

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH METHODS

Timeframe:	Minimum of 4 hours
Learning outcomes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critically explain research terminology, concepts and principles
Recommended reading:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A., 2013, <i>Research Methods for Business Students</i>, 6th ed., Cape Town: Pearson Education. Collins, J. and Hussey, R. 2003, '<i>Business Research: A Practical Guide for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Students</i>', 2nd ed., Palgrave Macmillan, 32–37.
Recommended multimedia:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cranfield SoM. 2012, 'Management research: Delivering business results', [video clip], http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7XuQxukmb0 (accessed 16 January 2014).
Section overview:	<p>This section introduces you to the research concept and the research need. The characteristics of research are discussed to allow contextualisation of the research. This will allow you to understand the relevant research concepts and their definitions.</p> <p>This section will cover the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The research concept Conducting research Understanding the need for research as a core business driver to remain competitive <u>How</u> things (study objects) are defined — i.e. to define the nature of the study object(s) Explaining <u>why</u> things (study objects) are the way they are and to explain the relationship between things (study objects) How to <u>predict</u> phenomena, such as human behaviour in the workplace, with the aim of using this information in future (e.g. for screening job applicants) The characteristics of research, and The purpose of research so as to apply it in a pragmatic and systematic manner to solve an organisational problem

An Overview of Research

To a certain extent, most of us have been exposed to the research process and we have often been research subjects, without actually realising it. We are often approached to participate in surveys, for example on our preferences or experiences with regard to services, holiday experiences and household products, or on our preferences with regard to magazines, newspapers and radio stations. These surveys are typical examples of market research in which the service provider aims to determine customer needs and/ or potential customers. A specific research process is followed and an appropriate research method (such as a survey) is employed to collect and analyse data in order to achieve the aim of the study.

In this Research Methodology module, you will come across a number of frequently used research concepts, with which you should become familiar. We will start by describing the research-related concepts so that you have a clear understanding of them. To increase your understanding on research, revisit the following descriptions from time to time.

The term '**research**' is derived from the French word *recherché*, which means 'to travel through or to survey'.

Research is defined as follows:



"A systematic investigation to establish facts or collect information on a subject."

(Collins English Dictionary, 2004:1379)

"The process of thoroughly studying and analysing the situational factors surrounding a problem in order to seek out solutions to it."

(Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran, 2001:4)

"... a systematic, careful inquiry or examination to discover new information or relationships and to expand/verify existing knowledge for some specified purpose."

(Bennett, 1991:68)

"A process that people undertake in order to find out things in a systematic way, thereby increasing their knowledge."

(Saunders *et al.*, 2013)

From the above definitions, it is evident that research involves systematic investigation (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010). The term 'systematic' suggests that research is based on logical relationships and not just beliefs (Saunders *et al.* 2013). Research is not conducted haphazardly, but it is a systematic process with a specific purpose in mind. In other words, we can regard research as the systematic process of collecting and analysing information (data) to increase our understanding of the subject or phenomenon involved. As a researcher you will want to conduct research into your area of interest and this suggests that research involves enquiry or examination 'to find things out' on what you want to study in your mini-dissertation (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010).

In essence, **research** is a process that is followed in order to find answers or to come up with findings regarding a certain topic. In other words, **research is a process of investigation**: It examines a particular subject from a variety of different points of view considering a variety of assumptions, limitations and models proposed by various authors.

The following authors' definitions focus specifically on research in a business context:



“Undertaking systematic research to find out things about business and management.”

(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2003:3)

“An organised, systematic, data-based, critical, objective, scientific inquiry or investigation into a specific problem or issue with the purpose of finding solutions to it or clarifying it.”

(Cavana *et al.*, 2001:5)

These definitions are essential as they establish a common understanding of what research means to you as the researcher. Research students should, therefore, follow a systematic process to investigate a management-related problem in order to compile their mini-dissertation.

According to Saunders *et al.* (2013), there are three main factors which a researcher needs to take cognisance of when conducting research. These are as follows:

Firstly, Saunders views the practice of management as being largely 'eclectic' as it is influenced by other disciplines and a variety of sources, such as physical sciences, pure sciences, social sciences, economics, statistics and maths. Students must be able to work across spiritual, emotional, technical, cultural and functional boundaries. They need to draw on knowledge from all modules, inter-alia, Leadership, Emotional and Spiritual Intelligence, Human Resources, Financial Management, Marketing Management, etc. The dilemma for any researcher, who attempts to compile a mini-dissertation, is whether to examine management from the perspective of one discipline, or whether to adopt an inter-disciplinary approach.

Secondly, a researcher will most likely conduct research within organisations, either public or private. Note that, as a researcher, you may be constrained to access the organisation you want to research, unless such an organisation can see some intrinsic, commercial or personal advantage to be derived from the research study. Research can become challenging as it involves issues such as confidentiality, ethics, moral issues and consent from the organisation.

Thirdly, as a researcher you will need to appreciate that research will require both critical analysis and theory application to resolve the research problem. The researcher must be able to critically compare the various theories and models in the context of the research objectives. The final research report should add value to organisations and society.

The Purpose of Research

The purpose of our research is to conduct a research study in a pragmatic and systematic manner to solve an organisational problem.

Welman and Kruger (1999:19) identify **the purpose of research** as follows:

TABLE 1: PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

Describing	To describe <u>how</u> things (study objects) are — i.e. to define the nature of the study object(s)
Explaining	To explain <u>why</u> things (study objects) are the way they are and explain the relationship between things (study objects)
Predicting	To <u>predict</u> phenomena, such as human behaviour in the workplace, with the aim of using this information in future (e.g. for screening job applicants)

The Characteristics of Research

Although research may vary in complexity and duration, Leedy and Ormond (2003:2–3) argue that research typically has the following eight distinct characteristics:

1. Research originates with a question or a problem.

Research will usually begin with a problem statement, such as: Organisation X lost 10% per annum over the last three years in the area of technical skills. The researcher needs to ensure that the real problem (root cause) is identified and correctly defined, and not the symptoms of the problem, as this will lead to incorrect research with meaningless results.

2. The research goal requires a clear articulation because research is time consuming and usually costly to conduct.

A research goal that is not clearly defined, may lead to research findings that differ from what is required by the researcher. This may nullify the research study conducted.

3. Research follows a specific format.

Leedy (2013:75) views the basic format of the research process as having the following steps:

- Step 1: The researcher asks a question to which there is no (currently) known solution.
- Step 2: Convert the research question into clearly stated research problem that is researchable.
- Step 3: Based on the problem statement, state the research questions and hypothesis. The hypothesis is what the researcher believes may be causing the problem.

- Step 4: Select relevant literature and relevant secondary data, which already exists and is relevant to this problem. Conduct a critical analysis of the literature.
- Step 5: Once the literature review is completed and the secondary data analysis has been exhausted, collect primary data, specifically for where there are gaps in the secondary data.
- Collate the data and synthesised it into a logical structure to analyse through the appropriate data analysis tools and techniques, such as, hypothesis testing.
- Interpret the data and link it back to the previous steps to ensure a logical research flow and link back to the research objectives.
- Compare the data analysis and information produced from the data with the research problem statement and the extent to which the hypothesis tests, validates or solves the problem.

4. Research usually divides the principal problem into more manageable sub-problems.

This allows the researcher to manage the research by focusing on more manageable areas to research.

5. Research is guided by the specific research problem, question or hypothesis.

The researcher must ensure a clear link between the research goal, objectives, problem statement, research questions and the hypothesis.

6. Research accepts certain critical assumptions and limitations, as well as delimitations to ensure that the parameters of the research scope are clearly defined before any research is undertaken.

7. Research requires the collection and interpretation of data in an attempt to resolve the problem that initiated the research.

8. Research is, by its nature, cyclical.

It is critical for the researcher to understand that his/her research may be influenced by the market, organisation, product or other relevant cycles.