I stated my research question(s), research aim and my research objectives?
- ✔ Have I outlined how I will conduct my research?
- ✔ Have I outlined my research design?
- ✔ Have I outlined what data I need?
- ✔ Have I stated who and where my intended participants are?
- ✔ Have I explained how I will select my participants?
- ✔ Have I explained how I will gain access?
- ✔ Have I outlined how I will collect my data?
- ✔ Have I outlined how I will analyse my data and use this to develop theoretical explanations?
- ✔ Have I outlined what data quality issues I might encounter?
- ✔ Have I outlined how I will seek to overcome these data quality issues?
- ✔ Have I considered the ethical issues I might encounter at each stage of my research?
- ✔ Have I outlined how I will address these?