MANAGEMENT & BUSINESS RESEARCH

5th EDITION

Mark Easterby-Smith
Richard Thorpe
Paul Jackson

MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS RESEARCH

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3 Church Street
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Editorial assistant: Molly Farrell
Production editor: Sarah Cooke
Copyeditor: Solveig Gardner Servian
Proofreader: Lynda Watson
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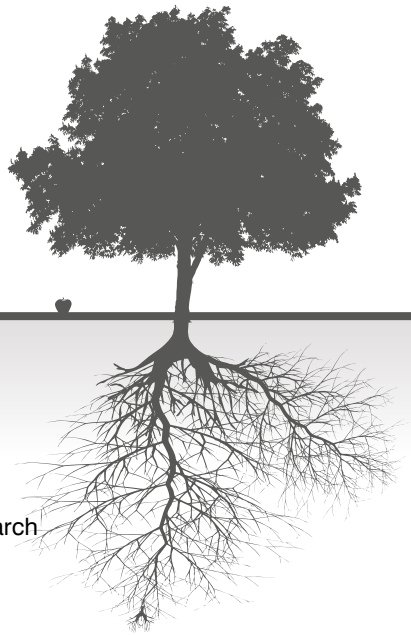
BRIEF CONTENTS



Chapter 1 Getting started and writing the research proposal

Chapter 2 Reviewing the literature

Chapter 3 The philosophy of management and business research

Chapter 4 Designing management and business research

Chapter 5 Politics, access and ethics

Chapter 6 Crafting qualitative data through language and text

Chapter 7 Crafting qualitative data through observation and interaction

Chapter 8 Framing and interpreting qualitative data

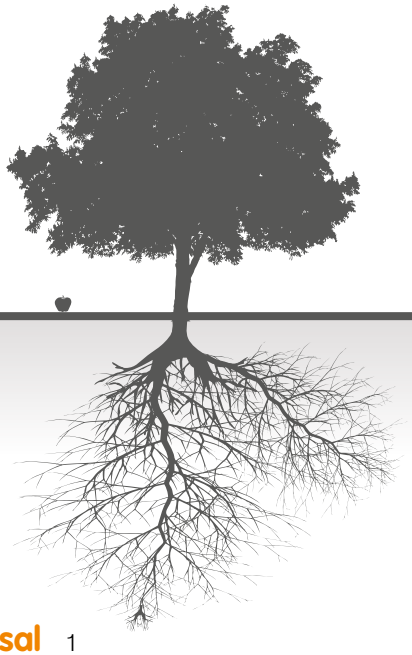
Chapter 9 Crafting quantitative data

Chapter 10 Summarizing and making inferences from quantitative data

Chapter 11 Multivariate analysis

Chapter 12 Writing management and business research

CONTENTS



About the authors x
Preface to the fifth edition xii
Acknowledgements xiii
About this book xiv
Guided tour xvii
Companion website xxi

1 **Getting started and writing the research proposal** 1

The landscape of management and business research 2
Elements of a research proposal 3
Clear research questions and research objectives 4
Explanation of how the research relates to previous work in the field 5
Concise description of the research design and methods 8
The impact and engagement agenda 10
Conclusion 11
Further reading 11

2 **Reviewing the literature** 12

What is a literature review and what are its main purposes? 13
Preparing a literature review: finding and recording relevant literature 17
Finding relevant literature 20
Evaluating literature 34
Writing a literature review 40
Conclusion 43
Further reading 44

3 **The philosophy of management and business research** 45

The philosophical debates 46
Ontology: from realism to nominalism 47
Epistemology: positivism vs social constructionism 51
Strengths and weaknesses of the main traditions 56
Paradigms and research approaches 57
Conclusion 64
Further reading 65

4 **Designing management and business research** 66

The essence of research design 67
Positivist research designs 69
Experimental methods 69
Survey research 75
Constructionist research designs 84

Case method and grounded theory 89
Mixed methods 95
Common design dilemmas 98
Contributing to theory 101
Contrasting views on validity and reliability 103
Research design template 103
Conclusion 105
Further reading 106

5 **Politics, access and ethics** 107

Politics and power in research 108
Political influences on research 109
Politics of access 116
Ethics 120
Conclusion 126
Further reading 127

6 **Crafting qualitative data through language and text** 128

Crafting qualitative data 129
Textual data 130
Qualitative interviews 133
Preparing for data collection 137
Conducting interviews 141
Interview-based mapping techniques 147
Conclusion 156
Further reading 157

7 **Crafting qualitative data through observation and interaction** 158

Visual data 159
Observational research 161
Interactive and participatory methods 168
General concerns related to the creation of qualitative data 175
Conclusion 182
Further reading 182

8 **Framing and interpreting qualitative data** 184

Preparing and managing qualitative data 185
Framing and interpreting qualitative data: seven approaches 187
Computer-aided analysis 210
Quality in qualitative research 214
Conclusion 217
Further reading 218

9 **Crafting quantitative data** 220

Sources of quantitative data 221
Question design 231
Measurement models 236
Conclusion 241
Further reading 242

10 **Summarizing and making inferences from quantitative data** 243

Summarizing and describing data 245
Going beyond a sample 256
Conclusion 272
Further reading 272

11 **Multivariate analysis** 273

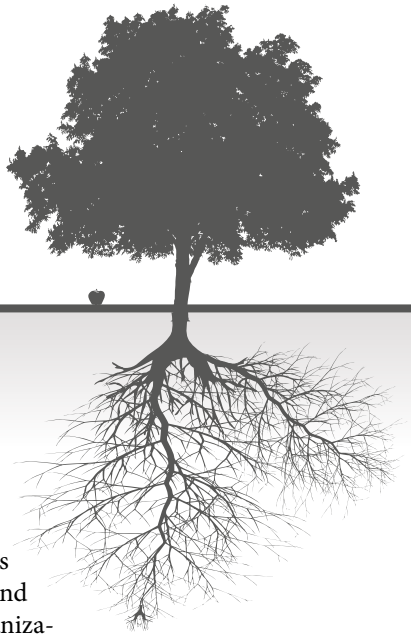
The domain of multivariate analysis 274
Multivariate analysis of causal models 278
Conclusion 296
Further reading 296

12 **Writing management and business research** 297

The skills of writing 298
The content of reports and dissertations 303
Writing up the literature review 305
Outputs and evaluation 308
Plagiarism 313
Dissemination strategies 315
Conclusion 317
Further reading 317

Answers to exercises 319
Glossary 332
Further readings 344
Bibliography 352
Index 370

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



MARK EASTERBY-SMITH is Distinguished Professor of Management Learning at Lancaster University Management School. He has a first degree in Engineering Science and a PhD in Organizational Behaviour from Durham University. He has been an active researcher for over 30 years with primary interests in methodology and learning processes. He has carried out evaluation studies in many European companies, and has led research projects on management development, organizational learning, dynamic capabilities and knowledge transfer across international organizations in the UK, India and China.

He has published numerous academic papers and over ten books including: *Auditing Management Development* (Gower, 1980), *The Challenge to Western Management Development* (Routledge, 1989), *Evaluation of Management Education, Training and Development* (Gower, 1994), *Organizational Learning and the Learning Organization* (Sage, 1998) and *The Handbook of Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management* (Wiley, 2011).

At Lancaster he has been variously, Director of the School's Doctoral Programme, Director of the Graduate Management School and Head of Department. Externally he spent several years as a visiting faculty member on the International Teachers' Programme, acting as Director when it was held at the London Business School in 1984. During the early 1990s he was national co-ordinator of the Management Teaching Fellowship Scheme funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), which was responsible for training 180 new faculty members across UK management schools. He is a former member of the ESRC Post-graduate Training Board and was President of the British Academy of Management in 2006 and Dean of Fellows in 2008.

RICHARD THORPE is Professor of Management Development and Pro Dean for Research at Leeds University Business School. His early industrial experience informed the way his ethos has developed. Common themes are: a strong commitment to process methodologies and a focus on action in all its forms; an interest in and commitment to the development of doctoral students and the development of capacity within the sector; and a commitment to collaborative working on projects of mutual interest. Following a number of years in industry, he joined Strathclyde University as a researcher studying incentive payment schemes. This led to collaboration on *Payment Schemes and Productivity* (Macmillan, 1986).

In 1980 he joined Glasgow University, where he widened his research interests to include small firm growth and development as well as making regular contributions to the Scottish Business School's Doctoral Programme. In 1983 he attended the International Teachers' Programme in Sweden where he met Mark and embarked on a PhD under Mark's supervision. Collaboration continued through the 1990s with the ESRC Teaching Fellowship Scheme. In 1996 he was instrumental in establishing the Graduate Business School at Manchester Metropolitan University and in 2003 joined the ESRC Training and Development Board. There, he was involved in establishing the training guidelines for both doctorate and professional doctorate provision and more recently in initiatives to address capacity building in management and business. In 2003 he contributed to the

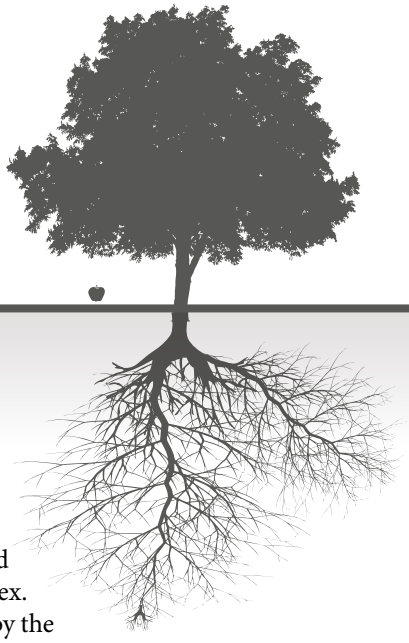
ESRC's Evolution of Business Knowledge programme, his research interests including: performance, remuneration and entrepreneurship, management learning and development and leadership. He has published (with others) a number of books including: *Strategic Reward Systems* (Financial Times/Prentice Hall, 2000), *Management and Language: The Manager as Practical Author* (Sage, 2003), *Dictionary of Qualitative Management Research* (Sage, 2008), *Performance Management: Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Palgrave, 2008) and more recently the *Gower Handbook of Leadership and Management Development* (2010). He was President of the British Academy of Management in 2007, Dean of Fellows in 2012, and is currently Chair of the Society for the Advancement of Management Studies.

PAUL R. JACKSON is Professor of Corporate Communications at Manchester Business School. He has a first degree in Psychology from the University of Sheffield and an MSc in Applied Statistics from Sheffield Polytechnic (now Sheffield Hallam University). His first university post was as a research assistant in studies on impression formation, where he decided that it was worth learning how to write programs in Fortran so that the computer could do the tedious work of adding up and he could do the interesting bits. His research interests have included lab studies of impression formation, large-scale surveys of the impact of unemployment on psychological health, longitudinal field studies of the effects of empowerment and work design on employee health and performance, employee communication and teamworking, mergers and social identity.

He has published widely in journals such as the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *British Medical Journal*, *Human Relations*, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* and *British Journal of Management*. His books include: *Developments in Work and Organizational Psychology: Implications for International Business* (Elsevier, 2006), *Psychosocial Risk Factors in Call Centres* (HSE Publications, 2003), *Change in Manufacturing: Managing Stress in Manufacturing* (HSE Publications, 2001) and *Organizational Interventions to Reduce the Impact of Poor Work Design* (HSE Publications, 1998).

Over the years he has undertaken various roles including Director of Doctoral Programmes at the University of Sheffield and, at UMIST, Head of the Division of Marketing, International Business and Strategy as well as designing the doctoral training programme at MBS. He has been teaching research methods to undergraduate, masters and doctoral students since 1975 and has contributed to books on research methods teaching as well as workshops for students and teachers on behalf of the British Academy of Management.

PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION



The first edition of this book appeared in 1991, at a time when there were very few management research methods books on the market. It quickly became established as the leading text because it covered all of the essential ground, yet was not too long or intimidating. Students and staff liked it because it tackled difficult issues, but avoided either trivializing them or making them unnecessarily complex. The success of the book was attested by the sales figures, and by the fact that it had become the most highly cited management methodology book in the world according to Google Scholar.

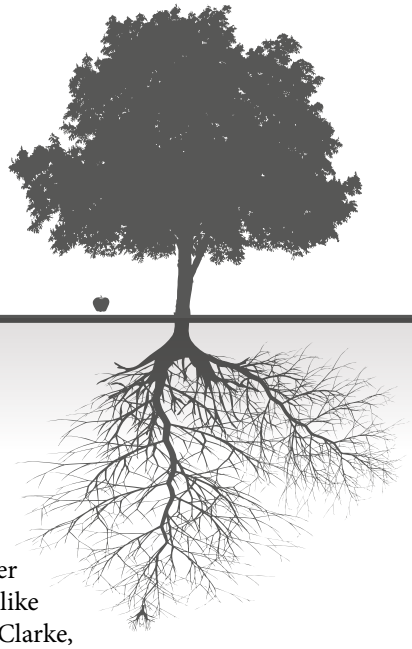
The second edition was published in 2002, and this included a substantial updating of the material since methodology had become a hot topic during the intervening years, and there were many new methods and approaches to management research which needed to be covered. The market had also begun to change significantly, as research methods were starting to be taught at undergraduate level. This resulted in a modest repositioning of our book, but also stimulated the appearance of strong competitors in the market.

The third edition maintained the continuity in the sense that it provided comprehensive treatment of philosophies and methods, plus coverage of both qualitative and quantitative techniques; but it also introduced some radical departures both in terms of content and design. The most significant change was that we strengthened the treatment of quantitative methods, running from the basic techniques for collecting and analysing quantitative data, up to multivariate analysis and structural equation modelling. In keeping with our desire to avoid complications, we covered the principles of analytic methods without introducing complicated algebra. We claimed in the third edition that this part of the book now provided advanced statistics without tears!

The fourth edition was the first edition that deployed full colour. There were additional boxed examples, usually drawn from our own experiences and from those of our students. We also rethought some of the material on philosophy and research design and extended the coverage of qualitative analysis, particularly with the use of computer-assisted methods. The exercises, based on our own extensive methodology teaching, were appropriately updated in response to student feedback. We retained the companion website, developing our guidance to teachers. Perhaps most striking of all to this edition was the addition of a system of icons based around the metaphor of research being like a tree that sucks up nutrients (data, ideas and experiences) from the ground and then converts them into leaves and fruits (reports, publications and theses). Without wanting to labour the metaphor exhaustively, we then went on to develop the icons to illustrate some of the points and as a general orientation tool.

The fifth edition builds on changes made to the book's structure in the fourth edition. We have also changed the order of some of the chapters in order to improve the logic of our arguments and make the text flow better. A new Chapter 1 has been designed to give an overview of the book's content, whilst at the same highlighting what students at all levels need to consider when preparing their research proposals. The chapter on literature searching has been brought forward and updated, and the two qualitative methods chapters have been split into three to mirror the three quantitative methods chapters later in the text. As with other editions, we have offered students an increased number of examples and exercises to help illustrate the points being made or the issues being discussed.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



This book is based on the personal research experience of the authors, but thanks should also go to a number of students and colleagues. Both have contributed to this edition in a number of ways, through their encouragement as well as their ideas. We have tried to reflect their suggestions as far as possible in the text.

Our students have taught us a great deal and we have included a number of their examples, both in this edition and earlier editions. We would like to thank Chavi Chen, Gerard Duff, Ray Forbes, Suzanne Gagnon, Jean Clarke, Anya Johnson, Mohamed Mohamud, Lee Beniston, Kendi Kinuthia, Paul Grimshaw, Anna Zueva, Brian Simpson, Julie Schönfelder, Sanaz Sigaroudi and Geetha Karunanayake.

Colleagues have also assisted us by reading through the transcripts, making comments and suggesting ideas, and to them we are extremely grateful. These include Lisa Anderson, Susan Baker, Joep Cornelissen, Ann Cunliffe, Ardha Danieli, Ashish Dwivedi, Paul Ellwood David Holman, Robin Holt, Ossie Jones, Efthimios Poulis, Christine Reid, Haina Zhang, Liu Wei, Anna Lorbiecki, and Hannah Preston. Jean-Claude Usunier provided a valuable critique of the first edition of the book from a European perspective, and this led to a French translation of the book, which is now in its second edition. Joanne Larty, Mirjam Werner, Daniella Fjellström and Lena Kruckenberg all helped with the preparation and organization of the manuscript from the third edition to the present day, with Lena Kruckenberg being particularly helpful in the restructuring of sections of the book for this fifth edition.

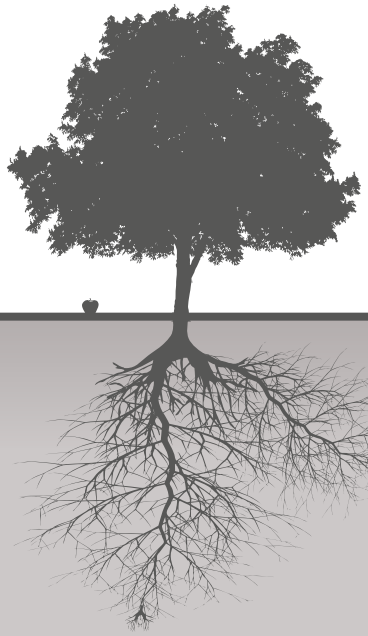
Our editor at SAGE for the first edition was Sue Jones. She provided us with the initial inspiration, and since then Rosemary Nixon, Kiren Shoman, Natalie Aguilera, Delia Alfonso and Alan Maloney offered encouragement, and occasionally hectored us. Our minder for the fourth and fifth edition has been Kirsty Smy.

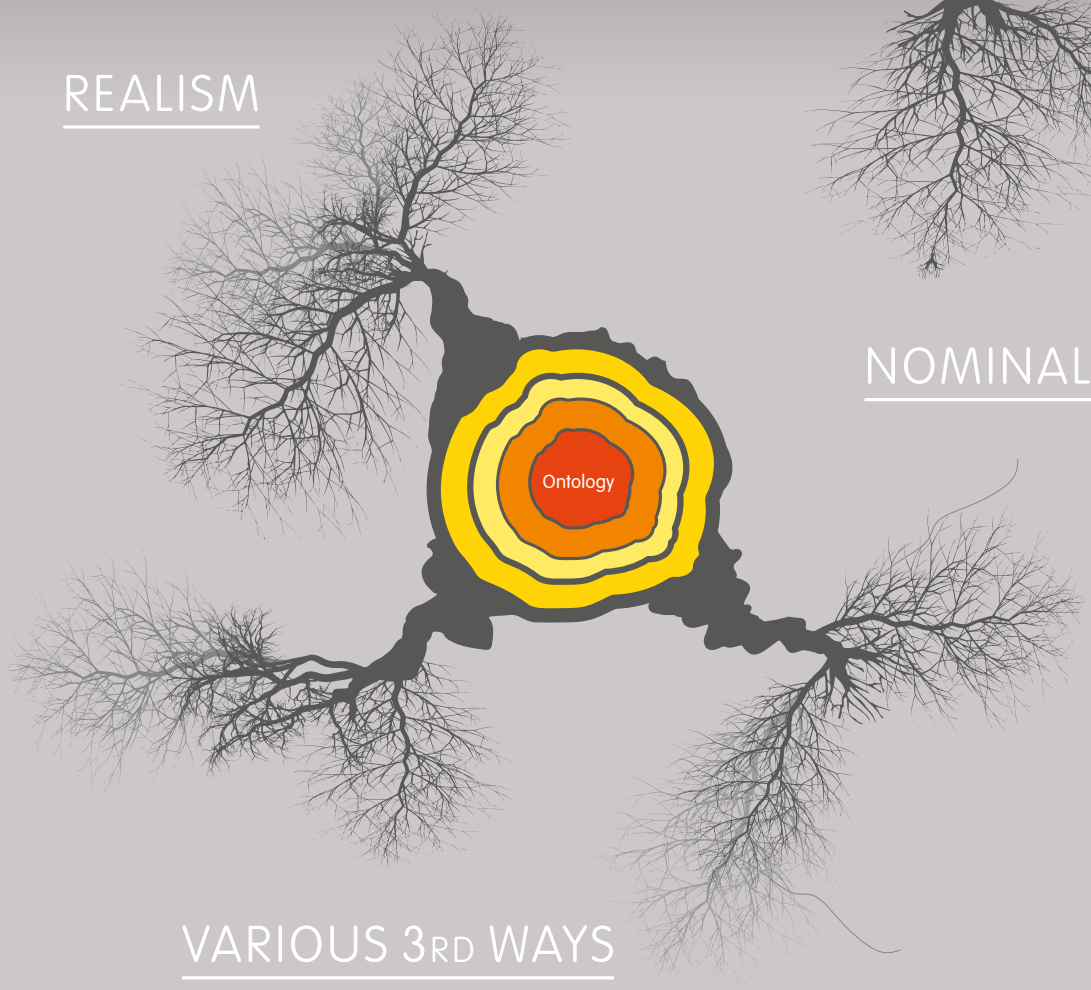
The authors are grateful to SAGE for permission to include extracts from R. Thorpe and J. Cornelissen (2003) 'Visual media and the construction of meaning' (Ch. 4) in D. Holman and R. Thorpe (eds) (2003), *Management and Language: The Manager as Practical Author*.

We would like to thank our families for their tolerance while this book was being written and rewritten – we hope they will consider the outcome to be worth the effort.

Paul would like to dedicate this book to the memory of Sallie, who died in the final production stages of this edition. She enriched his life beyond measure.

ABOUT THIS BOOK





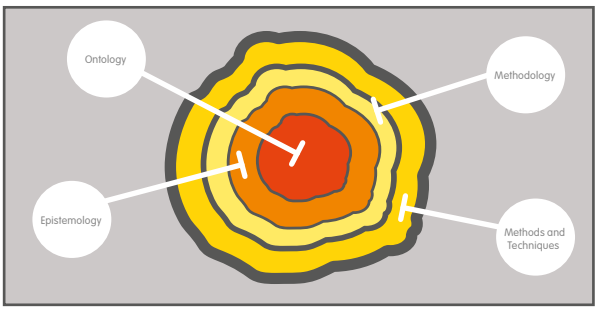
We use the metaphor of a tree to represent how the research process unfolds. The key elements of the tree are the roots, the trunk and branches, the leaves, and the fruit – and each of these parallels an aspect of conducting research.

The *roots* symbolize the research traditions within particular disciplines as well as the experiences of past researchers from particular fields. These perspectives, understandings, ideas and beliefs are drawn up (as the tree draws nutrients from the soil) to form the basis of the researcher's ideas in relation to such things as design, methods and forms of analysis.

The *trunk* transports the nutrients from the roots through the branches to the leaves and fruit; it also provides strength and shape to the tree. Here we use a simplified cross-section of the trunk to symbolize four main features of a research design. The inner ring (or heartwood) is the densest part of the trunk, and we use it to represent *ontology*, the basic assumptions made by the researcher about the nature of reality. The next ring represents *epistemology*, the assumptions about the best ways of inquiring into the nature of the world. The third ring from the centre represents *methodology*, or the way research techniques and methods are grouped together to provide a coherent picture. And the fourth ring represents the individual **methods and techniques** that are used for data collection and analysis. The four rings are named and ordered in this way, because the most visible parts of research projects are the methods and techniques used for data collection and analysis and represented by the outer ring. The three inner rings are increasingly hidden from the external observer, yet each makes a critical contribution to the strength, vitality and coherence of the research project.

Moving up and along the *branches*, the leaves and fruit form the tree's canopy. The *leaves* collect energy from sunlight, and represent the collection and analysis of data within a research project. It is the collection of research data that stimulates new ideas and enables the evaluation of existing theories. Here we distinguish between three main kinds of data based on the underlying epistemology (second ring in the trunk), according to whether they are essentially positivist, constructionist or hybrid approaches. To provide differentiation we indicate the positivist approaches in orange, constructionist approaches in green, and hybrid approaches in a combination of these colours.

In the final chapter of the book we focus on the *fruit* of the tree, which represents the way the research is written up and communicated to third parties. Here we show the coherence between the outputs of the research, and the ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods which underpin any research. In this way, the views and



values adopted by the researcher from the early stages of the framing of the research, the design of the research project and the collection of the data are coherently connected and linked.

Within the chapters that follow we have placed a number of these icons in key locations. This is not intended to be exhaustive in the sense that everything is necessarily covered by the icons; nor are we seeking to explain everything through the use of these icons. Our intention is mainly to use them in the light sense as an organizer and as a reminder of the origins of some of the ideas being discussed.

Key of symbols

Ontology

Epistemology

Methodology

Methods and Techniques

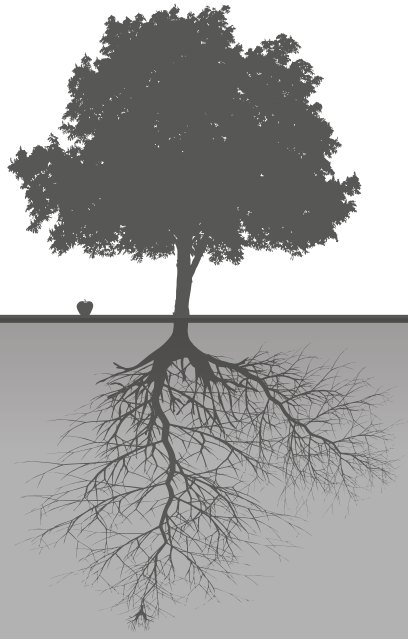
Positivist

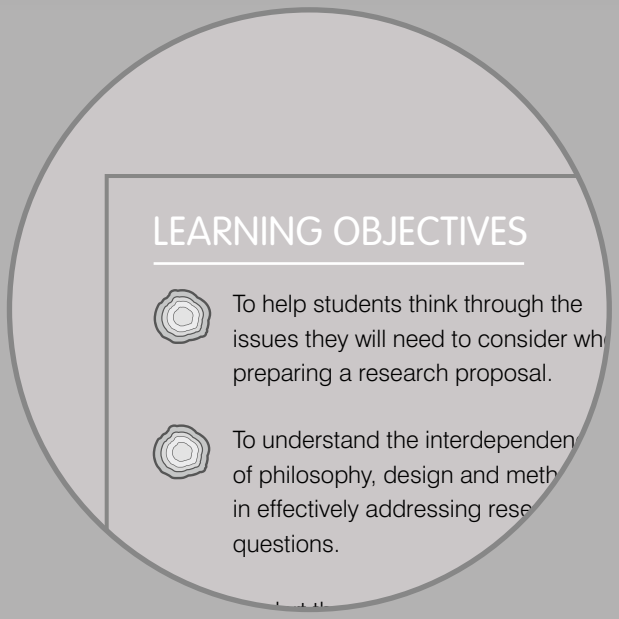
Constructionist

Hybrid approaches

Output

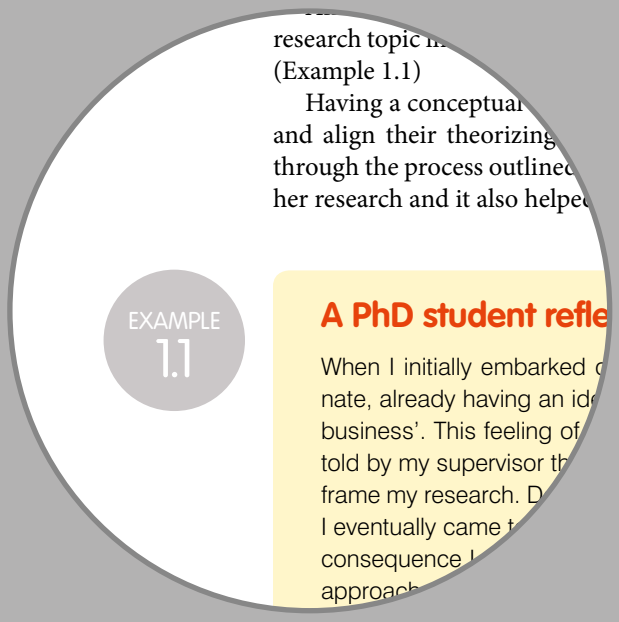
GUIDED TOUR





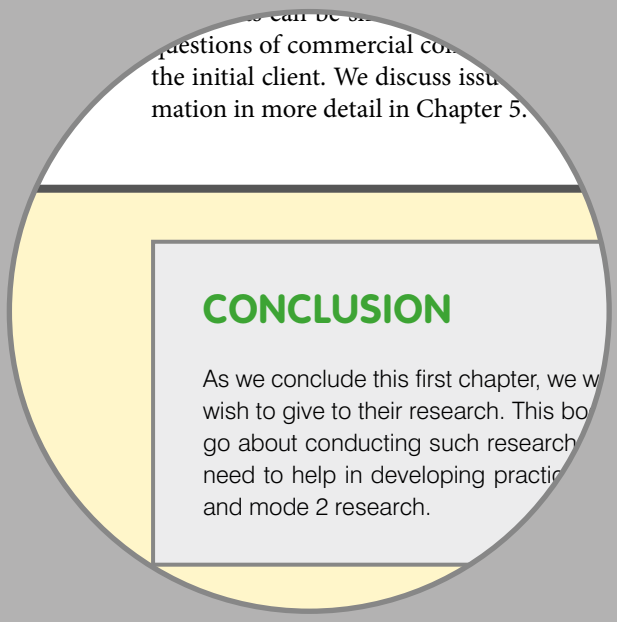
Learning objectives Each chapter starts by setting out clearly what key information you should soon understand, so you can easily track your progress.

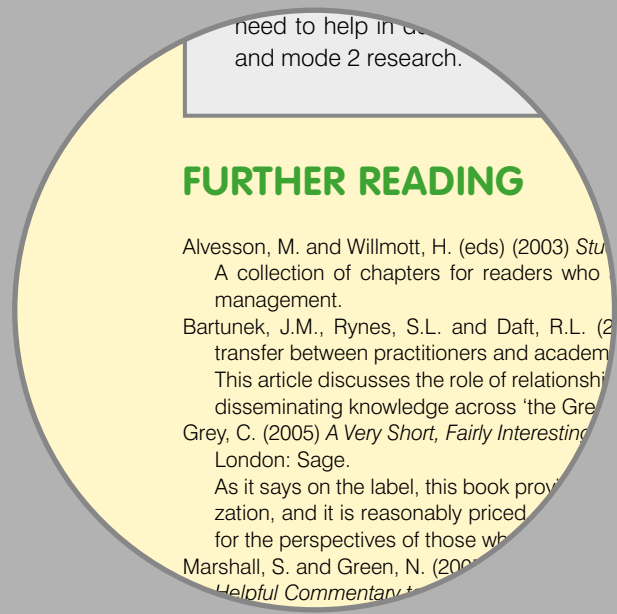
Examples Real management and business research examples are highlighted in these boxes, to show you how research happens in reality.



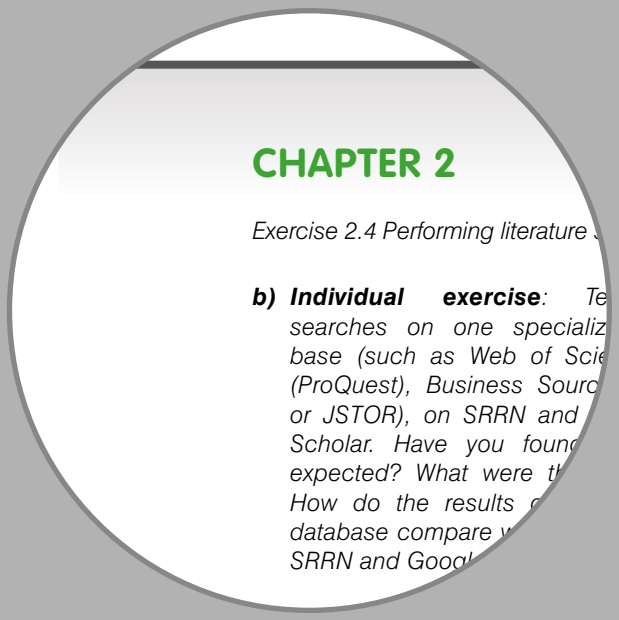
Exercises These activities are designed to get you to practise and think about the key research tasks covered in each chapter.

Conclusion Review the contents of each chapter in the Conclusion, an easy-to-read review and discussion of the most important information you've read.



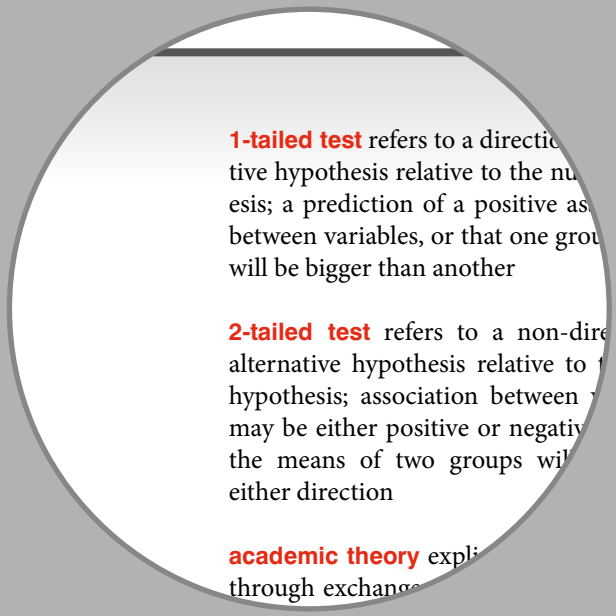


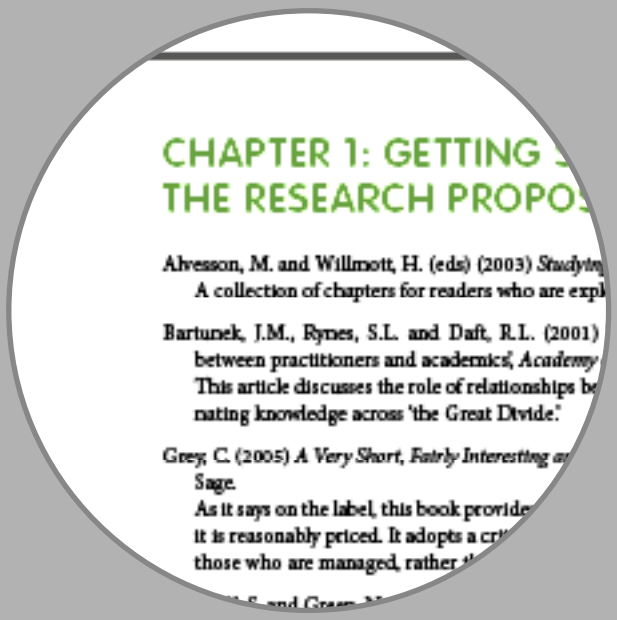
Further reading Each chapter ends by highlighting books and articles that provide more in-depth information on the methods presented in each of the chapters and insights into how these methods have been used successfully in existing studies.



Answers to exercises Turn to the back of the book to get responses to those exercises that have specific answers.

Glossary Key terms appear in bold in the text, and their definitions are presented in the Glossary near the back of the book.




CHAPTER 1: GETTING
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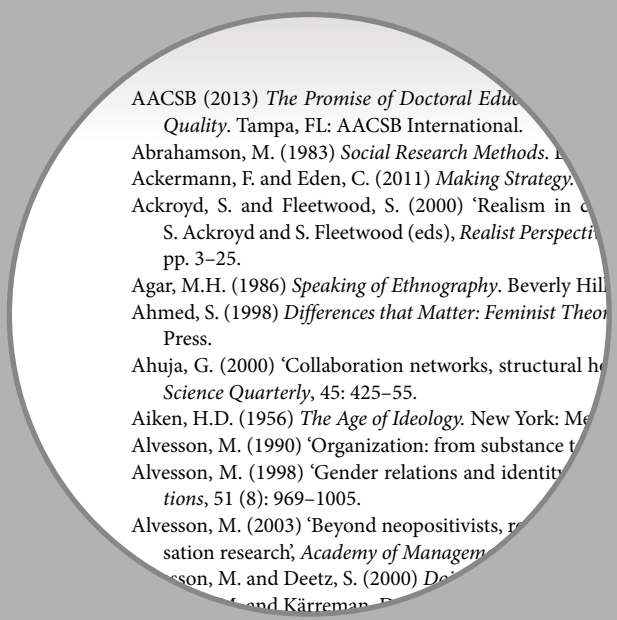
Grey, C. (2005) *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting a*
Sage.
As it says on the label, this book provide
it is reasonably priced. It adopts a cri
those who are managed, rather t

Further Readings For ease of reference we have gathered the further reading from all chapters into one section.

Bibliography A wealth of reading material is covered here, as all the sources that have collectively informed the writing of this book are gathered in one place.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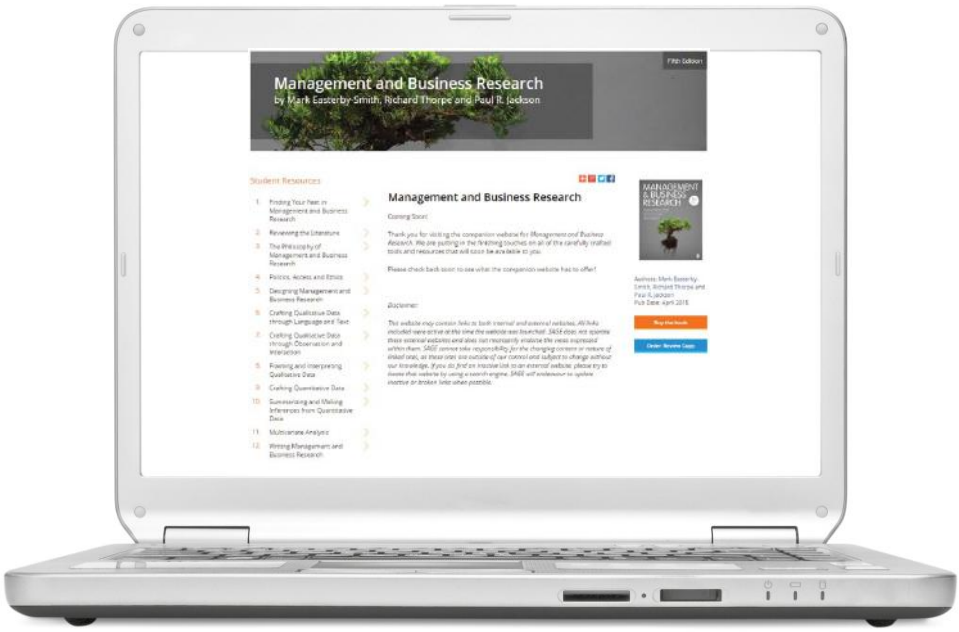

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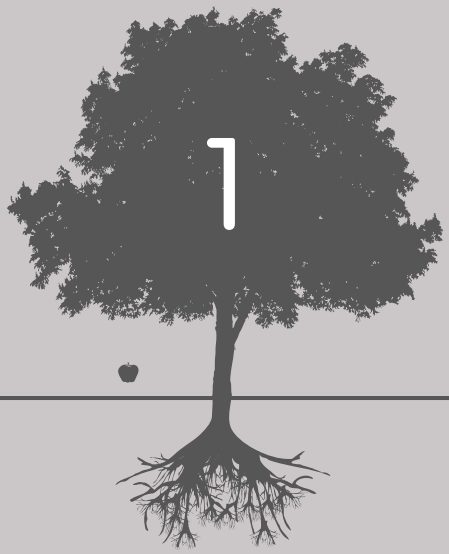
GETTING STARTED AND WRITING THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- To help students think through the issues they will need to consider when preparing a research proposal.
- To understand the interdependence of philosophy, design and methods in effectively addressing research questions.
- To alert the reader to the impact and engagement agenda.

The landscape of management and business research

Elements of a research proposal

Clear questions and research objectives

Explanation of how the research relates to previous work in the field

Concise description of the research design and methods

The impact and engagement agenda

Conclusion

Further reading

This chapter offers an overview of the book through examining what students need to consider when writing. In doing this, we take the view that the format of proposals is essentially very similar whether for undergraduate projects, postgraduate dissertations or doctorates.

THE LANDSCAPE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS RESEARCH

Our aim in producing this textbook is to offer an insight into the nature of the landscapes of management and business research and the different skills that will be required to navigate it successfully. The research proposal is, for many students, the first opportunity to test out the logic and content of the research on which they wish to embark.

Within this chapter we set out the thought processes that students might go through, and what they need to consider when writing research proposals. We summarize the nature of the intended project, including what research has taken place before, why it would be useful to conduct a particular study, and why it may be opportune to conduct a study at this time. If the study is at doctoral level, some institutions will require proposals from prospective research candidates before they register; if not, they will certainly do so between three and six months following enrolment. If the purpose of the study is an undergraduate or postgraduate dissertation, then proposals (and their quality) often form part of the assessment process prior to conducting the research. They are often seen as a way of judging to what extent the student has grasped the content of a formal training programme in research methods.

Different types of research also tend to be linked to different levels of degree. *Undergraduate research* tends to be specific and bounded, either as an assignment from tutors or as a question posed by a client. Common projects include small market-research studies, or interview-based studies of employee attitudes. As a consequence, there is more likely to be an emphasis on **applied research**. Again, because of the limitations of time, it is more likely that a single method will be used, and sometimes this might also be specified in advance of the study taking place. The opportunities for choice with these types of project lie mainly around the kind of methods that might be used, and how the results are to be interpreted and communicated. In many cases, undergraduate research projects are also conducted in teams, because – from a teaching point of view – this creates economies of scale, for example when using surveys. It also means that more significant projects can be undertaken in a short period of time, and students can gain the benefits of combining their skills and working together in teams.

Research conducted as part of a *postgraduate taught degree* will normally have greater scope, and more time will be available – often several months over the summer. Again, applied research is likely to predominate. **Evaluation research** is one of the easiest options, and this involves looking at some kind of existing practice and making recommendations for how it might be changed and improved. The advantage of a dissertation that seeks to comment on existing practice is that the company, as well as the student, knows about the organization, and the dissertation will take on some of the features of **action research**. Involvement in change can lead to rich and interesting results, and the student can develop skills that might well be valuable if they are seeking work in consultancy.

Doctoral dissertations are required to produce contributions to knowledge and, as a consequence, an additional element is a certain degree of originality. This suggests that doctoral studies need to contain significant elements of **pure research**. Although doctoral studies may include both applied and action research, the theoretical contribution is a necessary condition for the award of a doctorate. But there are also other contributions that can be made and assessed within a thesis. One of those is the individual's understanding of the research process adopted in the search for new ideas. This might come from the invention of new procedures and methods, the replication of existing studies in new contexts, or the application of new theoretical perspectives to existing research questions. For many students,

the thesis is their first exposure to the world of work and organizational life; empirical studies conducted within an organizational context can give students a valuable insight into the world of work. This in turn can lead to insights into how the results of their research study can be of use to management and business practice, and as an applied field of study; this can be a contribution in its own right.

Funded projects are usually conducted by experienced researchers, but require many of the same decisions as projects conducted as part of university degrees. The required outputs will depend on the expectations of the funding body: if funding is provided by a company, there may be an emphasis on applied research; and if it is funded by a research council, then there will be an emphasis on pure research.

Of course, the reader should not assume that research is undertaken only by qualified and trained individuals. In many ways, research is something that managers do as a natural part of their everyday activity, collecting and analysing data and drawing conclusions. Also, consultants conduct research, and many management and business students go on to become consultants in later life.

What often differs, though, is the level of sophistication in the methods used, as well as the speed with which answers are sought.

Thinking about the role of research

EXERCISE 1.1

Individual or interactive exercise: What is the role of research in relation to the job of academics, compared to the role of research in relation to the job of practitioners who embark on research projects to improve organizational practices, to innovate or to explore new areas of activity?

A recent report by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB, 2013) highlighted two dimensions on which scholarship might differ while still remaining of high quality. One dimension focused on whether the research was based on or undertaken by practitioners conducting their own investigations (or perhaps acting as consultants) or by academics whose interest lay in more abstract theories and ideas. The second dimension focused on whether the research being conducted was basic foundational research (aiming to produce 'general theory') or was focused on producing knowledge to be translated into practice (perhaps case-specific research that values the richness of context and explicit solutions to particular problems).

These issues and the main links between types and levels of research are discussed in more detail in later chapters; factors that require a particular emphasis in relation to management and business (e.g. the political and the philosophical factors that can influence the way research is conducted in this field) are highlighted.

ELEMENTS OF A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Formal research proposals are becoming necessary at most levels. Organizations that fund research, whether academic or applied, have to ensure that their money is being wisely spent, so a paper trail has now become necessary. At the higher level, research councils now require very detailed (but concise) proposals before they will allocate money to applicants; there are similar requirements for those upgrading their registration within doctoral programmes, sometimes referred to as 'the transfer'. Even when there is no formal requirement to produce a research proposal, the exercise of doing so is an extremely good discipline that can help students draw together what they already know, their early ideas and what the literature says on the topic. There is some truth in the saying that 'you don't know what you

think until you see what you say'! So, for many, writing a proposal offers the opportunity to begin to see how elements of the research process come together, and to demonstrate for others the coherence of what is being proposed.

To draw an analogy with cooking, a research proposal might be seen as a recipe, for which ingredients are needed. Some of these ingredients are essential for good taste (i.e. quality), while others are less important. Some chefs (researchers) will approach cooking the dish in one way, and others in another. Bringing out certain textures or flavours while suppressing others requires skill, and this both depends on preferences and requires practice, ideas and a vision of what is being aimed for. Thus, the purpose of proposals is to set out the ingredients required, and how the food will be prepared and served. For example, what kind of dish is to be served? Is it fast food of relatively poor quality or high-quality cuisine? What ingredients will be used, and what cooking procedures and kitchen utensils will be required to prepare the particular dish? This translates to the importance of students being both qualified and capable of undertaking their study, and to supervisors being assured that the research is feasible and likely to contribute to generating the knowledge claimed.

Although the requirements for research proposals do differ from institution to institution, there are some common elements that can be discerned.

CLEAR RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Clarity in relation to the focus of the research is usually achieved by students setting out the main research questions to be investigated and describing the aims that will link to the outcomes of the research. Expressions such as 'to investigate' or 'to study' are not aims in themselves and need to be avoided. In addition, the aims need to be consistent with the method or methodology adopted; in other words, they need to be capable of being achieved through the methods proposed. Overly general or ambitious aims can also be problematic. There have been many occasions when supervisors have been heard to remark that for this research to be completed, six researchers would need to work on it for a lifetime!

There can be several purposes behind a particular research project and these need to be clearly articulated. They include the recognition of patterns in data or information; the development or refinement of a particular methodological approach; the ability to generalize to a wider population; and the ability to describe a problem in a sufficiently detailed way to show the realism of a particular context. We will consider all of these in later chapters of the book.

Having a clear objective is extremely important as it helps students to understand and identify an interesting research project. Students will need to know, for example, what are relevant criteria for deciding that a research idea is worth pursuing and appropriate. Tracy (2013) gives some useful advice on this, suggesting that there are a number of ways for students to generate their research ideas. For example, ideas may stem from:

- the student's personal life – such as family, work, political beliefs and travel
- current societal problems or organizational dilemmas – such as the cost of food waste, or issues relating to ethnicity and employment
- current events – such as societal needs or policy debates
- current research debates – as expressed, for example, in the Point Counterpoint papers in the *Journal of Management Studies* or in review papers on a particular topic, such as in the *International Journal of Management Reviews*.

EXPLANATION OF HOW THE RESEARCH RELATES TO PREVIOUS WORK IN THE FIELD

Understanding the literature in the area in which the student wishes to be taken seriously is an important prelude to a research project. Not only is it the means by which students see what work has been undertaken on the subject before, but also it provides a stimulus to what focus the study might have and how it might be undertaken.

At every level – undergraduate, postgraduate and doctorate – there will generally be an expectation of evidence that the student has an understanding of what literature already exists on a particular subject. Although there is often no specific expectation to be definitive, there should be sufficient evidence produced to indicate that there is a question to be answered. This is because it is through generating knowledge via the research that those in the field will become more knowledgeable. A simple test that might be used here would be to reflect on whether the research proposal would convince someone with a good knowledge of the area that the individual has a sufficiently good grasp of the relevant current literature and the boundaries of that knowledge to claim that the topic warrants further research.

There are a number of different ways of thinking about how knowledge might be created, and students employ different strategies for different reasons. Research is about both a creative and a disciplined sense of curiosity; how researchers employ different strategies (sometimes simultaneously) in order to choose their research questions is dealt with in detail in Chapter 2. One way of crafting a review of previous work in the field that we discuss later is the notion of defining a gap. Gaps can be defined in at least three ways: to take well-understood and mainstream methods from one area of the social sciences and use them (perhaps for the first time) in another; to take a well-understood problem within a particular discipline that has been explored in a particular way, and to investigate the same phenomenon using a different methodological approach; or to identify contradictory results and try, through the research, to reconcile them or produce new findings.

However gaps are defined, the role of the researcher is to show how their research serves to fill the gap and, in so doing, to offer explanations that are new and original, producing knowledge that extends understanding of the problem or the field.

Some academics go even further and suggest that the role of research students, through the way they present their research, is to create gaps. Tom Lupton, an early researcher in the field of management and business, and an anthropologist by training, likened this process to a blind person crawling along a chain-link fence feeling for a gap through which it would be possible to crawl in order to get to the other side. Once the person found even the smallest chink in the fence, the requirement would be to prise out a hole large enough to crawl through.

Another approach, which is quite different, relies on a creative process of 'disciplined imagination', a phrase coined by Karl Weick (1989). This process is undertaken with a high degree of intuition and creative thinking, and contrasts with the 'gap spotting' approach outlined above. The argument being made by Weick is that unlike the natural science model of research, which many social scientists try to emulate, social science is rather different and as a consequence requires a different approach. This approach involves researchers thinking about a subject or problem and 'imagining' the different ways in which they might operationalize their study.

Such an approach would normally surface a range of alternatives and perspectives from which choices can be made (the 'disciplined' part), which in turn are further specified in terms of more detailed hypotheses, research designs and questions which are built into the conduct of the research. Weick also suggests that the thinking process involved in disciplined imagination takes place simultaneously as opposed to sequentially and includes three elements: problem statements, through trials, and finally, the criteria used for selection.

Cornelissen (2006) suggests that it is helpful for researchers to engage in a series of mental experiments which he refers to as 'thought trials', where researchers iterate between the reviewed literature, preliminary analysis, background assumptions and their intuition to consider a variety of metaphors, ideas as representations of the subject or problem in hand (imagination) before selecting and deciding on the way the problem might be conceptualized and, consequently, how the research might be most appropriately conducted (discipline).

Weick suggests that such an approach offers an active role for researchers who can imagine and construe theoretical representations, rather than see theoretical representations as deductively or naturally following on from a literature review. In Weick's words, research and theorizing is more like artificial selection than natural selection, as the research, rather than nature, intentionally guides the evolutionary process of selecting new ideas and theoretical representations (1989: 819).

In practice, this means that all researchers will imagine and construe theoretical representations in their own way, leading to different theoretical representations even though the general topic of the research is the same. Further, the researchers' educational and cultural backgrounds, as well as their previous research experiences, will all serve to affect the way in which they view a research topic conceptually.

An example of someone who has gone through a process of conceptualizing their research topic in this way is offered by Joanne, a doctoral student at Cardiff Business School (Example 1.1)

Having a conceptual model is not meant to restrict the student, merely to help to guide and align their theorizing in more productive and focused ways. Joanne indicated that through the process outlined below, she found many new and different avenues to follow in her research and it also helped having a guide to keep the research project focused.

EXAMPLE 1.1

A PhD student reflects on conceptualization

When I initially embarked on the PhD programme I thought that I was quite fortunate, already having an idea of what subject area I wanted to explore: 'the family in business'. This feeling of security quickly changed to a state of anxiety when I was told by my supervisor that I would have to have some kind of 'conceptual model' to frame my research. Despite initially trying to hope this requirement would disappear, I eventually came to accept that I have to have a basis from which to work and as a consequence I would need to have to look for a 'model' which justified my chosen approach. My salvation was my supervisor, who proposed I use his model on networking and 'systems of exchange'. It took some time for me to see how this model would fit with my research area – family business – while making a contribution to organization theory, but, after reading more of the literature, connections began to emerge between these two aspects which I incorporated into the conceptual schema. Social capital literature made a good bridge and other links became apparent and began to fall into place. It was the identification of the linkages that led to the building of the conceptual model below. This was aided by the fact that I was able to use my masters as a pilot study for the PhD, and this really helped me get a sense of how I could apply the features of the model. It also highlighted to me elements that could be included in the model that currently were not, such as trust and the differing orientations to action of the different actors in a relationship. The diagram below represents my thinking of 'if that, plus that, are taken into account, then maybe we may end up with a model looking something like that …' This has meant that the initial conceptual development is something like a hypothesis or research question and will serve to guide my research and help me stay focused. See Figure 1.1.

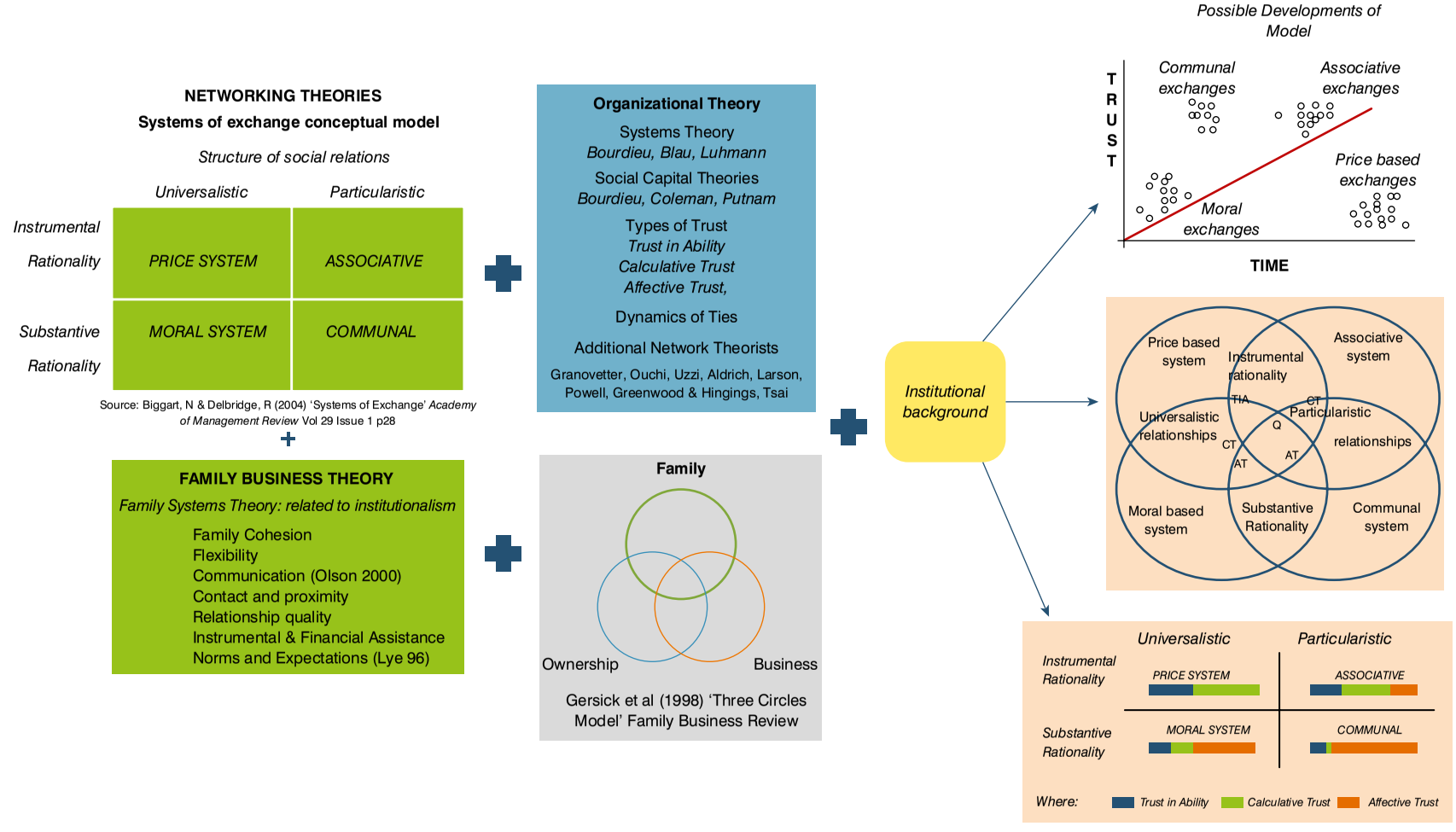


FIGURE 1.1
An example of a conceptual framework

The debates and approaches that Joanne refers to are covered and illustrated in Chapter 2 (on reviewing the literature). There, we set out how students might begin to appreciate what a literature review entails at different levels, and why it is necessary to undertake one. It also includes those practical skills that researchers will need in order both to identify and to record relevant literature for inclusion later in either a literature-review chapter or in the analysis and discussion sections of the thesis. Most importantly, the chapter helps researchers to understand what is meant by a critical review, including how researchers might evaluate the literature in order to persuade their audience of the value of their research.

CONCISE DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The second element of a research proposal is a concise statement of the design to be adopted and the methods which will be used to meet the objectives. We consider that good research design is fundamental to achieving high-quality research, and so we have brought together in Chapter 4 an analysis of design principles and applications in different areas of research.

Before exploring design in detail, we think it is important for students to understand the different philosophical assumptions that underlie management and business research, and in particular to reflect on their own position, and we do this in Chapter 3. Through appreciating the strengths and weaknesses of these different perspectives, students will be able to appreciate how different philosophical assumptions influence the criteria used when judging the quality of research, how the assumptions made about research philosophy directly impact on research design, and how the quality of the design proposed might also be judged.

Having settled on an appropriate research design based on a preferred philosophical position, the next step is to consider the kinds of data to be collected, and research projects may propose to use either **primary data** or **secondary data** sources. Most of the examples we use throughout the book involve the collection of primary data directly by the researchers. Primary data can lead to new insights and greater confidence in the outcomes of the research, which is very useful for students wishing to use their research experience as a basis for subsequent careers in management consultancy. It is normally expected that dissertations at undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral levels will include some primary data.

However, some subjects – such as economics and finance – rely more on public or corporate financial data and statistics (see Chapter 9). Research using secondary data like this has value through exploring new relationships and patterns within these existing data, and we give some examples later in the book. In Chapter 2, we consider published literature as another form of secondary data, especially in the form of literature surveys. Reinterpreting what has gone before is important so as to avoid repeating something that has already been done, as well as to provide new understandings which can guide empirical research.

The method section of the proposal may well be divided up into discrete stages of the research, and each of these should be clearly linked to the aims of the research. On occasions, some of the stages may have already been completed through a previous research project. If this is the case, it is also worth linking to the nature of this research, how it was conducted, and what conclusions were derived.

The most important feature of a good research proposal is that the study design and the methods of enquiry should be appropriate to answering the research questions. The literature review section should summarize existing knowledge, and identify gaps in that knowledge which are the focus for the research questions. The design and method sections then explain how the researcher intends to answer those questions. Figure 1.2 illustrates the balance that we believe should be struck between the research design and most appropriate methods to meet its requirements; the research questions asked within the field; and the skills of the individuals to carry out the research, undertake the analysis and communicate

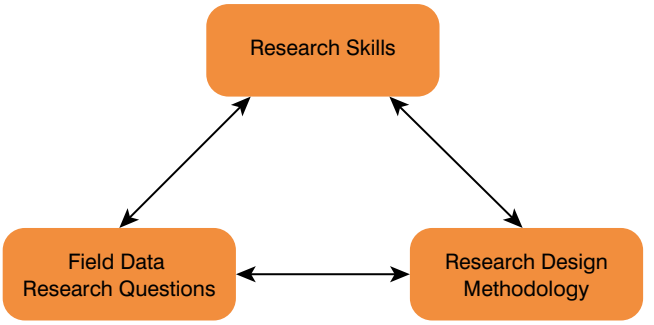


FIGURE 1.2
Balancing the components of research

the results. The biggest section of this book is concerned with methods, and we follow conventional practice by looking separately at qualitative methods and quantitative methods.

Chapter 6 offers an overview of the nature of **qualitative data** and why data of this type are collected. It focuses on textual data (both primary and secondary) and how data are created through language. We specifically examine the nature of the qualitative interview and how interviews might be appropriately conducted, as well as textual data (again primary and secondary) through such devices as diaries. Many research participants may never before have considered the answers to the questions posed in a qualitative interview, and so their views may be hidden or only partly understood. A key characteristic of a skilled researcher is the ability to work with study participants to allow their opinions to surface. We conclude Chapter 6 with a reflection on how researchers might gain access to, and collect and store, data – including raising issues of data protection and the avoidance of **bias**.

Chapter 7 focuses on the creation of qualitative data through observation and interactions that take place between researchers and respondents and/or users. The techniques that we explain include **participant observation** and a variety of participatory tools that researchers might use in order to elicit understanding from settings being studied. In studies like this, it is important to be aware of the ethical issues linked to these methods, as well as on the risks and opportunities that occur through involvement and interaction in the field. It is particularly important in qualitative studies for the researcher to reflect on the ways in which they are influencing the individuals from whom information is being collected, the research process and the research outcomes. This kind of **reflexivity** is an important and valuable part of the qualitative research process, and we will examine later how it influences in conducting 'good' research.

Chapter 8 offers an overview of the different types of analysis of qualitative data, explaining how these map on and link to different philosophical traditions. Again, we stress the difference between pre-structured approaches (e.g. **content analysis**) and emergent approaches to analysis (**grounded analysis**), stressing the importance of adopting a systematic approach, while remaining flexible and creative in the analysis. The chapter covers data-analysis techniques, focusing on how patterns within the data can be identified through the way the data are indexed and coded. More recent methods, such as the analysis of visual data, are also included. Chapter 7 also introduces a range of computer-aided analysis tools and techniques, describing how these might be used, offering an overview of the main packages and suggesting how students might find out more about them. Within the qualitative tradition, we highlight the importance of the interplay between theory, data and analysis through the process of research. The concluding part of the chapter discusses the criteria that might be used for assessing the quality of qualitative research.

The next section of the book (Chapters 9, 10 and 11) details opportunities, expectations and methods that would be required if research students decide to undertake their research within a quantitative tradition. Chapter 9 builds on the foundations laid down in Chapters 3 and 4, and focuses on alternative sources of quantitative data and the craft of