



Research Methods in Business Studies

P. Ghuari, K. Gronhaug, Research Methods in Business Studies, Prentice Hall, 2010

According to the authors' introductory notes, the book is intended primarily for the students at the MBA programmes, master studies and for research-oriented undergraduate students. It is also recommended to the students at doctoral studies, and to those engaged in research in the field of modern management and business doing.

This book is especially valuable in the preparation of theses and final versions in various types of business studies, when the results of the studies conducted by the students are expected, in view of concrete issues and problems.

The three basic sections of the book offer a comprehensive insight into the basic research methods and techniques, accompanied by numerous examples, notes on extended literature on the concrete field and by problem solving activities. The first section deals with the general importance and challenges of the research into the domain of business studies, the second conducts the reader through the research process,

whereas the final section is concerned with the analysis, implementation and report writing.

In the first section, a specific nature of the research task and process in the domain of business studies is elaborated in detail. The authors highlight the basic differences between the research and concrete problem solving in practice, relying on the "common sense". They infer that there should be no significant differences, as in solving practical problems the managers should be knowledgeable and skilful in evaluating the consequences of the decisions they make. In other words, the managerial decision making and problem solving, is performed systematically, it results in a better decision making and better results compared to the decisions based exclusively on intuition and personal preferences. This implies that research processes, methods and procedures are necessary in order that we should achieve the academic goals of disseminating theoretical knowledge, but also that we gain precious

support in solving the ever present problems in practice. The researchers in the domains of business studies, therefore, pursue various objectives and orientations, from objective general issue and problem solving to solving a specific problem of a concrete company.

Ethical issues in the research area are a specific aspect related to ethics and moral principles affecting the manner in which a researcher or research teams conduct the research activities, especially as regards “the situations and activities which may result in a real or potential harm of any kind and for any one”. It is a moral obligation and a responsibility of the researchers to work out the solutions to the problems honestly, frankly, accurately and precisely. One of the most sensitive issues in this domain is the relationship between the researcher and the subject of research in business studies. The authors quote eight areas of the researcher-subject relationships that may cause ethical problems: preserving the anonymity of the subject; exposing the subject to emotional stress; asking the subject the questions that may be in collision with his/her own interests; using special equipment and techniques, such as recording the interview, video recording or using equipment harmful to health; including the subjects into the research without their consent; cheating and lying; using force to gather information; preventing the subjects from exercising their rights. A conclusion is drawn that ethical issues merit attention already in the initial phases of the research process.

The research process starts from the activity of identifying the research topic and task to the research problem shaping and structuring, to the determining of the research approach, the strategy of information gathering in an adequate manner, the development of the possibility of measuring and data gathering and analysis. It starts from the analysis of the role of theory in business studies, the stress being on the research process and the explanation of the basic concepts of theory, model and knowledge. A special chapter is devoted to the research problem, because the authors believe that the majority of students encounter difficulties in formulating the research problem and they do not make a difference between the research problem and the research topic. The first step of the research process is the research topic that refers to the phenomenon or topic to be explored, e.g., how firms organize their activities, how research and development are conducted in a business system, or how firms enter export markets. The authors insist that the research topic is not the same as the research problem, since the topic is usually much broader and more generalized compared to the research problem which can, for example, be which organization structure is most efficient or whether the firms relying on the bureaucratic organizational type are less innovative compared to the firms organized in an “organic” manner.

The research design is an overall plan of connecting the set research problem with the relevant and practically applicable empirical research. This is a plan or a framework for data gathering and analysis by which the research type is defined – exploratory, descriptive or causal. The research methods in this book refer to the data gathering techniques.

Important measuring problems refer to the operationalization of research hypotheses and data. The measuring of an empirical research is a difficult task since the quality of information largely depends on the procedures used in data gathering and analysis. The basic truth is stressed in the “garbage in, garbage out” postulate which highlights a high level of interrelation of all research activities in the data gathering and analysis phase with the concrete conclusions as research results. A special part is devoted to measuring in qualitative research, as well as to various types of data sources and to identifying the right type of data for particular research. The advantages and disadvantages of primary and secondary data gathering are analysed.

Research in the business studies relies heavily on data gathering and the authors, Pervez Ghauri and Kjell Gronkaug offer an elaborate explanation of this phase of research, in the first place explaining the difference between qualitative and quantitative data gathering methods, illustrated by the analysis of situations respective to one or the other type. Explained are the basic methods of business research such as polls, interviews and focus groups. The authors continue to explain the sampling and the basic activities in preparing the data analysis, describing the role of statistics in the data analysis and presentation. The data analysis is presented by qualitative and quantitative analysis methods, and also presented are the widespread techniques of statistical analysis. Special attention is paid to the case study as a method and methods of its use are explained with an additional emphasis that in case of complex situations of cross-cultural research, additional caution is required in setting the research problem, data gathering and selection of methods for their analysis.

Finally, the report writing, composing the project report comprising all the results of the research is a very important research phase in which one should be concise, consistent and convincing, showing the necessary evidence and arguments supporting the conclusions inferred. The report structure is analysed part by part with appropriate examples and instructions for the use of notes and bibliography related to different types of reports, such as theses, oral presentations or written reports prepared for publication.

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