**5. Negotiating Access and Research Ethics**

**Access to collect data**

The ability to collect data depends on gaining access/entry to the source. The feasibility to gain access to the data for your research is an important determinant of what you choose to research and how you undertake the research.

This may face certain difficulties:

1. Organisations or individuals may not be prepared to engage in additional, voluntary

activities because of time and resource constrain.

2. The request for access and cooperation may fail to interest the person who receives it and

this could be due to a number of reasons:

* a lack of perceived value in relation to the work of the organisation or individual.
* the nature of the topic because it is potential sensitive or concerns the confidentiality of the information that would be required.
* perceptions of your credibility and doubts about your competence.

3. The organisation may find itself in a difficult situation owing to external events totally

unrelated to any perceptions about the nature of the request or the person making it.

4. There are different types and levels of access and they provide different problems to gain access to the collection of the required data. E.g. physical access to an organisation, access to intended participants, continuing access in order to carry out further parts of the research or to be able to repeat the collection of data in another part of the organisation; cognitive access in order to get sufficiently close to find out valid and reliable data.

5. In the event you gain an entry to an organisation, there are other levels of access to be considered in order to realise your research strategy. It is necessary to also gain informal acceptance by the participants who form your research sample. You need to conduct yourself in an unbiased way and ethically in getting your data as reliably as possible. In other words, you must be able to reach the position where you can reveal the reality of what is occurring in relation to your research question and objectives. It is important that you are able to gain the confidence of the people in the organisation about your credibility and competence. to gain the answers to your question and objectives. If your research requires you to gain access on more than one occasion and at different times these issues must be formally relate to the management of the organisation in order avoid problems in the future.

**Strategies to gain access**

Summary of strategies to gain access

* Allowing yourself sufficient time to gain permission to gain access.
* Using existing contacts and developing new ones.
* Providing a clear account of purpose and type of access required.
* Overcoming organisational concerns about the granting of access.
* Identifying possible benefits to the organisation in granting you access.
* Using suitable language.
* Facilitating ease of reply when requesting access e.g. pro forma (page 126).
* Developing your access on an incremental basis.
* Establishing your credibility with intended participants.

**Research Ethics**

Ethical concerns extend to many areas in the research: planning the research, gaining access to organisation and to individuals, collect, analyse and report the data. Ethics actually refers to the appropriateness or acceptability of your behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work. Therefore you need to consider the ethical issues throughout the period of your research and to remain sensitive to the impact of your work on those whom you approach to help, those who provide access and cooperation, and those affected by your results.

The conduct of your research may be in the form of a code of ethics where a statement of principles and procedures for the conduct of your research is provided. This is because in a research you will be in contact with other people for your information collection. E.g. in the face-to-face interview places the researcher in a position of some power because he is able to formulate questions including probing ones, which may cause levels of discomfort.

**Ethical issues that affect the research process generally**

* privacy of possible and actual participants;
* voluntary nature of participation and the right to withdraw partially or completely from the process;
* consent and possible deception of participants;
* maintenance of the confidentiality of data provided by individuals or identifiable participants and their anonymity;
* reactions of participants to the way in which you seek to collect data;
* effects on participants of the way in which you use, analyse and report your data;
* behaviour and objectivity of the researcher.

**Implications of respecting privacy in business and management research**

Respecting privacy in business and management research means the right:

* not to participate;
* not to be harassed or offered inducement to participate or to extend the scope of participation beyond that freely given;
* not to be contacted at unreasonable times or at home (where the scope of the research is related to an organisational setting)
* of participants to determine, within reason, when they will participate in the data collection process;
* of participants to expect the researcher to abide by the extent of the consent given and not to find that the researcher wishes to widen the scope of the research without first seeking and obtaining permission;
* of participants not to be subject to any attempt to prolong the duration of an interview or observation beyond that previously agreed unless the participant freely proposes this as an option;
* of the participants not to answer any question, or set of questions, or provide any related data where requested;
* of participants not to be subjected to questions that create stress or discomfort;
* to expect agreed anonymity and confidentiality to be observed strictly both in relation to discussions with other research or organisational participants and during the reporting of findings (including from those who gain subsequent access to data).

**Ethical issues during the design and initial access stages**

* Not to pressure anyone to grant access.
* Not to interfere the privacy of the intended participant e.g. by telephoning him at unacceptable time or confronting intended participant.
* Where personal data about individuals are obtained without their consent, you have to treat the data in the strictest confidence and not to abuse it in any way.
* When a person has consented to participate in the data collection, it does not mean that the person has also consented to the way in which the data are to be used.
* Ensure that informed consent is obtained. Three situations are shown with regard to the nature of consent:

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| Lack of consent | Implied consent | Informed consent |
| Participant lacks knowledge | Participant does not full understand her/his rights | Participant consent given freely on full information about participation rights and use of data. |
| Researcher uses deception to collect data | Researcher implies consent about use of data from fact of access or return of questionnaire |

There are many ways to establish informed consent and an example in the form of a

checklist is shown below:

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| Checklist of requirements for informed consent |
| About the nature of the research   * What is its purpose? * Who is or will be undertaking it? * Is it being funded or sponsored -- if so, by whom and why? * Who is being asked to participate - i.e. broad details about the sampling frame, sample determination and size? * How far has the research project progressed? |
| About the requirements of taking part   * What type of data will be required from those who agree to take part? * How will these data be collected e.g. interview, observation or questionnaire? * How much time will be required, and on how many occasions? * What are the target dates to undertake the research and for participation? |
| About the implications of taking part and participants’ rights   * Recognition that participation is voluntary. * Recognition that participants have the right to decline to answer a question or set of questions, or to be observed in particular circumstances. * Recognition that the participants have control over the right to record any of their responses where use of a tape recorder is contemplated. * Recognition that participants may withdraw at any time. * What are the consequences of participating - possible risks, depending on the nature of the approach and purpose, and expected benefits? * What assurances will be provided about participant anonymity and data confidentiality? |
| About the use of the data collected and the way in which it will be reported   * Who will have access to the data collected? * How will the results of the research project be disseminated? * How will assurances about anonymity and confidentiality be observed at this stage? * What will happen to the data collected after the project is completed? * Where data are to be preserved, what safeguards will be ‘built in’ to safeguard the future anonymity and confidentiality of participants? |

**Ethical issues during data collection stage**

General issues irrespective of any method used to collect data:

* The privacy rights of participants.
* The maintenance of objectivity in the collection of data is to be accurately and fully and avoiding any subjectivity in what is recorded. It will affect the reliability and validity of the research instrument.
* Confidentiality and anonymity have to be shown.
* Seeking explanations in qualitative methods must be done within the appropriate and acceptable parameters.

Issues related to particular method of collecting data

* The use of observation method must be within the boundaries of what is permissible to observe e.g. not to intrude into the private life of the participants or their private telephone calls and to take note of the reaction of the participant.
* In the face-to-face interviews avoid overzealous questioning and pressing the participant to respond.
* The questions to be asked need to be considered and avoid any way demeaning to your participant.
* Seeking to conduct an interview requires to arrange a time suitable to the participant or to prolong a discussion.
* If you have observed something you are not allowed to do so, then you have to inform those affected about what has occurred and why. This is known as debriefing.

**Ethical issues to the analysis and reporting stages**

Objectivity must be maintained during the analysis of the data collected. This means to avoid selecting the data to report or misrepresenting its statistical accuracy. The ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity must be maintained during the reporting stage. Permission must be gained from the person concerned to revive any confident information.

The use of the research data by others is another ethical issue. It is viewed that the identity of the participant s should not be revealed even though the research conclusions are used to make decisions.

The introduction of the data protection legislation has led to the aspect of research assuming a greater importance and to a need for researchers to comply carefully with a set of legal requirements to protect the privacy and interests of their data subjects.

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| Summary checklist to anticipate and deal with ethical issues |
| 1. Attempt to recognise potential ethical issues that will affect your proposed research. 2. Utilise your university’s code on research ethics to guide the design and conduct of your research. 3. Anticipate ethical issues at the design stage of your research and discuss how you wil seek to control these in your research proposal. 4. Seek informed consent through the use of openness and honesty, rather than using deception. 5. Do not exaggerate the likely benefits of your research for participating organisations or individuals. 6. respect others’ rights to privacy at all stages of your research project. 7. Maintain objectivity and quality in relation to the processes you use to collect fata. 8. Recognise that the nature of a qualitatively based approach to research wil mean that there is greater scope for ethical issues to arise and seek to avoid the particular problems related to interviews and observations. 9. Avoid referring to data gained from a particular participant when talking to others, where this would allow the individual to be identified with potentially harmful consequences to that person. 10. Covert research should be considered only where activity is likely to be significant issue or where access id denied (and a covert presence is practical). However, other ethical aspects of your research should still be respected when using this approach. 11. Maintain your objectivity during the stages of analysing and reporting your research. 12. Maintain the assurance that you gave to participating organisations with regard to confidentiality of the data obtained and their organisational anonymity. 13. Consider the implications of using the internet and email carefully in relation to the maintenance of confidentiality and anonymity of your research participants and their data, before using this means to collect any data. Avoid using this technology to share any data with other participants. 14. Project individual participants by taking great care to ensure their anonymity in relation to anything that you refer to in your research project report, dissertation or thesis. 15. Consider how the collective interests of your research participants may be adversely affected by the nature of the data that you are proposing to collect, and alter the nature of your research question and objectives where this possibility is likely. Alternatively declare this possibility to those who you wish to participate in your proposed research. 16. Consider how you will use secondary data in order to protect the identities of those who contributed to its collection or who are named within it. 17. Unless necessary, base your research on genuinely anonymised data. Where it is necessary to process personal data, comply with all of the data protection legal requirements carefully. |

Questions

1. How can you differentiate between types of access, and why is it important to do this?

2. Which strategies to help to gain access are likely to apply to the following scenarios?

a. an ‘external’ researcher seeking direct access to managers who will be the research

participants;

b. an ‘external’ researcher seeking access through an organisational gatekeeper/broker to

her/his intended participants;

c. an internal researcher planning to undertake a research project within her/his employing

organisation?

3. What are the principal ethical issues you will need to consider irrespective of the

particular research methods that you use?

4. What problems might you encounter in attempting to protect the interests of participating

organisations and individuals despite the assurances that you provide