

**Book Title:** Doing Research in Business & Management. An Essential Guide to  
Planning Your Project

**Book authors:** Mark Saunders and Philip Lewis

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“Publish or perish”. We’ve all heard this expression referring to the need academic, but especially PhD students and young academics have to make their research results public in order to promote and improve their contractual position, consolidating their careers. Nevertheless, it is also well-known that this is a long-distance race conditioned to the capacity to publish the research findings.

This means that students whether undergraduate, postgraduate or enrolled in a PhD programme need to develop their research knowledge from the very beginning in order to refine their writing skills, paying attention to a large list of details and requirements which may vary from one situation to another. Indeed, academics invest innumerable hours and resources in writing their research results to succeed when submitting them to a peer-reviewed journal. Therefore, it is not surprising that planning and writing a research project is often considered by inexperienced students as a challenging, time-consuming and a demanding task. Yet, despite all these constraints, writing up the findings in a form that can be published and read for others, constitutes a very rewarding effort.

Emerging from the necessity to instruct students in acquiring the appropriate skills and abilities to effectively complete a research project, many courses are now incorporating a research module in their syllabuses as a mean to improve students' probabilities to succeed when doing so.

The editorial industry has also echoed these concerns and demands in the recent years, leading to the flowering of a large number of books and manuals addressing this issue (i.e. Bryman and Bell, 2011; Cooper and Schindler, 2011; Creswell, 2009; Flick, 2011; Sekaran, 2010). One of the most compelling books tackling this problem is *Doing Research in Business & Management. An Essential Guide to Planning Your Project*, written by Saunders and Lewis and published in 2012 by Pearson Education Limited.

Saunders and Lewis are experienced professors in teaching research methods in the fields of Business and Management. Indeed, they have published several books offering guidelines for students that need to conduct and produce a competent piece of research. According to the authors it is now fourteen years since their first book on research methods was printed. In 2009 the fifth edition was published (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009) and due to its popularity and good acceptance among academics and students they are now presenting this new and updated approach, providing a detailed coverage of all the relevant aspects (both theoretical and empirical) that may face students when carrying out a research project.

Combining their years of academic practice and their vast practical experience, with this book Andersen and Lewis aim at providing, in an accessible and friendly manner, some assistance to students and early career individuals who need to undertake an assessed research project by means of a written project report. This way, "*Doing Research in Business and Management*" provides a comprehensive and holistic overview of how to

develop quality research in the fields of business and management, offering a detailed coverage of the relevant research approaches and methods used in these disciplines, and bringing together the essential components of the process of writing up a research project.

The authors take the reader through all the major stages involved in this process, introducing the different contexts and purposes that may guide a research project, as well as highlighting the key methods, strategies, tactics, programmes and processes that are recurrent in a management and business research context.

One noteworthy aspect of this book is that it takes extraordinary care to focus the reader on the logic and techniques of research methods using an accurate but simple language, that is, bearing in mind that the targeted audience is inexperienced students on undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes in business, management or related disciplines, that may not yet be familiar with the language and style required by the scientific community. Therefore, employing a concise, highly accessible style and a logical structure, this book enables students that face for their first time the challenge of writing a research project to understand the practical relevance of research methods on business and management research. It also discusses the interrelationships of theoretical and empirical research, how these apply to practice, and the most recurrent software packages available in the market.

An important feature of this book is its clear structure and ease of reading. Furthermore, within each chapter, the use of illustrations, contemporary examples and key research terms placed in *definition boxes* to demystify their meaning, helps breaking up the text and brings it to life due to the practical perspective adopted. Certainly, it is presented in

a logical and structured manner, organising the content in eight chapters that correspond to eight stages of the process of writing a research project.

Although the chapters follow a sequential order, the authors have written them in such a way that they stand alone, so any chapter in isolation make sense of it. Therefore, it is not necessary to read this book progressively from Chapter 1 through to Chapter 8, but allow readers to select those chapters that really match with their needs.

Each chapter follows a similar structure, starting with a brief summary that gives some ideas of the content and the approach adopted to afford the topic discussed (*Why read this chapter?*). Also each chapter contains a set of different examples to illustrate, from a practical point of view, some of the points addressed in the chapter (*Research in practice*). Every chapter ends with a *Thinking about* section, where the content is summarised in the form of concise and succinct bullets, and where authors make some suggestions on how to reinforce the contents learnt.

Revising each chapter individually, Chapter 1 starts with some preliminary considerations on what is meant by a research process. Conducting research is something more than writing the findings using a formal language and a specific structure. It means to embark on a journey of discovery, where researchers have the chance to express their skills and resourcefulness demonstrating their abilities to carry out research projects of high quality.

Given these initial thoughts, Chapter 1 is then entirely devoted to the first matter academics come across: the selection of the research topic. As any process, a research project starts with the choice of a research theme. This is an issue entailing an extraordinary significance as the student/researcher should have to live with and live for, perhaps for a considerable period of time. Thus, it is important that the research

topic matches with his/her expectations and motivations, contributing to the development of his/her personal skills and strengths, rather than being imposed by a supervisor.

The chapter follows with the main difficulties students face when choosing the research topic, and suggests novel ways in which to generate ideas, including for instance the use of relevant literature in the field to identify gaps that may constitute new research avenues. Discussions with friends and lecturers or drawing a concept map, are also listed as intermediate steps that may help filtering ideas, moving from the general to the specific question.

In the latter part of the chapter the authors focus on how to turn an idea into a research topic. At this point Sanders and Lewis recommend the use of the Russian doll principle (Clough and Nutbrown, 2007), consisting of breaking down from the original statement to something which strips away all the complicated layers and obscurities until the heart of the question, in a similar fashion as the Russian doll is taken apart to reveal a tiny doll at the centre (p. 21).

Chapter 2 focuses on the subject of the literature review. A literature review is a very hard and time-consuming process, as it should discuss relevant previous work and provide a comprehensive review of the major findings in the current area of study. This section is mandatory for any research project as it allows the researcher to demonstrate the need for a new study and that he/she has the appropriate background. Moreover, knowing what is known, it comes out easier to state what is still unknown, facilitating the identification of the gaps in the current understanding of the field, and making it simply to justify the research question(s) underlying the research and the context in which the study is going to be performed.

Thus, in this chapter the authors explain what constitutes an effective critical literature review, giving some ideas on how to start writing it and how to organise ideas and findings in a coherent logical argument.

A careful selection of the references to support statements and previous research findings is essential. In this sense, the authors make explicit differentiation of the main types and sources of literature available. A detailed description of the process of searching for obtaining the relevant literature is then provided, emphasising the use of an abstract to assess likely use of an article.

In accordance with the Harvard College Library (2006), the authors also suggest that while reading, it is extremely important to take notes, summarise findings, compare information and contrast results. Likewise, they emphasise that a good literature review can lead to interesting insights into possible ways of collecting and analysing data.

Chapter 3 is concerned with how to manage the research process, focusing on four main aspects. First, questioning how to manage respondents, that is, how to access organisations for data collection. Here a set of six strategies are listed. Second, the authors focus on how to manage oneself in terms of keeping up the motivation, organising time and resources, and keeping in touch with individuals who may provide insightful comments on the work in progress. The relationship with the supervisor is believed to be indispensable, as he/she is expected to give advice at every stage of the process. But in order to succeed in this relationship, students are asked to report in a regular basis the partial results throughout the entire length of the project. A fourth issue deals with the management of the university context, that is, how to fit with the regulations, specific norms and other requirements imposed by the university. Paying

special attention to the assessment criteria is also essential in order to guarantee that the research outcomes fulfil the requirements.

This chapter ends with a section covering the subject of research ethics, pointing out the key ethical principles and responsibilities that should be taken into account and that apply to all stages of any research process. This topic has perhaps been underexplored in the management and business literature; however it seems that it is now increasingly entering into the agendas of many academics (Academy of Management; Frechtling and Boo, 2012; Payne, 2000).

Chapter 4 begins with a definition of what is meant by secondary data. A full definition is given, differentiating between qualitative and quantitative data and the possible transformation processes data may have suffered. Figure 4.1 (page 86) exhaustively summarises potential forms of secondary data according to their nature.

In this chapter the authors discuss the potential of using secondary data as a method for accessing large datasets and saving time and money, as they can often be found in the public domain as a result of the growth of the Internet. Nevertheless, secondary data also presents some pitfalls. For instance the authors emphasise that data are not always value-neutral or only meet research needs partially. Although data available are rich and allows the creation of reliable variables, it is relevant to question whether the selected variables represent the core influential factors that match with the exact requirements of the study. The chapter ends with a list of some gateways to secondary data sources that are relevant for its broad scope and content.

Chapter 5 is entirely devoted to research strategy and design. Using the research onion metaphor presented in the authors' previous work (Saunders *et al.*, 2009), Saunders and Lewis illustrate the different stages that conform the research process. Techniques and

procedures for data collection and analysis are placed in the centre of the onion. As we move away from the centre we found the intermediate layers, where the strategies and choices have to be selected. Finally, the outer layers consider the research philosophies and approaches that embody the research. Building on this approach, the different layers of the onion are presented and complemented with readable examples. Definitions are also given, clarifying some terms that may be unknown for the freshman student, for instance, differences between inductive and deductive approaches, and alternative types of studies (exploratory, descriptive and explanatory).

This chapter also includes a section devoted to the description of different strategies that students may use in their attempt to answer their research question(s). Some useful insights are given on the use of experiments, surveys, case studies, action research methods, ethnography studies, grounded theory, archival research methods or the combination of any of the above. Although the aim of this book is not to in-depth in the technical specifications behind these strategies, Saunders and Lewis provide the reader with the main features characterising each method. Further information on these approaches may be accompanied with the reading of the specific literature on each particular topic, such as Yin (2009) for case studies; the book of Berg and Lune (2008) with two chapters entirely focused on action research methods and ethnography studies; Corbin and Strauss (2008) and their approach to the grounded theory; or Ventresca and Mohr (2002) studying archival research methods. Correspondingly, the books of Miles and Huberman (1994) and Marshall and Rossman (2010) offer an exhaustive review of all aspects related to qualitative data analysis.

Chapter 6 pays attention to the methods used to collect data. The uses of different techniques and statistical procedures to obtain a sample that satisfies the research



requirements, or how to draft an effective questionnaire, are some of the issues addressed in this chapter.

Part of this chapter is devoted to the importance of using a pilot test with a small group of respondents in order to corroborate the validity of a test/questionnaire before launching it to the whole sample. The chapter ends with some guidelines on how to successfully conduct interviews (either semi-structured or unstructured), giving some examples on how to ask questions, how to interact with the respondent and how to prepare the material needed. A transcription of a potential interview is also provided.

The subject of Chapter 7 is about getting data ready for analysis, the use of different techniques for the analysis, and how to interpret the results obtained.

The chapter begins with the particularities of different types of data, namely quantitative and qualitative. Then the authors address each sort of data individually, first focusing on how to prepare and analyse quantitative data, and second, qualitative data. Essential statistical terms are defined, providing the reader with the basic instruments and techniques. Examples on how to interpret descriptives, correlation coefficients, associations between variables, predict cause-effect relationships, or how to transcript an interview are provided, facilitating the understanding of those terms that the reader may not yet be familiar with. Screenshots of the most commonly used software packages for processing data are also introduced (i.e. SPSS, ATLAS.it, NVivo).

Writing an effective research proposal is a vital part of the research process. In the 8 and last chapter, the authors provide some insightful comments on the writing style students should adopt when compiling their research proposal and suggest some of the criteria against which the quality of the research project may be assessed.

Although each research process has its own particularities and layout, to a great extent, the content of a research project tends to follow a standardized structure: the title; an abstract; an introduction section presenting the research question(s); a review of the literature ending with the formulation of the hypotheses to be tested and the statement of the research objectives; a method section detailing how the research will be carried out; a discussion of the results; the conclusions and limitations of the study; and a list of the cited references. By way of conclusion, two research proposals are presented exemplifying all the aspects and issues discussed throughout the book.

Although the content of this book is quite predictable for a book of this type, it enables an effective learning process, representing a very useful guide for students planning or undertaking a research project or a dissertation in the fields of business and management. An eminently practical approach and a language free of an excessive use of technical terms helps students obtaining a thorough understanding of the main methodological issues a research project entails.

Therefore, taken as a whole, the value and rigour of this book is unquestionable, underpinning the strength of this publication.

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