## CH APTER 1

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

**Learning outcomes**

*By the end of this chapter students should be able to:*

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

## Summary

* *Research Methods for Business Students* is designed to help students to undertake a research project whether they are an undergraduate or postgraduate student of business and management or a manager. It is designed as an introductory text and will guide them 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 student’s research projects lies on this continuum, they should undertake their research with rigour. To do this they will need to pay careful attention to the entire research process.
* In order to enhance students learning during their research we recommend they 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 and forward planning.
* The text of each chapter is supported through a series of boxed examples. These include, focus on student 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 2– 13 will enable students to generate all the material that they will need to include in their project report. When students have also answered the questions in this section for Chapter 14, they will have written their research report.

## Comment

In order for students to use *Research Methods for Business Students* to the full, we believe it is important to spend time outlining the structure of the book and the way it will be used during the module. Our preferred method is to set pre-work and reading prior to each session, and to run the taught part of the research methods course alongside an assignment in which the students undertake their own piece of primary research. A copy of this assignment is included in Appendix 1 of this guide. Please feel free to adapt it as you see fit. It is, of course, also important that students understand the nature of business and management research and are aware of the importance of theory in research.

## Student preparation

Many students will come to the first class of a course having undertaken only limited preparation. However, it is still worthwhile setting some preparatory work and asking students to purchase the book and bring it with them to the first class. For a class based solely on chapter one, we suggest you ask the students to read the chapter and make notes when answering the three self-check questions at the end.

## In the classroom

Inevitably, the first class will involve some administration and an overview of the module. In recent years, rather than simply going through a module outline we have used a variation of Easterby-Smith *et al*.’s (2012: 7–8) ‘Skills and qualities’ of researchers rating exercise to encourage students to think about the module and its content. Each student has assessed her or his strengths and weaknesses for each area of knowledge, skills and personal qualities using this checklist. Areas, which students scored as strengths and weaknesses, have then been used as part of a class discussion in which we refer to the module outline to highlight how the knowledge, skills and personal qualities required for business and management research will be developed over the module. As part of this discussion, we also clarify problems with terminology.

One exercise, which we have found useful, is to ask students to brainstorm two interlinked questions in groups of four to six. These are:

1. What do you understand by the term ‘research’?
2. What distinguishes business and management research from research more generally?

An alternative, devised by Bryans and Mavin (2004) of Newcastle Business School involves asking the students in groups of three (or individually) to draw a visual representation of how they see research or how they see a researcher. Subsequently students explain their visual representations to each other, their explanations providing a way of discussing research and providing insights into what the students do and think. Common pictures for research include road/journey/path, tree, tunnel, brick wall, magnifying glass, climbing and scales. Common pictures for researchers include a monk, canoeist, hunter, diver, silos, dunce and a bungee jumper.

In addition, it is important that students obtain an overview of the research process and how this is covered in the book. PowerPoint slide 1.1 may prove helpful here.

In recent years, we have combined the introductory class with one based upon the material in chapter two, having ensured that students receive detailed instructions regarding preparatory work prior to the class.

## Follow up work

Selected further reading with a brief overview of each suggestion’s content is given at the end of Chapter 1. Easterby-Smith, M., Thorpe, R. and Jackson, P. (2012). *Management Research,* (4th ed). London, Sage. Chapter 1 provides a very clear and readable introduction to management research and how it is distinct from other forms of research. The paper by Starkey and Madan (2001) argues for the distinctiveness of management research emphasising its applied nature and the importance of the relationship between theory and practice.

Alternatively, or in addition, students can be asked to undertake one or both of the review and discussion questions. Question 1.4 asks them to look at how the term research is used in the media whilst Question 1.5 focuses on the articles discussed in Section 1.3. Of these our students have found the article by Hodgkinson *et al*. (2001), also referred to in Box 1.2, particularly thought provoking.

The students can also be asked to reflect on their assignment for the module and come to the next class with questions about the assignment and ideas for their own research topic.

## References

Bryans, P. and Mavin, S. (2004) Monks, Hunters and White-Water Rafting: Images of Research and Researchers, paper presented at the British Academy of Management Conference, August, University of St. Andrews, UK.

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

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

Starkey, K. and Madan, P. (2002) Bridging the relevance gap: aligning stakeholders in the future of management research, *British Journal of Management,* Vol. 12, Special Issue, pp. 3–26