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The Essence of Research Methodology

A Concise Guide for Master and PhD Students in Management Science

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They both have been lecturers in Qualitative Methodology for the Dutch Organisation for Business Research (NOBEM) between 1989 and 2004. NOBEM was a fruitful network organisation between universities across The Netherlands providing methodology courses for PhD students in the field of business studies. This book is based on precious and pleasurable experience gained teaching together for more then a decade. A concise edition of this book appeared in Dutch under the title "De Kern van Methodologie" (2000 (first edititon) and 2004 (second edition)) published by Royal Van Gorcum Publishers (Assen).

Chapter 1
Looking at Research

Abstract This chapter outlines the structure and topics covered in this book. The central aim is to teach students how to design and conduct proper (applied) research. Research starts by identifying the research question. The questions addressed here, are linked to the 'reality' of organisations. This reality is problematic for two reasons – firstly, owing to the nature of organisations itself and secondly, the problems that arise as a result of the processes of organising. Problems in this area need to be broken down into a problem definition leading to a research goal and question. We assume that if you have a clear understanding of the problem, you implicitly also have the solution. Problems in organisations are by definition linked to various stakeholders. Two of them – the client and the researcher – often jointly work out what the problem is. The researcher often has to navigate between the requirements made by the organisation and those representing the community of science – the third important stakeholder. Dealing with the various requirements of these stakeholders creates tension for the researcher and he needs to reflect carefully before taking any action. Subsequently, handling the framed problem properly requires methodology. That is what this book is all about.

1.1 Introduction

Imagine the following situation: a company's manager calls up your institute and asks if there is a student available to conduct research into the way quality management systems can be better implemented. By making this telephone call the manager thinks he has found an efficient and maybe even effective solution to his problem and, at the same time, has done the institute – or rather the student – a favour by offering a trainee post. Maybe there is even some money involved! Perhaps he also hopes that the student – once he is carrying out the assignment in

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