Answers to additional case studies

*Case studies are numbered according to the chapter for which they are most relevant. For example, the cases which are most relevant for Chapter 2 are numbered 2a, 2b, etc. These are followed by an ongoing case divided into three parts.*

*A complete list of additional cases available to students on the Companion Website (without answers) is given in Appendix 3 of the Instructor’s manual.*

*Unless stated answers to case studies are written by the book’s authors.*

Case 1a: Business and management research1

1. How do you think Isabelle’s understanding of theory and method changed in adopting   
 the approach she chose?

Isabelle became increasingly aware of alternative approaches to research other than the more traditional one associated with Positivism. She conceived this alternative approach using a more qualitative method could be just as rigorous and have some practical relevance. She could understand how even the physical sciences which had influenced Positivism where not always as ‘scientific’ as they assumed. This understanding she conceived from reading the seminal work of Kuhn on Scientific Revolutions. Thus, because of this it was arguably more difficult for researchers to be critical of social scientists merely on the grounds of being less rigorous and indeed systematic. She also argued that research on managers could be more valid and meaningful if she adopted a more qualitative approach.

2. What particular knowledge and skills did she develop in preparing this research?   
 Isabelle had developed her knowledge and skills in conducting her research.

Researching life histories requires a knowledge and understanding of in-depth interviews and   
careful use of secondary data. Before her in-depth interviews with managers on how they coped   
with pressure at work, she decided to interview some family members using a technique   
pioneered by Bertaux (1995). These practical family history exercises could sensitise one to the   
interplay between the individual and the wider social structure in which they are embedded.

The other knowledge and skills developed were ethical concerns. Problems could arise because   
there are potential dangers with life history interviews. Given that life history is an introspective   
process for the interviewee, this process may not always be a positive experience, it could be   
negative. This process may then become problematic for the interviewee. Reflecting on ones   
experiences may be fraught with any number of psychological pitfalls. This requires careful   
interviewing so that the interviewee feels that the experience has been a worthwhile experience.

Equally, the vulnerability of the participant in this kind of study requires the exercise of   
informed consent. As well as taking care during the collection of the information, she needed to   
ensure that the closing of the interview is done with sensitivity. This should then make it   
possible for the interviewee to contact the researcher at a later date. Isabelle realised that   
conducting such interviews, given the theoretical, methodological and ethical issues involved   
required a psychological ‘maturity’ on her part if the process was to be successful.

1 Answers to case study provided by Michael Savvas

Saunders *et al*., *Research Methods for Business Students*, 7th edition,   
 Answers to Additional Case Studies

3. What problems do you think she would have anticipated in conducting research into   
 pressure and coping among managers that her literature review may not have   
 identified?

The problems she would have anticipated include getting access to managers, usually a problem in this type of research. She would have to interview a number of managers. This would require obtaining their consent and expecting a longer interview. This type of qualitative research would arguably take more time than giving out a postal questionnaire.

Secondly, managers may be reluctant admit that the pressure they are under can lead to problems. Pressure and coping among managers could thus be problematic enough in itself, let alone all the other issues highlighted above.

Reference

Bertaux, D. (1995) Social genealogies commented on and compared: an instrument for   
observing social mobility in ‘the Longue Duree’, *Current Sociology,* Vol. 43, (2/3), 67-88.

Case 1b: Reporting evidence from business and management research2

1. If Katie is correct, and evidence doesn’t necessarily tell managers the best way to take   
 action, do we still need evidence?

If academics were only to generate evidence that addresses managerially-defined problems then they would ultimately be managers’ servants. In the long term, many argue, without ‘blue skies’ research - work that is not meant to be applied to a specific ‘problem’ but done out of curiosity and without taking account of the vested interests of managers - there would be nothing to move our knowledge on to new ways of thinking.

2. Can Katie’s decision to submit a report she thinks is misleading, be justified on ethical   
 grounds?

There is no definitive ‘answer’ to this quandary. But it is one that many academics face, because   
their research is often funded by people in industry and government who clearly would like the   
research to point in a particular direction. As students read on the book, they will learn about   
research ethics and ethical dilemmas. The key with this question is that it starts a debate and   
raises the importance of ethics in research. Ask the student ‘What would you do?’

3. In what ways are the kinds of research projects that most managers want to read   
 likely to be different from the kinds of research projects that get high marks at   
 university?

In general, managers need to be ‘action-orientated.’ This means that they tend to want reports   
that are short, easy to read and (appear to) tell them what to do - perhaps like the Deloitte report   
that Katie found. This orientation is reflected in a well known managerial cliché: ‘don’t bring   
me problems, I want solutions!’ Academic work, in contrast, tends to emphasise complexity and   
paradox - dwelling on the problems and why the solutions may not be as easy as they appear!

2 Answers provided by Mark Learmonth