**CHAPTER 1**

**The nature of business and management research and structure of this book**

**Learning outcomes**

By the end of this chapter, students should:

* be able to outline the purpose and distinct focus of management research;
* be able to place their research project on a basic-applied research continuum, according to its purpose and context;
* understand the stages that they will need to complete (and revisit) as part of their research process;
* have an overview of this book’s purpose, structure and features and
* 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 undergraduate or postgraduate students 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 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 also 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 you to generate all the material that you will need to include in your project report. When you have also answered the questions in this section for Chapter 14, you will have written your 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 1, 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 (1991: 17) ‘Qualities of competent researchers’ checklist1 to encourage students to think about the module and its content. Each student has assessed his or her 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 as follows:

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

1 It is worth noting that this exercise does not appear in the second (2002) or third (2008) editions of Easterby-Smith et al.’s book.

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. Figure 1.1 may prove helpful here.

In recent years, we have combined the introductory class with one based upon the material in Chapter 2, 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. Jackson, P. and Lowe, A. (2008). *Management Research.* (3rd edn). 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 while question 1.5 focuses upon 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, as 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.