How to Keep Your Research Project on Track
How to Keep Your Research Project on Track
Insights from When Things Go Wrong

Edited by
Keith Townsend
Associate Professor of Employment Relations, Griffith Business School, Griffith University, Australia

Mark N.K. Saunders
Professor of Business Research Methods, Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, UK

Edward Elgar
Cheltenham, UK • Northampton, MA, USA
Contents

About the editors ix
List of contributors x

1 Shit happens, but you have a job to do!
Keith Townsend and Mark N.K. Saunders 1

PART I GETTING STARTED

2 Developing research ideas
Bill Lee 11

3 On the path to enlightenment? Reviewing the literature systematically – or not
Céline Rojon 20

4 The master and apprentice: lessons from two PhD supervisors and a recent PhD graduate
Jillian Cavanagh, Hannah Meacham and Timothy Bartram 28

5 ‘Finders, keepers, losers, weepers!’: a doctoral candidate’s reality of changing thesis advisors
Polly Black 36

6 Reply all, tweets and social media: technological friends for developing a professional identity that need to be treated with care
Hugh T.J. Bainbridge 44

7 Coming up with a research question: opinions, feedback and networking
Deisi Yunga 46

PART II GETTING DATA

8 Finding epistemology
Neve Isaeva 51
9 Bounce back, firewalls and legal threats: reaching respondents using Internet questionnaires
Mark N.K. Saunders and David E. Gray

10 Finding the truth amongst conflicting evidence
Heather Short

11 Rolling with the punches
Sharyn Rundle-Thiele, Julia Carins and Christiane Stock

12 Access, involvement and interference: encounters and experiences of case studies
Kenneth Cafferkey

13 Is a pilot necessary?
Polly Black

14 The precarious nature of access
Wojciech Marek Kwiatkowski

15 The diminishing dissertation: seven cases to three+
Ashlea Kellner

16 So, I guess we’re probably finished then
Keith Townsend

17 Your incentives are too lucrative: caution in rewarding interview participants
Catheryn Khoo-Lattimore

18 Sales skills for researchers
Colin Hughes

19 Being flexible in interviews: make sure that you account for power imbalance
Qian Yi Lee

PART III GETTING IT TOGETHER

20 ‘. . . Just one goat’: the importance of interpretation in qualitative data analysis
Keith Townsend and Rebecca Loudoun

21 Analysing quantitative data
Sameer Qaiyum and Catherine L. Wang

22 When the words just won’t come
Dawn C. Duke
Contents

23 I’m a paper person or maybe not? 138
   Ilenia Bregoli

24 A mug of stress 140
   Rohit Talwar

25 Excuse me . . . should that comma be there? Dealing with awkward questions 142
   Kenneth Cafferkey

26 Finding the time to progress your research, and the big lie that you are part of! 144
   Jennifer Kilroy

PART IV GETTING FINISHED

27 Authorship in action 149
   Kate L. Daunt and Aoife M. McDermott

28 ‘They think I’m stupid’: dealing with supervisor feedback 157
   Amanda Lee

29 Grasping roses or nettles? Losing and finding ourselves in research projects 164
   Kiran Trehan, Alex Kevill and Jane Glover

30 Using social media to enhance your research 174
   Angelique Gatsinzi

31 Organisations, clients and feminists: getting in, coming back and having fun 184
   Marian Baird

32 Born to . . . write, rewrite and rewrite again 194
   Mark N.K. Saunders

33 ‘I’m over it . . .’ 197
   Peter J. Jordan

Index 199
Editors

Keith Townsend is Associate Professor at Griffith University, Australia. His research spans a wide range of areas including a focus on line managers (including frontline managers), employee involvement and participation in decision-making, industrial relations and human resource management and work–life balance. These broad themes are brought together with an overarching approach to better understanding the complexities of managing people within the modern workplace. His research has been published in journals including Human Resource Management Journal, Work, Employment and Society and British Journal of Management. He has also published a number of research methods books, including Method in the Madness: Research Stories You Won’t Read in Textbooks and Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods on Human Resource Management: Innovative Techniques.

Mark N.K. Saunders is Professor of Business Research Methods and Director of PhD Programmes at Birmingham Business School, University of Birmingham, UK. His research interests include research methods (in particularly participant selection, and methods of understanding organisational relationships) and human resource aspects of the management of change (in particular trust, and organisational learning). He also has an emerging interest in small and medium-sized enterprises. His research has been published in journals including the British Journal of Management, Human Relations, Journal of Small Business Management and Social Science and Medicine. He is co-editor of the Sage book series Understanding Research Methods for Business and Management Students and editor of the Edward Elgar Handbooks of Research Methods series. He has also co-authored a number of research methods books including Research Methods for Business Students (currently in its 7th edition), Handbook of Research Methods on Trust (currently in its 2nd edition) and Handbook of Research Methods on Human Resource Development.
Contributors

**Hugh T.J. Bainbridge** focuses on workforce diversity with a specialisation in the experience of employees who, in addition to their job, also provide informal unpaid care to family members with disabilities.

**Marian Baird** AO is Professor of Gender and Employment Relations and Chair of Work and Organisational Studies at the University of Sydney Business School, Australia. Marian is a policy-focused and action-oriented academic.

**Timothy Bartram** is a Professor of Human Resource Management in the Business School at La Trobe University, Australia. His research is in the area of HRM in healthcare, Indigenous Men’s Sheds and disability in the workplace. Tim is currently the Co-editor of the *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, Australia’s leading management journal.

**Polly Black** is Professor of Practice in Business and Entrepreneurship, and the John C. Whitaker Jr Executive Director of the Centre for Innovation, Creativity and Entrepreneurship at Wake Forest University in the USA. Her research focuses on consumer behaviour and trust.

**Ilenia Bregoli** is a Senior Lecturer in Marketing at the University of Lincoln, UK. She considers herself a pragmatist and in her research she uses mixed methods.

**Kenneth Cafferkey** is currently an Assistant Professor at the Graduate School of Business, Universiti Tun Abdul Razak, Malaysia. His research interests include high-performance work systems, ideological orientations towards HRM, organisational climate, and employee perspectives and experiences of HRM.

**Julia Carins** is a Researcher at Griffith University, Australia and a Defence Food and Nutrition Scientist. Julia takes a social marketing approach to improve eating behaviour for individual and societal benefit.

**Jillian Cavanagh** is the Business School Graduate Research Co-ordinator and Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management at La Trobe University, Australia. She has undertaken commission research on Men’s Sheds and Indigenous Men’s Groups, and she researches disability in the workplace.
Kate L. Daunt is a Reader in Marketing and Deputy Director of Postgraduate Studies at Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, UK.

Dawn C. Duke is the Head of Researcher Development within the University of Surrey's Doctoral College, UK. She leads the team that supports the transferable/employability skills of researchers across all disciplines.

Angelique Gatsinzi is a final-year doctoral student at the University of Surrey researching child labour in artisanal and small-scale mining in sub-Saharan Africa.

Jane Glover is a Research Fellow at the University of Birmingham, UK. Her research interests lie in small family firms with a particular focus on rural firms. Jane conducts qualitative research using multiple approaches including interviews, participant observation and documentary analysis.

David E. Gray is Professor of Leadership and Organisational Behaviour at the University of Greenwich, UK. His research interests include research methods, management learning (particularly coaching and mentoring), professional identity, action learning, reflective learning, management learning in SMEs and the factors that contribute to SME success.

Colin Hughes is a Department Head at the College of Business, Dublin Institute of Technology, Republic of Ireland. His PhD research at the University of Birmingham focuses on trust building in virtual sales teams.

Neve Isaeva is a doctoral researcher at the University of Birmingham, UK. Her research interests include, but are not limited to, trust and distrust, research philosophy and methodology, and culture.

Peter J. Jordan is a Professor of Organizational Behaviour at the Griffith Business School, Griffith University, Australia. Peter’s research interests include emotions in organizations, team performance and psychological entitlement in organizations.

Ashlea Kellner is a Research Fellow at Griffith University’s Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing, Australia. She completed her doctoral thesis in 2012, and is currently involved in research relating to HRM systems and high performance, people management in healthcare, and HR control in the franchise relationship.

Alex Kevill is Lecturer in Enterprise at the University of Leeds, UK. His research interests include dynamic capabilities, micro-enterprises and social entrepreneurship. Alex completed his doctoral research.

**Catheryn Khoo-Lattimore** is a Senior Lecturer in Tourism and Hospitality at Griffith University, Australia. Her research focuses on women travellers and family tourism, and often, qualitatively, from an Asian perspective.

**Jennifer Kilroy** completed her PhD at NUI Galway, Republic of Ireland, while working full time in a HRM position in a multinational firm. She continues her practitioner life while publishing from her PhD findings.

**Wojciech Marek Kwiatkowski** is a Doctoral Researcher at Alliance Manchester Business School, University of Manchester, UK.

**Amanda Lee** is a Senior Lecturer in Human Resource Management at Coventry University, UK and Chartered Fellow of the CIPD. Prior to a career in academia she worked in retail, construction and the NHS.

**Bill Lee** is Professor of Accounting at Sheffield University Management School, UK. He has a long-term interest in research methods and is an editor of Sage’s Mastering Business Research Methods series.

**Qian Yi Lee** is a PhD candidate at Griffith University, Australia, exploring performance management in the public sector. She has an honours degree also from Griffith and a MBA from Korea University.

**Rebecca Loudoun** is Associate Professor at Griffith University, Australia. Her research and teaching focuses in the areas of human resource management, industrial relations, and health and safety management.

**Aoife M. McDermott** is a Reader in Human Resource Management and coordinator of the Cardiff Health Organisation and Policy Studies (CHOPS) group at Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, UK.

**Hannah Meacham** recently completed her PhD at La Trobe University, Australia. She completed in two and a half years on the topic of disability in the workplace. Hannah has already published three refereed journal articles in the area of HR and disability.

**Sameer Qaiyum** is a Senior Lecturer in Strategic Management at Liverpool Business School, Liverpool John Moores University, UK. His research interests are in the areas of strategic management and innovation.

**Céline Rojon** is a Lecturer in Human Resource Management at the University of Edinburgh Business School, UK. Her research interests include work performance, assessment, selection and development, research methods and cross-cultural studies.
Sharyn Rundle-Thiele is Director, Social Marketing at Griffith, Griffith University, Australia. Drawing on her commercial marketing background Sharyn’s research focuses on applying marketing tools and techniques to change behaviour for the better.

Mark N.K. Saunders is Professor of Business Research Methods in the Birmingham Business School at the University of Birmingham, UK

Heather Short lectures in business and management at Portsmouth University, UK and is Managing Editor of Human Resource Development Quarterly. Having worked in multinational organisations and run her own small and medium enterprise (SME), her research interests include e-learning and SMEs.

Christiane Stock is an Associate Professor at the University of Southern Denmark. Her research focuses on young people’s health and health behaviour and on intervention research for behaviour change.

Rohit Talwar is a PhD researcher in marketing at the University of Birmingham, UK. His research focuses on consumer experiences generated by interactive installations in public spaces with a postmodern lens.

Keith Townsend is Associate Professor of Employment Relations in the Griffith Business School at Griffith University, Australia.

Kiran Trehan is Professor of Leadership and Enterprise Development at the University of Birmingham, UK. Kiran is a key contributor to debates on critical approaches to enterprise development, leadership and diversity and how it can be applied in a variety of small business and policy domains.

Catherine L. Wang is a Professor of Entrepreneurship and Strategy at Brunel Business School, Brunel University London, UK. Her research interests are in the areas of entrepreneurship and strategic management.

Deisi Yunga (European Doctorate in Teacher Education Programme – EdiTE) is an MSC Early Stage Researcher at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Hungary. She is interested in topics related to adult learning.
7. Coming up with a research question: opinions, feedback and networking

Deisi Yunga

At the beginning of my doctoral programme, I had very ambitious plans for my thesis. My goal was to come up with an all-encompassing research question that, after being answered, would solve one, if not more of the problems within my research field. It was a little naive, to be sure.

The first months of my programme were, to say the least, full of concern and self-inflicted stress. I wanted to absorb every piece of information available in my research field. This approach got me lost in the literature and I did not know which path to follow. It seemed that in each article I read, there was a new piece of information or idea that could enrich my research question—Eureka!—or at least, I thought so every time I would finish reading a paper. In the end, I realised that although these ideas were often good on their own, they would eventually lead me in different directions.

Some months later, when I thought I had my ideas clear, I nervously presented my initial research question to some of my colleagues. I received mostly very valuable feedback. However, the most frequent advice was ‘it’s too big, narrow it down’ and each of my colleagues gave me ideas on how to do this and what literature to read. However, each colleague recommended very diverse literature that started with Plato and ended with last month’s publication of the most popular indexed journals in my field – only 2400 years’ worth of material to review! I was going to get lost – yet again!

I wasn’t expecting this: why? Well, at the time I thought that because my colleagues belonged to the same specific subfield, they would naturally recommend to me the same, or at least similar, literature. I would just have to read it to clarify and narrow my research question down.

My initial naivety became panic. At this point, I was pretty aware of my limits. I knew that trying to integrate dozens of different articles and my colleagues’ opinions was, without doubt, impossible and I would inevitably broaden my research question again.

So my first learning was: just don’t do it . . .

Every time somebody gave me advice about my research, she or he did
Coming up with a research question

so (probably with the best intentions) from the narrow perspective of her or his own specific research and experience. However, rather than getting completely lost in the initial excitement of a new paper or book that appears relevant, I now evaluate the methodology, findings and theories deeply before deciding whether or not to make them part of my research.

I’ve also learned to scan literature people recommend. To my surprise, I can make an unexpectedly fast selection of the papers that truly interest me and appear relevant and discard the ones that don’t. I am finally on track and defining the characteristics of my own research study.

This experience of massive feedback also heightened my awareness of the world outside my supervisory team, a world full of experts, some of whom could help me. I decided to be more proactive, contacting researchers in conferences and through email. The worst they could tell me was ‘I have no time for you’, assuming that they would answer me at all.

When looking for experts in my field and seeking advice, I didn’t find the ‘bow tie-wearing martinets’ I always pictured the H-index 20+ university professors would be. Instead, I found a dynamic network of knowledgeable people who have advised me, not just about my research question but also about methodological design, possible outcomes, and what to do if things go wrong. Of course, not all answers have been positive. Sometimes, I’ve been told to contact them later upon reaching a more advanced stage in my research and others simply have not replied. Yet, at the end of the day, I gained much more than I expected.

Not surprisingly my second learning and advice is: do not be afraid of contacting seemingly unreachable experts in the field. I write emails, join research networks, approach people in conferences, and so on. I’ve expanded my network and hopefully begun to enrich my research and my future work. Realistically you never know if the person who answers you will become your greatest advisor, next collaborator, best friend – or all of the above.

In retrospect, I’m glad of my initial naivety because it made me discover what was out there. My panic made me aware of my own abilities as a researcher and the need to develop. I’m thankful for the network in my field whose collective experiences and opinions have helped me begin to develop my own experience, shape my research question, and start to find my own angle on one aspect of one of my initial research questions.