



Book Review

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The Essential Guide to Doing Research

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This book consists of 13 chapters arranged from the starting point of undertaking a research project to the writing of the report. The author is a senior lecturer and the Workplace Integrated Learning coordinator at the University of Sydney Business School, Australia. She is also a consultant and research coordinator at the Centre for Environmental Health Development at the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre.

The author begins with Chapter One, entitled “Research as a Creative and Strategic Thinking Process,” consisting of the topics: Exploring Research, the Construct of Research, Working through the Complexity, and Putting It All Together. This introductory chapter is her attempt to help readers feel less stressed and become acquainted with the research process. Chapter Two, “Managing the Process,” could be said to be a warm-up for the researchers. The author informs the readers that “you will need to familiarize yourself with your institution’s requirements. Similarly, taking advantage of all possible resources involves knowing what they are” (p. 27). This assertion is indeed germane.

In Chapter Three, “Developing Your Research Question,” the author discusses the following four areas: (1) the Importance of Good Questions, (2) Defining Your Topic, (3) From Interesting Topics to Researchable Questions, and (4) Characteristics of Good Questions. In this chapter she states that “hypotheses are designed to express

relationships between variables. If this is the nature of your question, a hypothesis can add to your research. If your question is more descriptive or explorative, generating a hypothesis may not be appropriate” (p. 41). This statement is most helpful for the readers.

Chapter Four, “Exploring Power and Ethics in Research,” includes the following topics: Power, Politics, and Research, Attributes and Attitudes, Navigating Worldviews, and Ethical Responsibilities. The author is most critical regarding integrity in context, stating “integrity in the production of knowledge demands that researchers: recognize, understand, and balance their subjectivities; accurately report on their research; act within the law; and develop appropriate expertise and experience” (p. 55). Again, this guidance is most valuable.

The author provides the criteria for judging a research project in Chapter Five, “Indicators of Good Research,” by looking at the following items: (1) Frameworks for Credibility, (2) Managing Subjectivities, (3) Striving for Methodological Consistency, (4) Capturing “Truth,” (5) Working Towards Applicability, and (6) the Need for Accountability. Her central recommendation in this chapter is: “Rather than selecting indicators strictly by paradigm, researchers are encouraged to determine appropriate indicators by critically examining their own worldview and assumptions; the aims and objectives of their research; and their methodological approaches” (p. 64).

Chapter Six, “Working with Literature,” consists of details in the followings areas: (1) Importance of Working with Literature, (2) Finding Literature, (3) Managing the Literature, (4) Using the Literature, and (5) the Formal “Literature Review.” She makes an analogy for writing literature reviews, saying “writing a good literature review can be likened to holding a good dinner party conversation. They both require individuals who can engage, learn debate, argue, contribute, and evolve their own ideas, without being hypercritical or sycophantic” (p. 84).

Most importantly for the reader, the author focuses Chapter Seven on the subject of “Methodological Design,” covering: (1) Methodology, Methods, and Tools,

(2) From Questions to Answers, (3) Three Key Prerequisites for Methodological Design, (4) Getting Down to the Nitty Gritty, and (5) Thoughts on the Qualitative/Quantitative Divide. Her suggestion to the readers on this matter is that “methodological options may be diverse, but credible design is reliant upon three key ‘prerequisites’: the design addresses the question; it is suited to the researcher; and you have the ethics approval, resources, time, and access necessary to accomplish the task” (p. 101).

Chapter Eight is entitled “Exploring Populations”. The author discusses the following areas: (1) Population Research, (2) the Sampling Process, (3) Random Samples, (4) Non-random Samples, and (5) Methods of Data Collection and Analysis. At the end, she concludes that “traditionally, population studies involved the use of survey questionnaires, quantitative data, random samples, and statistical analysis. However, a variety of methods, data types, modes of analysis, and the use of non-random samples have broadened possibilities for understanding populations” (p. 112).

Chapter Nine, “Investigating Complexities of the Social World,” consists of the discussion on: (1) Delving into Complexities, (2) Exploring Bounded Systems, (3) Exploring Cultural Groups, (4) Exploring Phenomena, and (5) Exploring the Everyday. Actually, this chapter concerns “qualitative methods,” and the author posits that “methods that allow researchers to delve into social complexities often involve parameters not likely to lend themselves to assessment by ‘positivist’ criteria. Appropriate criteria are likely to be neutrality or transparent subjectivity, dependability, authenticity, transferability, and auditability” (p. 130).

Chapter Ten, “Facilitating Change through Research,” includes the discussion on: (1) From Knowledge to Action, (2) Paving the Way for Change, (3) Creating Knowledge and Auctioning Change, and (4) Striving for Critical Emancipation. The author intends to elaborate detailed information on the critical approaches, saying that “a common issue in emancipatory research is the intertwining of research and political agendas. In addition to managing subjectivities, researchers need to guard against imposing their own political agendas on the researched” (p. 149).

Chapter Eleven, “Data Collection,” is a description of the major means for collecting data, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This chapter consists of the following areas: (1) the Quest for Credible Data, (2) Surveying, (3) Interviewing, (4) Observation, (5) Document Analysis, and (6) the Final Word. In this chapter, the author emphasizes the importance of gaining access to the data, stating that “your ability to gain access can improve if you do your homework, act professionally, and are willing to give something back. Gaining access must be done in an ethical manner to ensure that relationships are not abused” (p. 183).

Chapter Twelve can be considered as a highlight of this book and is entitled, “Data Management and Analysis.” It focuses on the following areas: (1) Thinking Your Way through Analysis, (2) Crunching the Numbers, (3) Working with Words, and (4) Drawing Conclusions. The author wisely describes the how-to of data analysis for both qualitative and quantitative approaches, concluding that “your findings and conclusions need to flow from analysis and show clear relevance to your overall project. Findings should be considered in light of significance, current research literature, limitations of the study, and, finally, your questions, aims, objectives, and theory” (p. 204).

The final chapter or Chapter Thirteen, “The Challenge of Writing-Up,” is offered as a tool to help the readers to write their reports. The content is composed of the following: (1) the Writing Challenge, (2) Writing as “Conversation,” (3) Preparing for Submission, and (4) the Importance of Dissemination. The author’s assumption is that “research write-ups are often a relatively unpractised form of writing that can challenge and intimidate students. Once considered an activity that commenced once research was complete, it is now commonly recommended as a practice that should be incorporated throughout the research process” (p. 214).

However, in this reviewer’s opinion, this chapter may not necessarily have been included as it is more germane to how to write a research paper, rather than the conducting of research.

Overall, this text would be suitable for an introductory course in research methodology for both undergraduate and graduate levels. The reviewer happened upon this text in the process of looking for a text for his M.A. students with no knowledge of research and this book seems to fit the needs of such students. The language used puts the readers at ease and the jargon used is easily understood throughout the text as it is precisely and concisely defined. Readers who are not well informed about research methodology will find this book as inspiring as the author intended, while novice researchers will find this book an excellent guide on the subject of how to conduct research.