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## The MRS/City & Guilds Examination

The examination for the MRS/City & Guilds Certificate comprises 40 multiple-choice questions, many of which focus on your knowledge of key terms and concepts. To support your preparation for the examination, key terms have been highlighted in the text using bold ***italics***. Use the terminology test at the end of each chapter to test your knowledge of these terms. If you would like more information, visit the glossary of Market Research Terms on the MRS website (www.mrs.org.uk).

For more information on the MRS/City& Guilds Certificate in Market & Social Research Practice, visit www.mrs.org.uk

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# How to use this book

*An Introduction to Market and Social Research* provides a step-by-step guide to the research process, from the identification of the topic to be researched to the delivery of results and recommendations. It combines clear explanations and practical examples to guide you through the decisions that need to be made at each stage in the research process.

The book follows the syllabus of the MRS/City & Guilds Certificate in Market and Social Research, and provides tasks and tests to help you prepare for the examination for this qualification in the following ways:

- The book is divided into three sections, mirroring the syllabus of the MRS/City & Guilds Certificate.
- Each chapter contains:
  - a clear description of what you will learn in the chapter;
  - clear explanations and practical examples to help you understand key points;
  - a series of tasks to help you apply what you are learning to practical situations, with suggested answers provided in an answer guide;
  - a terminology revision test to help ensure that you remember key terms and concepts in market and social research.
- Throughout the book, you will have the chance to apply what you are learning to an unfolding market research case study.
- The final section includes a series of exam-type questions to help you test your knowledge and prepare for the MRS/City& Guild Certificate examination.

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# Section 1

# Introduction to market research

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1

# Why do I need research?

## *Introducing market and social research*

## Introduction

The results of research are all around us. If you watch the news, or read newspapers or magazines, you are likely to see or hear the words 'a study shows …', 'a new survey indicates …' or 'people aged between 25 and 35 are likely to …'. Behind each of these statements lie research findings. However, how did the process of research begin? And how did it reach its conclusions?

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- define and describe 'market research';
- explain why organizations use market research;
- identify how the market research industry is structured;
- describe some of the key work roles within market research;
- describe the ethical and legal frameworks which govern market research.

## What *is* 'market research'?

All organizations, whether they are commercial companies, not-for-profit organizations or public sector bodies, need to develop and change. However, deciding how best to change can be a complex task. For example, if a charity wants to find new ways of raising funds, it needs to look at the various options open to it and try to select the one

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which will be most effective. To make this decision, the organization needs information: which option is likely to bring in most money? How will potential donors respond to this new way of raising funds? What are the risks involved in raising funds in this new way? All of this information can help the charity to consider its options carefully, and to make the most appropriate choice. And this is where market research plays a key role. Well-planned and well-executed research can provide the accurate and relevant information needed to help the organization make its business decision.

## Defining 'research'

The Market Research Society (MRS) is the world's largest professional body for individuals working in, or interested in, market, social and opinion research. It defines research as:

> *the collection and analysis of data from a sample or census of individuals or organizations relating to their characteristics, behaviour, attitudes, opinions or possessions.*

(MRS, 2005: 6)

As the MRS definition demonstrates, researchers gather information from people and organizations about all aspects of their lives: what they think, what they do, how they spend their money. How this information is used will depend on the reasons for undertaking the research project. A local council that needs to decide how to prioritize its spending might consult local residents to find out their views. A holiday company seeking to expand its list of holiday destinations might need to find out which possible destinations most interest potential customers. In all cases, it is the organization's ***business problem*** that dictates what information will be gathered. By identifying what decisions need to be made, the researcher can work out what information is needed.

# Using research to inform business decisions

As the examples above demonstrate, research can be used to help identify possible solutions to a wide range of problems. In essence, any business decision can be informed by effective research. However, there are some key business areas that depend heavily on research.

- **Developing new products.** Developing and launching a new product or service can be a very expensive venture, and a business needs to know that it has a good chance of being successful. Carrying out research at different stages in the development process can help identify best choices and possible problems.

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- **Understanding how brands are performing.** In an environment where different brands compete for the same share of the market, it's important that companies understand how well their brand is doing. Through research, the company will be able to understand its brand's areas of strength, and identify areas where competitors are beginning to overtake it.
- **Segmenting the market.** Organizations in all sectors – commercial companies, government agencies and not-for-profit organizations – deal with a very wide range of people. This means that the organization's customers or contacts could have very diverse needs. By ***segmenting*** their market – that is, by identifying different sub-groups within their group of customers – organizations can tailor their services to the needs of those different groups. For example, a local library might know that the majority of its members are adults aged 45+. However, there might also be a significant number of teenagers and of younger children who use the library. By identifying these different segments, the library can develop to meet the needs of all of the different groups of members.
- **Communicating with customers.** Organizations can now make contact with their customers using a huge variety of media: email, the internet and television advertising are only a few. But how can the organization know which approach is most effective? Research plays a major role in assessing the effectiveness of advertising and other forms of communication between organizations and their customers.
- **Gauging how satisfied customers are.** One important feature of a successful organization is that it retains customers as well as gaining new ones. Being able to find out how customers feel about the services or products an organization provides is vital to retaining their loyalty and custom. Measuring customer satisfaction is now a major area of research for a wide range of organizations, from colleges which ask students to complete evaluation forms, through to restaurants and hotels where guests are asked to complete a short questionnaire when they visit.

In some organizations, research is carried out occasionally when a business problem or issue is identified, while in others research is carried out on a continual basis. An example of this can be seen in major retailers and owners of big brands, which need to be constantly aware of how their brand is faring against the competition.

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## Market research and social research: the same or different?

MRS is a professional body whose members include individuals who work either in market research or in social research. But what is the difference between the two?

***Market research*** is very much a commercial activity, focused on gathering information to help the organization address a business problem.

***Social research*** focuses on gathering information about society and social issues. In many cases, this information is needed to help make a decision. An example is research to help a health authority measure the effectiveness of an anti-smoking campaign. However, social research is also carried out with the aim of helping us to understand society more fully. The information might be used to inform decisions at a later date, but the primary aim might have been simply to further understanding of the subject area.

Although the aims of projects may differ, both market and social research are based on the same principles and share many techniques. There is now a greater crossover than before between the two disciplines, with many market research suppliers carrying out both market and social research.

In this book, we will be looking at research as it is used to help solve business problems. Importantly, however, those problems may be set in commercial contexts or in social contexts. To find out more about social research, visit the MRS website and the website of the Social Research Association, a membership organization in the UK specifically for social researchers (www.the-sra.org.UK).

# Who carries out research?

We often hear that a major organization has launched a new product or decided to open offices in a new area. But how does the organization gather the information required to help make those decisions?

## The client and the supplier

In most market research projects, there are two key roles: the client and the supplier.

The ***client*** is the person, the department or the organization that needs the research information. The ***research supplier*** is commissioned by the client to carry out the research on its behalf, and to provide guidance to help the client understand the research results.

Larger companies or organizations may have their own internal research team which is commissioned to carry out research. However, these teams of ***clientside researchers*** tend to be relatively small, and a project might need a larger research team. When the company is unable to carry out its own research, it normally enlists the services of an external research supplier, in the form of either an individual research consultant or a larger research agency.

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## How research agencies are structured

Within the UK, market research is a multi-million pound industry sector, and a wide range of research agencies exists, many specializing in specific research areas. Clients normally select agencies based on their expertise either in one particular type of research, or in their work with different types of clients or in different countries.

As with most industry sectors, the UK market research sector includes agencies of different sizes, some with only a few staff and others which are global organizations with offices in many countries. Some may offer only a limited range of research services, while others (known as ***full-service agencies***) carry out all aspects of the research process. So who works in a full-service agency, and what do they do? Although there is a wide range of agencies, all of which might be structured slightly differently, there are some standard ways in which a project might be delegated to different staff members. Table 1.1 shows how a research project often includes people from a wide range of departments.

In many cases, client companies work with a limited number of research suppliers. This helps build relationships in which the client is sure that the researchers understand the context in which the client works, and recognize the importance of the business problem. However, other clients work with a wide range of suppliers. In all cases, the research supplier – either agency or consultant – needs to demonstrate that it has the understanding, skills and experience to address the research problem appropriately. In order to do

**Table 1.1** *People involved in research*

| Where do they work? | Research department | | Operations department | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Who are they? | **Director/associate director** (very experienced researchers) | **Senior research executive/research executive** (less experienced researchers) | **Field department** (interviewers, supervisors and field managers) | **Data processing department** (data analysts and other staff responsible for electronic handling of data) |
| What do they do? | Usually responsible for meeting with the client and deciding on the parameters of the research project. Ensuring the success of the project is the responsibility of the staff at this level. | Usually responsible for carrying out the more detailed aspects of the project, such as designing the questionnaire, and the day-to-day management of the project. Staff at this level may also be involved in presenting the findings of the research to the client. | Usually responsible for gathering data from the ***respondents***, ie the individuals who agree to participate in the research | Usually responsible for the entering, editing and running analysis of data |

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this, the supplier will normally produce a research proposal to demonstrate how it will address the problem. Clients may invite a number of agencies or consultants to submit proposals and select the one that most closely fits their needs. In Chapter 2, we look at how such proposals are put together.

### Researching the research agencies

The *Research Buyer's Guide (RBG)*, the UK's largest directory of research suppliers, is produced annually by MRS. It includes a wide range of agencies and consultants, with details of the types of research they carry out, the numbers of staff they employ, and where they operate in the world.

The online version of RBG can be searched to find agencies by size, region, research type and area of business. To find out more about agencies operating in your area, visit www.rbg.org.uk

## Conducting research ethically

As we saw at the beginning of this chapter, research is carried out on behalf of a wide range of organizations. In some cases, the organization will be seeking information from individual members of the public. An example is when a research interviewer stops a person in the street and asks him or her to participate in some research. In other cases, the organization might need to find out what other businesses or organizations think or do: for example, an IT supplier might need to find out how a business uses IT in order to be able to market its products to that business. This type of research, known as ***business-to-business research***, can help businesses understand each other more effectively. In all cases, however, the people providing the information – the respondents – need to be sure that their views are being represented accurately, and that the details they provide are kept secure.

Because market research depends heavily on gathering information about people, it is important that a clear ethical framework exists – and is seen to exist – to protect the rights of respondents. In the UK, MRS is the regulator of ethical standards in market research. The regulations in the ***MRS Code of Conduct*** govern all aspects of the research process, including the rights of respondents. All members of MRS, and the companies they work for, are bound by this Code. Some of the key underpinning principles of the Code of Conduct include:

- **The need to gain *informed consent* from a respondent.** Before respondents can be asked to provide information, they must understand what will be done with the

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information. The purpose of the research also needs to be made clear to the respondent before any interview can take place.

- **The right to anonymity.** Effective research depends on the respondent feeling comfortable enough to share information. In many cases, respondents would be unwilling to participate in research if they felt their identity was to be made known to the client. As a result, respondents should be assured that their identity will be protected. In some cases, the researcher may need to include the respondent's name or other details in any analysis of the data. If this is the case, specific permission needs to be sought from the respondent during the interview.
- **Information should be treated as confidential.** As well as being anonymous, respondents have the right to expect that their views will be treated as confidential. This is particularly important when researching sensitive areas. An example is a survey of employee satisfaction in a company. If the survey is to find out exactly what employees think of the company, the employees must be sure that the views they express will not be traced back to them. Researchers need to ensure that the views of the individual are kept confidential, and that it is only the views of the group that are fed back to the client. They can only pass back information that could identify an individual with the express permission of that individual.
- **Data is held in accordance with data protection legislation.** In the UK, the 1998 Data Protection Act gives individuals certain rights over information that is held about them. One of the foremost principles in the Act is that information about an individual must not be passed on to a third party without his or her approval. The MRS Code of Conduct, and associated guidelines, help interpret the Act as it relates to market research information.
- **No one will try to sell respondents anything as a result of their taking part.** Market research has nothing to do with selling anything directly to the people who take part in the research. Members of the public would not cooperate if they thought it was just an excuse to sell them something.

MRS, and the research profession in general, take the rights of respondents very seriously. It is recognized that if people are not confident that their information will be handled properly, they are unlikely to participate in research. One of the key roles of the researcher, then, is to ensure that all the work he or she does is carried out in line with the MRS Code of Conduct.

The MRS Code of Conduct, along with the guidelines produced by MRS to help researchers ensure ethical practice, can be downloaded from the MRS website (www.mrs.org.uk/standards).

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## Becoming research aware: practical task

While you are reading this book, try to become more aware of the research going on around you. To do this, look for instances of research projects in newspapers or in the news. Key words to look out for include:

- survey;
- study;
- research;
- statistics.

When you find an example of a research project, try to answer the following questions:

1. Who is the client?
2. Who is the research supplier? You may find this information on a graph or diagram.
3. What was the problem that needed research?
4. What was the outcome of the research?

If you identify the research supplier, try to find out more about it by visiting the RBG website (www.rbg.org.uk) or by looking for it on the net, using a search engine.

## Terminology test

The following research terms were introduced in this chapter. Can you explain what each one means?

- market research
- segmentation
- research supplier
- respondent
- MRS Code of Conduct
- client
- clientside researcher
- business-to-business

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## Summary

Some of the key points from this chapter are:

- 'Market research' involves the gathering of information from individuals and organizations in order to aid business decision making.
- Research is normally commissioned by a client and carried out by a supplier. However, don't forget that the client and the supplier may work for the same organization.
- Much of the research undertaken in the UK is carried out by research agencies. Different agencies specialize in different types of research or research for specific sectors.
- The MRS Code of Conduct provides the regulatory framework for research carried out in the UK. All members of the MRS are bound by the Code, wherever they are working.

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2

# What do I need to know?

## *Defining research objectives*

## Introduction

All businesses and organizations need to find ways to develop in order to meet the demands of a changing environment. For example, an organization may want to measure how its business is progressing, to improve on the products or services it offers, or to expand into a new area. In each case, effective research can provide the guidance and support needed for the organization to make business decisions.

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- explore the background to a business 'problem';
- define the research 'problem';
- identify research objectives;
- identify the resources needed for a research project;
- create an effective research brief.

## The first steps

Before a research project can begin, there are a number of important steps that must be taken. It is vital that the research is based on a clear understanding of the problem the information might help solve. As a result, the client and the researcher may spend some time discussing the possible research requirement, even before a formal research brief is

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written. Therefore, the steps described in this chapter may develop as a cycle, with problems being analysed and refined, rather than proceed as a sequence.

## What is the problem?

As we saw in Chapter 1, research findings play an important role in informing decision making in business and organizations. They provide evidence which can be used to help solve a business problem or challenge.

### Business problems in practice: case study

T H Stores is a small, family-owned supermarket in a residential area of a large town. The owners opened the shop 10 years ago, and the business is doing well. Encouraged by this success, they are now interested in expanding their business. They are considering either enlarging their current shop or opening another shop in a different area of town.

This is their *business problem* – how can they expand their business? Any research undertaken needs to provide information that can help them address this problem.

## From problem to objectives

Once the business problem or goal has been identified, the business or organization may need additional information about its potential choices to help make the final decision. It is at this point that the research process begins. The first stage in any research project is to define precisely the research problem. This problem definition is usually achieved by the researcher talking with the client to find out what exactly needs to be researched. In order to identify the research problem, a number of important questions need to be answered:

- **What is known already?** It is important to investigate the background to the business problem. Understanding the business context will help the researcher identify precisely which areas need to be researched. The first step, therefore, is to ask questions about:
  - *The business*. It is important to understand the business or organization – its history and how it is structured – in order to understand the context of the business problem. Knowing about the aims of the organization, its clients and its current products or services will help the researcher to develop a wider understanding of the circumstances that gave rise to the business problem.
  - *The wider environment*. Businesses and organizations do not operate in isolation. All need to be aware of their competitors or any changes in the social or political

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landscape which might affect how they do business. The researcher may be able to draw on previous research to gain this type of insight. For example, if a local council wishes to introduce a new scheme to recycle household waste, it might be possible to find out if other councils have already started similar schemes, and how successful these have been. This type of information can help to identify the areas that need to be researched further.

- **What decisions need to be made?** The researcher needs to understand the client's business problem, and to see how research findings will inform the decision-making process. This will help identify precisely the area that needs to be researched.
- **Is the research really possible?** In some circumstances, it may not be possible to carry out the research the client wants. There might be ethical, financial or time constraints which mean that it simply is not possible to gather the information which is asked for. Remember that it is important to identify any restrictions that exist when identifying the research problem.

A thorough understanding of the background and the business problem is vital to the research project. Without this understanding, the researcher might not identify exactly what needs to be researched, and therefore the research project will not provide the information which is required. Identifying constraints will help the researcher avoid setting unrealistic or unachievable aims for the project.

Once the research problem has been identified, it needs to be broken down further into a series of ***research objectives***. Research objectives identify exactly the areas or topics that need to be investigated, and are usually set out as questions. For example, if a gym is investigating ways of attracting new members, the research objectives might include:

- How does this gym compare with others in the area?
- What do current members think of the gym?
- Why did former members leave?
- What might encourage members of other gyms to move to this one?

In some cases, a research objective may take the form of a ***hypothesis*** to be investigated. For example, a train company might want to know if people are more likely to use commuter trains in poor weather than when it is fine. Its research hypothesis would be 'Passenger numbers on commuter trains are related to changes in the weather'.

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## Research objectives in practice: case study

The owners of T H Stores have decided to expand the business but need to be sure that the option they choose will bring a good return. The cheaper option is to enlarge the current store. However, they are worried that, by enlarging, they might lose the family-friendly environment they currently have, which they think has been an important factor in their current success. They need to know more about the possible impact of enlarging their store on their current customers, and if their investment would pay off in increased sales.

T H Stores' business problem is, 'What is the best way to expand?' The research problem, however, is narrower than the business problem. In fact, if the owners seriously wish to consider two options, they have two separate research problems: one that focuses on enlargement of the current store and one that focuses on setting up a new store. If they want to take the first option, they need to find out 'how customers might respond to an enlarged store'. This broad research problem can be broken down into a number of objectives:

- Who are the customers (ages, where they live, etc)?
- Why do customers choose to shop here?
- What range of goods do they buy here?
- Where else do they shop, and why?
- Would an enlarged shop encourage them to spend more here?

# Finding resources for the research project

Before embarking on a research project, it's important to identify the resources you have – and the resources you need – to undertake the project. This will help to avoid making over-ambitious plans, and ensure that the project can meet the aims set for it. The following checklist highlights the questions that need to be answered when considering resources.

- **Who will do the research?** In most business situations, the client will commission researchers to carry out the project. These researchers may work for an external research supplier, or could be members of a different department within the client's company. Sometimes, however, the client and the researcher will be the same person. This might happen in a small organization or business, where no separate budget exists for research and the project becomes part of the 'client's' workload. It is important to recognize, however, that this approach may have substantial hidden costs, particularly if the project has to be fitted into an already busy schedule.
- **How much information is required?** When a research project is planned, it can be tempting to try to gather information about a wide range of issues that are not directly relevant to the research problem. Don't forget that asking for more information than is needed can result in increased costs and a longer deadline for the delivery of results.

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- **What is the deadline for the project?** It is not uncommon for businesses or organizations to expect results within a very short time. However, short deadlines can result in research being rushed or findings limited. It's important that any deadline gives enough time for each step of the research process to be completed fully so that the researcher and the client can be sure that the findings are accurate and relevant to the business problem.
- **How much money is available for the project?** It's important to set aside a reasonable budget for the project. The amount of money available will, obviously, depend on the size of the organization, the in-house resources available and the extent of the problem being researched. Remember, however, that spending money on research may help the company or organization save money in the long term.

When the resources have been identified, the client can start the research process by creating a research brief.

## Creating the research brief

The ***research brief*** provides the basis for the research project. The brief, which is usually written but may take the form of a discussion between a client and a researcher, gives the parameters of the research required: the problem, the reason for the research, and the resources available.

A well-written brief can provide a great deal of support to help the researcher create a suitable ***research proposal***, showing exactly how the research project will be carried out. To be most effective, the brief should contain the following sections:

- **History of the business/organization.** This background information is important to help the researcher understand the context of the problem. This section may not be necessary if the researcher comes from inside the client's company.
- **Background to the problem.** As was shown above, accurate and relevant background information can help the researcher to refine the research problem.
- **The reason for the research.** Why does the client need the information? What decisions need to be made? Including this information will allow the researcher to identify whether the client has diagnosed the research problem accurately, or additional questions need to be asked.
- **What will be done with the information.** The client may need to publish the results or present the findings of the research to an international meeting. This information will help the researcher identify the 'deliverables' – the forms in which the information needs to be delivered. This might include a full written report, a presentation at

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board level, or via video conferencing. Including this section will enable the researcher to include the 'deliverables' in the costing.

- **The deadline for delivery of the findings.** A clear indication of timing is needed to ensure that the project designed matches the time available.
- **The budget.** The amount of money available will dictate the methods the researcher can use, and how the money will be allocated at different stages in the project.

Once the brief has been prepared, the researcher can begin to design a project to meet the client's needs. If the client is commissioning research from an external supplier it might invite several research agencies to send in proposals, and select the one it thinks is best.

## Creating a research brief: practice tasks

Good research briefs provide enough background information to allow the researcher to fully understand the context and the business problem. This background information can be drawn from a wide variety of sources, including:

- the business's financial records;
- its range of clients;
- information about its existing market, or its main competitors;
- information taken from previous research projects.

### Example

The owners of T H Stores want to know if it is advisable to enlarge their current store. The background information they could supply includes:

- information about their financial situation – how profitable the store has been since it opened;
- who the customers are, and when the store is most busy and quiet;
- what the most popular lines are, for example whether customers buy general goods, or specific types of goods;
- information on the possibility of extending the store, such as whether the owners own adjacent property or have planning permission for an extension;
- whether there are any other supermarkets nearby, or any plans for major new developments.

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Look at the following research problems. In each case, try to identify what background information could be included in the brief to help the researcher understand the business problem:

- The owner of a small restaurant wants to start selling her own brand of homemade sauces in specialist food shops.
- A local council wants residents to recycle more of their household waste.
- An electronics company wants to move into a new overseas market.

See page 137 for a list of suggestions.

## Terminology test

The following research terms were introduced in this chapter. Can you explain what each one means?

- research objectives
- research brief
- hypothesis
- research proposal

## Summary

- Remember that research will be used to help the client make a business decision. Understanding the business problem is an important first step.
- Effective research depends on well-defined objectives. Make sure that the objectives are based on a clear analysis of the client's business problem and information needs.
- Don't forget to consider resources at an early stage. Identifying the resources available will help set the parameters for the research.
- The research brief can be a formal written document produced by the client, or can develop in discussion between the client and researcher. Whichever form it takes, it should provide the range of information a researcher needs to develop a proposal.
- A good researcher will challenge the client's brief, reanalyse the problems and, if necessary, redefine the research objectives to make sure that the project produces the information the client needs. As a result, time spent discussing the problem before the research project is designed can bring important benefits to the finished research design.

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3

# How am I going to do it?

## *Selecting a research design*

## Introduction

When planning a research project, it's important to be aware of the range of research options that exists, and to choose the one that is most suitable for the research problem.

In this chapter, you will learn how to:

- identify a range of different types of research;
- choose the research design that is most appropriate for a given research problem;
- start to structure an effective research proposal.

## Defining information needs

Choosing the right ***research design*** is vital if your project is going to provide the information that is needed. To find the right design, think about the four following questions:

- Does the information already exist, or do I have to discover it for the first time?
- Does the client need facts and figures, or opinions and feelings – or both types of information?
- Should the research explore new areas, get reactions to a new idea, describe what is known already, or identify cause and effect?

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- Do I want to find out about a trend over time, or take a single 'snapshot' of the situation at one point in time?

The answer to each question will take you closer to the research design you need.

## Does the information already exist, or do I have to discover it for the first time?

It might be possible to identify a lot of information that is relevant to your research simply by reading. You might be able to find the answers to your research questions by drawing together information from a wide range of sources such as:

- existing research reports;
- the organization's own records and materials;
- competitors' websites;
- journals and magazines.

This type of research, where the researcher looks for relevant information that already exists, is called ***secondary research*** or ***desk research***. By gathering together this information and reviewing it against the research objectives, you may find that some of your research questions have already been answered.

However, you may need to talk to a range of different people to find the information you need. For example, to find out what consumers think about a new product, you will need to talk directly with those consumers. ***Primary research*** uncovers information for the first time. There are a number of ways of gathering this information, with the most common being through interviews and questionnaires, and through observing people in action.

Many research projects begin with secondary research, then move on to a phase of primary research in order to answer any questions that remain.

'Primary' and 'secondary' describe where we *find* information. However, it's also important to identify the *type* of information that is needed.

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## Primary or secondary? Practice task

In Chapter 2, you thought about the research brief for a local council that wants to encourage residents to recycle more. Below is a list of different research activities the council could carry out. In each case, decide whether the researcher is doing primary research or secondary research:

1. Searching the internet for reports on recycling in other towns or areas.
2. Interviewing residents to find out what type of waste they recycle.
3. Counting the number of people who visit the council's recycling centre on one day.
4. Calculating how much was recycled in the council's area last year, using council records.
5. Identifying the different types of waste recycled by visiting the recycling centre.
6. Contacting councils whose reports you found on the internet in order to speak with them about their programmes.

Compare your answers with those on page 138.

## Does the client need facts and figures, or opinions and feelings – or both types of information?

This question lies at the heart of a research project, and represents a traditional division in research. ***Quantitative research*** aims to quantify responses and information. Questions in quantitative studies usually ask for responses that can be counted in some way, such as yes/no answers or scales from 1 to 5. The resulting information can be expressed as statistics. For example, a quantitative report may show the percentage of people who agree or disagree with a particular statement or question, or use graphs to illustrate its findings.

However, the client might need to understand what motivates people to behave in a certain way, or why they hold certain opinions. This might be particularly important, for example, when a company wants to launch a brand new product. It might need to find out what people think of the product before it can find out how many think in this way. ***Qualitative research*** aims to uncover information about the way people think and behave, and to identify patterns in those thoughts and behaviours. Importantly, qualitative studies gather information using open-ended questions and recording the responses word for word, or by watching how people respond in different situations. The people being interviewed express their thoughts in the way they wish, and the researcher's role is to evaluate the importance and relevance of what is said and done.

Although it is easy to see quantitative and qualitative research as opposing approaches – one measuring responses and reactions, the other exploring them in more depth – many projects require both types of information. For example, a train operator that wants to

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make savings might need to find out which routes are least used. It therefore needs to have figures for the number of passengers on its various services, and which routes are the least profitable. But it might also have to consider the impact that cutting less-profitable services could have on passengers. It might be that cutting the services would have a negative impact on the way the public views the company – and this could affect its business. To find this out, the researcher might have to talk directly with those passengers and explore their experiences and opinions.

In many research projects, a qualitative stage is included near the beginning to establish the range of opinions you might expect to find around one area. These can provide the basis for a quantitative stage, where the researcher tries to establish how many of these views are shared by a large number of people. For example, a newspaper that is considering changing its size and look might ask a small group of readers for their opinions. The researcher might then identify the most common opinions and create a questionnaire to find out how many of the newspaper's readers think the same.

It is important that the questions in the quantitative stage are phrased in a way that respondents easily understand. Often, one of the roles of a qualitative stage is to determine the words that people use when thinking about the product. These words can then be used in the questionnaire, rather than the different and perhaps more technical words that the manufacturer uses.

## Quantitative or qualitative information? Practice task

In Chapter 2, you read about T H Stores' plans to enlarge its current supermarket. The research objectives for its research project are shown below. For each one, try to identify the type of information that is needed – quantitative or qualitative?

T H Stores Research Project: Research Objectives

1. Who are the customers (ages, where they live, etc)?
2. Why do customers choose to shop here?
3. What range of goods do they buy here?
4. Where else do they shop, and why?
5. Would an enlarged shop encourage them to spend more here?

Compare your answers with those on page 138.

It's important to realize that both quantitative and qualitative information may have an important role to play in a project. The job of the researcher is to identify exactly what each type of information can bring to the project, and which type is needed first.

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## Should the research explore new areas, get reactions to a new idea, describe what is known already, or identify cause and effect?

The type of information a researcher needs will often be dictated by how much is already known, and what the client wants to do with the information. The newspaper owners might be at the very beginning of the process of changing their newspaper. At this stage, they may have no idea about how their readers will react, and they may only want to explore the possible reactions to the changes. An ***exploratory research design*** allows the researcher to do this. Exploratory research projects are carried out to gather initial observations, feelings and reactions, and often to provide the basis for further research. They often rely on the gathering of qualitative information and this, in turn, will show if the idea is worth following up.

Other research studies may simply need to record the situation as it is. Many social research studies are designed to do this. A national census, for example, gathers information about the number of people living in a country: who they are, what they do, how many people live in each house and so on. The aim of the census is to describe the country at the time the survey is carried out. This ***descriptive research*** paints a very clear picture of a situation, and is therefore useful in establishing what is real, rather than assumed. Descriptive research designs often use quantitative methods to establish the facts about a situation.

A third important type of research study includes those designed to find out about the impact one thing has on another. For example, the owners of a sandwich bar might assume that cold weather will increase demand for hot sandwiches or soup. ***Causal research*** will help them to work out if their hypothesis – that cold weather causes an increase in demand for hot food – is true. The aim of causal research is to find out if there is a real link between two variables. In the case of the sandwich bar owners, they want to find out if a change to colder weather really does cause their customers to buy more hot food, or if the change they have noticed only happened by chance. Many other variables – such as customers wanting to change their diet, or being bored with the usual selection of sandwiches – might influence their buying habits. However, research can help identify if the link between cold weather and hot food is particularly strong. Knowing this could help the sandwich bar owners increase their sales by identifying the best times to offer more hot food.

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## Exploring, describing or testing links? Practice task

Look at the following research problems. In each case, decide if the required research design should be exploratory, descriptive or causal.

1. A local college wants to open a new department, offering business courses for local businesses. However, the college principal does not know if any other colleges in the area are offering similar courses. This information is vital, as too much competition could cause the courses to fail.
2. A company that owns a chain of gyms wants to know if people who want to lose weight should be advised to join an exercise class, or have a series of one-to-one classes with a personal trainer. This information will help it plan its autumn fitness classes.
3. A local council wants to know if its area has more or less crime than the national average. It has the national crime figures for the previous year for comparison.
4. A mobile phone company is thinking about producing a new style of phone for elderly people, with larger numbers and easy-to-use text features. However, the company needs to know how people would react to this innovation. Currently, all of its research has been into developing more hi-tech options.

Compare your answers with those on pages 138–39.

As well as deciding what type of information you need, you also have to consider when and how often you collect the information.

## Do I want to find out about a trend over time, or take a single 'snapshot' of the situation at one point in time?

When deciding on the timeframe of a research project, it's important to consider two questions. Do you need to find out about the situation at a single point in time, or over a longer period? And do you need to speak to the respondents only once, or a number of times? The answers to these questions will provide the final element of your research design.

Many research projects are designed to investigate a single problem at a single point in time. These ***ad hoc*** projects investigate problems that require an almost immediate answer: for example, the newspaper owners we discussed earlier need to know now if they should make the changes they plan. An ad hoc project is one that investigates a research problem once only, with the research designed specifically to answer that problem and no other. The type of research design that gathers information from a wide range of sources on one occasion is known as ***cross-sectional research***. Although an ad hoc project might take a few weeks, or in some cases months, to complete, the information from cross-sectional research provides the researcher and the client with a

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