Negotiating access and Research Ethics

MBA MODULAR
MBA 8109: Research Methods
Learning outcomes

By the end of this session, you should be:

- Aware of issues related to gaining access to research sites and participants.
- Able to evaluate a range of strategies to help you gain access.
- Aware of the importance of research ethics and the need to act ethically.
- Able to anticipate and address ethical issues at each stage of your research.
Introduction

• Business and management research almost inevitably involves human participants.
• Ethical concerns are greatest where research involves human participants, regardless of method (face to face or impersonal).
• Most universities have Research Ethics guidelines to guide researchers.
1. Traditional access:

- Involves face-to-face interactions (to conduct experiments, interviews, focus groups, observations or to administer questionnaires).

- First level of access is physical access or entry that is usually determined by a gate-keeper.
Issues associated with access

• The gate-keeper may be concerned about:
  – Perceived value-add to the organization.
  – Confidentiality of the information required e.g. corporate governance practices.
  – Perceptions about your credibility.
  – Doubts about your competence.

• Your request for access may either be accepted (with conditions) or denied.
Issues associated with access

• Negotiating access is a continuous process and not just an initial or single event.
• Physical access to an organization is formally granted through its management.
• Important for the researcher to gain the acceptance and trust of intended participants within the organization who will eventually provide actual access to the data (cognitive access).
Issues associated with access

• The nature of access negotiated will affect the **quality** of your data in terms of:
  – Selection of a suitable sample of participants.
  – Adequacy of primary and secondary data.
  – Continued access to data (longitudinal studies).

• Start thinking about access to data at the Research Proposal stage. Is it **feasible** to gain access?
Issues associated with access

• Another issue is **sufficiency** of access: will it allow you to answer all your research questions and fulfil your overall objective?
  
  – Plan ahead of your formal request for access.

• Be aware that it is not always possible to do the desirable. Trade-offs are typical.
Gaining access as an external researcher

• Need to negotiate access at each level – physical, cognitive and continuing.
• Goodwill from the organization and its members is critical.
  – You need to demonstrate research competence and integrity.
  – The gate-keeper can enhance your credibility by introducing you to the relevant people and creating awareness of your research.
Gaining access as an internal researcher

• Need to obtain formal management approval.
• Your status in the organization may pose problems in gaining cognitive access e.g. a change management project proposed by your line manager may be viewed with suspicion.
• Need to maintain researcher objectivity and guard against bias.
Issues associated with access

2. **Internet-mediated access:**
   - Quantitative and Qualitative data collection techniques are increasingly Internet-based.
   - It is still important to negotiate initial access on a personal basis (for organizations).
   - **Virtual access** can be negotiated where you know the respondents (members of your class; industry group etc.)
Strategies to gain access

1. Ensure you are familiar with the organization or group before you initiate contact.
2. Allow yourself sufficient time.
3. Use existing contacts and develop new ones.
4. Provide a clear account of your research purpose and type of access required.
5. Proactively address any concerns that the organization may have about granting access.
Strategies to gain access

6. Identify possible benefits to the organization as a result of granting you access.

7. Use appropriate language e.g. learn from your experience, hold conversations with staff, write a report etc.

8. Facilitate replies when requesting access e.g. offer to call back and follow up request.
Strategies to gain access

9. Develop access incrementally.
   - 1\textsuperscript{st} request to conduct interviews.
   - 2\textsuperscript{nd} request to undertake observation.
   - 3\textsuperscript{rd} request to audio-record interactions being observed.

10. Establish your credibility.
    - Full disclosure of research purpose.
    - Assurance about confidentiality and anonymity.
    - Professional conduct.
Research ethics

• Research ethics refers to the standards of behaviour that guide your conduct in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work, or are affected by it.

• Codes of ethics are intended to avoid malpractice and harm while promoting ethical practice and private or public good.
Ethical principles

1. Integrity and objectivity of the researcher
   – This means acting openly, being truthful and promoting accuracy.
   – Researchers must avoid misrepresentation of data and findings, reckless commitments or insincere promises.
   – Any conflict of interest or commercial association should be declared.
Ethical principles

2. Respect for others
   – A researcher’s role is based on the development of trust and respect.
   – The rights of all persons should be recognized and their dignity respected.

3. Avoidance of harm
   – Any harm to participants must be avoided. This includes physical harm, pain, discomfort, embarrassment, anxiety, stress or conflict.
Ethical principles

4. Privacy of participants
5. Voluntary participation (right to withdraw)
6. Informed consent of participants
7. Ensuring confidentiality of data and maintaining anonymity of participants
8. Responsibility in the analysis of data and accurate reporting of findings
Ethical principles

9. Legal compliance in the management of data
10. Ensuring the safety of the researcher
Internet-mediated research

• The ethical issues and dilemmas associated with the use of blogs, bulletin boards, chat rooms and social media include:
  ▪ Scope for deception
  ▪ Lacking respect and causing harm
  ▪ Confidentiality of data and anonymity of participants’ identities
  ▪ Privacy and copyright (harvesting data)
  ▪ Safety of the researcher
Data protection and management

i. Keep all primary data securely
   – Do not delegate storage of data to third parties.
   – Anonymised versions of data need to be kept securely but separately from data that includes personal identifiers. This includes copies of original notes or backups of recordings.

ii. Use it only for the specified purpose (research)

iii. Keep it for no longer than necessary.