Additional Case Studies

N.B. Case studies are numbered according to the chapter for which they are most relevant. For example, the case that is most relevant for Chapter 2 is numbered 2. There is no case study associated with Chapter 1.

Case A2: The use of internal and word-of-mouth recruitment methods

A few years ago Mark and Phil thought it would be fun to work together on a piece of research. They also hoped it would benefit their continuing development as researchers. Mark's research background (strength) has its origins in the recruitment and subsequent mobility of labour. His research methods skills emphasise the quantitative approach, although he had undertaken a variety of qualitative research projects. Phil's strength is as a mainstream HRM academic with an bias towards understanding the processes of everyday HRM. His research methods skills are mainly qualitative. Unlike many students Mark's and Phil's research area was one in which they were aware of the literature. However, despite this, they were in a similar situation to many students. They wanted to undertake a new piece of work that would excite them and be of some practical benefit to organisations.

In the early 1990s Mark had carried out a survey of recruitment methods used by local authority employers. This had built on and developed research he had undertaken as part of his doctoral thesis approximately 10 years earlier. While discussing the findings in the coffee shop Phil agreed to take a more detailed look to see whether there was anything of practical significance for managers. During discussion a few weeks later an issue that they felt was fascinating emerged. Throughout the previous decade there appeared to have been a dominance of internal and word-of-mouth recruitment. Internal recruitment is where recruitment is restricted to an organisation's existing employees. Word-of-mouth is where recruitment relies on the organisation's existing employees to tell other people in their social networks about the vacancies.

Through their discussion Phil and Mark developed a clear research idea that was in both their areas of academic strength. This was concerned with explaining why, given the centrality of equal opportunities to local authorities' recruitment, internal and word-of-mouth recruitment was so dominant. They felt this idea was fascinating because, on the face of it, both forms of recruitment were alien to the principle of equal opportunities. Quantitative evidence from Mark's survey showed that the phenomena of internal and word-of-mouth recruitment were dominant. Mark's experience of working in local authorities supported this. They now needed to refine the idea, develop a clear research question and objectives, and write their research proposal.

They adopted what we felt was a rational process. They both drafted outline proposals simultaneously and criticised each other's work. This led to an outline proposal that integrated their ideas and encompassed research questions and objectives.

Next they reviewed the literature to establish what work had been done on this aspect of recruitment. The overall conclusion from the empirical research, undertaken in all sectors of the economy, was that word-of-mouth and internal recruitment methods were still important. However, none of this work concentrated on local authorities. Moreover, they thought that awareness of the importance of equal opportunities would have grown since the time when the research was conducted. Their research proposal still seemed valid, and the literature confirmed its relevance. In addition, reading the literature had suggested possible new research questions. However, they still needed to discuss their proposal with other people.

The first discussion was with an equal opportunities officer with a London borough. He was not excited by their research idea, and commented that he was not surprised by the survey findings. These, he said, were due to the need to redeploy people who would otherwise be made redundant. The second discussion was with a personnel specialist from a large county authority. Her response can be paraphrased as 'well what do you expect.... the pay for manual positions is relatively low so there are few applicants.... we therefore have to rely on word of mouth.'

Mark and Phil were depressed, to say the least. They thought they had a fascinating research question. Yet the first two people they had discussed their ideas with had shown them the answer was obvious. They had spent a great deal of time refining their research proposal and in searching the literature. Their immediate reaction was to abandon the research completely. However, a few days later they decided to revise their research ideas. They decided to discard the local authorities and equal opportunities perspectives and focus on the notification channels used by employers. Their revised research question was: 'Why do organisations use word-of-mouth recruitment?'

Case study questions

1. Do you think that Phil and Mark had good reasons for choosing the research topic initially?
   Give reasons for your answer.

2. Draft a possible first research question for Mark's and Phil's idea as described in the first three paragraphs of the case study.

3. What lessons can you learn form Phil's and Mark's experience?

4. To what extent do you feel that Mark's and Phil's final research question meets the criteria outlined in Box 2.1?

5. **Case A3: The development of discount warehouse clubs**

Jane was keen to start her research project early. She had decided on her dissertation topic – the development of discount warehouse clubs in the UK. She spent two days each week in the library over the vacation reading and noting all the articles she could find, and wrote her literature review. In order to give her project tutor plenty of time to read the draft she sent it to him a week before the tutorial.

Jane arrived at her tutorial looking forward to her tutor's praise. 'Well Jane, you've obviously worked over the summer, but there's still a great deal of reading to be done....' Jane was crestfallen as her tutor explained the problems with her literature review. Every article was taken from either a trade magazine or newspaper, and there was not a single mention of any academic underpinning. The review consisted almost entirely of quotations from the articles, a couple of paragraphs being devoted to each article. Although the ideas contained in the articles were summarised they were not ordered in any logical manner, and the purpose was unclear.

'Why didn't you use the Internet abstract and indexes such as Emerald Abstracts?' asked her tutor. 'I did,' Jane replied, 'but there's nothing written on the development of discount warehouse clubs in the UK.' After considerable discussion about how to search the literature and the purpose of the literature review in her project report Jane went away feeling happier. She now knew that quotations should only be used sparingly in her review. The literature she had discovered in the trade magazines was still likely to be useful. Of most importance, she liked her tutor's suggestion of placing her research in the context of the spread of retailing innovation and, in particular, how innovations crossed from North America to the UK.

Over the next few months Jane diligently searched the tertiary literature and found lots of relevant items. Articles in the university library were noted. Those not available from the university library were obtained using inter-library loan. Appropriate sections from books on retailing innovation were photocopied. By February, she had two lever arch files full of information.

Jane began to redraft her literature review. This time she was determined to write a critical review. She made sure that her arguments flowed, and that the review was focused upon the transfer of retail innovations from North America to the UK. The work of different authors was clearly referenced. This time she included only two quotations, which she felt added significantly to her argument. She completed her draft, left it for a week, read it again and made further amendments. She was now ready to show it to her project tutor again.

This time Jane's project tutor seemed far more pleased. He suggested a few areas where points needed further explanation or justification, but that was all. Just as Jane was leaving she asked 'You've got all the references together for your bibliography haven't you?' Jane responded that she was going to do that next weekend, and that she had noted them all down on the items as she was collecting them.

That weekend Jane sat down at her word processor to type in her bibliography. She checked the format in the project assessment criteria and discovered that she should use the Harvard system. Working through her files she entered in alphabetical order all the items she had read, including those not directly referenced in the text. Unfortunately, she discovered three journal articles where the page numbers had been missed off by the photocopier when she had copied them. She decided to sort these out on Monday morning.

On Monday morning the library was packed, and all microcomputers with Internet access were booked solid until 8 p.m. As no machines were available Jane booked one for 8 p.m. to 9 p.m. and went to the canteen. Over her coffee, she tried to remember which databases and key words she had used for her searches. At 8 p.m. she started to re-create her searches using the Anbar on-line database. Within 20 minutes she had found two of the three missing sets of page numbers. The third journal article did not appear to be indexed in Anbar. Then she remembered, she had also used GeoAbstracts, so accessed that database and recreated her search again. Within a few minutes, she had found the missing page numbers.

In the following months Jane browsed both the current periodicals section of the library and the lists provided by Uncover on the Internet. As relevant material was published she incorporated it into her literature review. Later that year she submitted her research project. It received a good upper second class mark.

Case study questions

1. How might Jane have overcome the problems of only finding relevant articles in trade journals and newspapers?

2. Why did Jane type all the items she had in her files into her word processor rather than just those she had referred to directly in the text?

3. What lessons can you learn from Jane’s experience?

Case A4: The effectiveness of computer-based training at Falcon Insurance Company

(The techniques used in this case may appear complicated when you first read about them. Do not worry; the case is included as an example of a research strategy, not techniques. Further details on the techniques of observation, in-depth interviews and questionnaires can be found in Chapters 8, 9 and 10 respectively.)

Ingrid works for Falcon Insurance, a large UK insurance company offering insurance in the life and motor markets. As part of its training portfolio Falcon Insurance was considering the introduction of computer based training (CBT) for junior-level courses such as telephone manner. In order to make an informed decision about introducing CBT, Falcon needed to answer the question: Is CBT an effective training medium? After discussion with her project tutor Ingrid decided this would make a good research project. An extensive literature review enabled her to define the term ‘effective’ and generate four interrelated research questions:

- Is CBT effective for individual learning?
- Is CBT effective for group study?
- Is learning in groups more effective than self-study?
- Does a match of training media to learning style improve learning?

Ingrid wanted the research to provide both quantitative results, which described the outcomes of CBT in relation to other forms of training, and qualitative results, which explored trainees’ opinions and behaviours and the meanings behind these outcomes.

In order to describe and explore the effect of CBT on learning Ingrid decided to undertake a study that examined the impact of this type of training over an extended period. The independent variable was the training media used, and the dependent variable the learning that took place. A review of the literature suggested that four distinct groups would be needed:

1. self-study CBT: using the CBT software individually without a trainer to facilitate and provide input;
2. group study CBT: using the same CBT medium but studying as a group of trainees without a trainer to facilitate and provide input;
3. traditional training course: using the message and content of the CBT but applying it to a facilitated group in which no technology was used and the input was provided by a trainer;
4. control group: where no training took place during the study period to provide a bench mark.

A representative sample of 120 of Falcon Insurance’s employees was selected and 30 were allocated to each group at random. Data were collected using a combination of questionnaires, observation and unstructured interviews (Table 1).

Table 1 The research strategy

Group	Action taken:			
	Immediately before training	**During training**	**Immediately after training**	**Six months after training**
1. Self-study CBT	Questionnaire and learning styles Questionnaire	Descriptive observation	Questionnaire and separate in-depth interview	Questionnaire
2. Group study CBT	Questionnaire and learning styles Questionnaire	Descriptive observation	Questionnaire and separate in-depth interview	Questionnaire
3. Traditional training	Questionnaire and learning styles Questionnaire	Descriptive observation	Questionnaire and separate in-depth interview	Questionnaire
4. Control group	Questionnaire			Questionnaire

Ingrid decided to use pre-tests and post-tests on each of the four distinct groups. These data would be collected using a questionnaire on three separate occasions: immediately before training, immediately after training, and 6 months after training.

A confidential self-administered questionnaire, to measure quantitatively any changes in individuals' knowledge and understanding over the study period, was designed and pilot-tested. Questions tested the respondents' knowledge and understanding that should have been developed by the training they would receive. The control group was also tested, despite receiving no training, to measure any change in knowledge and understanding due to other factors. In addition, questions were included to measure the trainees' reactions to various aspects of the training as well as attribute questions to assess the representativeness of the sample. The questionnaire was administered to all four groups for the pre-test and, with minor alterations, the post-test stages. In addition, all respondents who actually undertook some form of training were asked to complete a learning styles questionnaire.

An important part of Ingrid's research was to examine the social context of the groups studied, and to provide additional data with which to compare and explore the results of the study. Descriptive observation was used to collect data on the behaviour of each of the three groups of trainees, paying particular attention to events and observed actions and behaviours. Observers were given a sheet on which they recorded this information in a structured manner using a predetermined scheme. This scheme was developed to minimise the impact of subjectivity and inconsistency on the recorded response. Observations were recorded while observing each of the three trainee groups, the observer remaining only as an observer and not engaging with the group.

Ingrid used unstructured interviews to collect views about group learning from a stratified sample of trainees immediately after the training. In particular, she asked trainees to discuss their views on learning in a group and whether they preferred this to self-study. Trainees who had received group study CBT were asked to discuss their views on the effectiveness of the medium in the group context and about the effect of group interaction in their particular session. Trainees were asked to consider whether or not they would put their learning into practice in their jobs. Finally, the trainees were asked to consider the match between their preferred learning style and the training they had received, and whether it had improved their learning.

Data collected from the questionnaire, observation, and unstructured interviews were subsequently analysed.

Case study questions

1. Which type(s) of research strategy are employed in this study?

2. What are the benefits of adding a longitudinal dimension to this research?

3. What are the benefits of using multiple methods of data collection?

4. a. What threats to reliability are inherent in the research design?
   b. How may these be overcome?

5. a. What threats to validity are inherent in the research design?
   b. How may these be overcome?

Case A5: The quality of service provided by the accounts department[1]

Angela had recently returned from a successful placement year working in the Marketing Department of a large manufacturing company. She had found the experience invaluable in supporting her joint degree in marketing management and financial management. She was well regarded by her line manager within the company, who considered her contribution during the year had been excellent. It is no surprise, therefore, that the company was pleased to provide her with a dissertation study opportunity.

While on placement Angela had assimilated the culture of the company and, in particular, the subculture of the marketing department. One of the common topics discussed regularly within the marketing department was the paucity and poor quality of services provided by the accounts department. The marketing department staff felt that the accounts department could not be relied upon, and that the service they provided was too little, too late. While she had been at the company the marketing director had actively canvassed support for recruiting a departmental finance 'expert'. In addition, she had noticed a growing disquiet amongst her colleagues as aspects of financial responsibility were devolved without additional resources.

Angela had thought hard about this and when back at college she had expressed to her tutor an interest in looking at the way internal services within organisations were marketed and perceived within organisations. Her tutor had pointed her in the direction of work on service quality by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985) and a recent paper by Robinson (1999). Therefore, she formulated a dissertation proposal that aimed to compare perceptions of service quality between the host organisation's accounts department with those of its internal customers. This she felt would combine the marketing and finance aspects of her degree.

At her discussion with the company's finance director, Angela set out her research objectives and questions along with a proposed methodology. Imperative to this was a need to include the views of all the internal stakeholders for the services provided by the accounts department.

The research question was agreed as:

To what extent do Accounts Department's staff perceptions of the services they offer match those of their internal customers?

Angela proposed a mixed method approach to data collection, and suggested holding focus groups with the interested parties to elicit the concerns and issues. These were to be followed by a series of semi-structured interviews with a cross-section of managers, members of the accounts department and a cross-section of non-managerial employees. She suggested that a summary of her findings should be circulated to all participants, with the full report readily available to all whom wished to read it.

Having listened, the finance director said that, while he 'fully supported' Angela's proposal he felt her approach 'needed some fine tuning'. In particular:

[1] Case co-authored with Barry Baker, University of Gloucestershire

- He liked the idea of using a mixed method approach to collect data, but considered the need to engage in focus groups too time consuming. He therefore felt it would be better to just interview staff.

- He felt that the sensitive nature of the topic meant that non-managerial employees should not be involved in these interviews. However, he would supply her with a list of managers across the company who would be useful to interview. Furthermore, he would write to them to let them know the purpose of her study and inform them of their nomination as research respondents.

- He would like to be present at the interviews with members of the accounts department, as this was an ideal opportunity to understand the operation of that department. He went to great lengths to say that he would be unobtrusive and would not take part in the actual interview.

- He also felt that information generated in research could be sensitive. Consequently, he would like to see the report before it was published and to reserve the right to restrict circulation of the results.

Angela was worried about the stance being adopted by the finance director, but felt powerless to influence the process. She had set out her proposal, which she had seen 'fully supported' but amended subsequently. She considered she had little real choice but to go along with the 'fine tuning', as she was unsure there would be another dissertation opportunity.

While she was on her placement she had met and become engaged to be married to Billy, a human resource advisor dealing mainly with employee relations issues. While out that evening they discussed her impending research and the meeting with the finance director. Billy told her in confidence that he thought the finance director hoped that the results of her study might be used to bring about the 'repositioning' of the accounts department and a resultant change in 'the way the accounts department was managed'.

Billy went on to say that he thought the finance director wanted to engineer a situation through which the accounts department would have to be brought under the umbrella of an integrated financial services department. Naturally, the staff in the accounts department were unlikely to be keen. However, they were currently unaware of any threat to their independent existence as an accounts department.

References to case study

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1985) 'A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research', *Journal of Marketing,* No. 49 (Fall), 41–50

Robinson, S. (1999) 'Measuring service quality: current thinking and future requirements', *Marketing Intelligence and planning,* 17: 1, 21–32

Case study questions

1. Should Angela go ahead with the study? What advice would you give her?

2. What are the likely outcomes if the research goes ahead as planned?

3. In what way have the following influenced the study directions and process?
   a. Imbalance of power
   b. Sample selection and access
   c. Hidden agendas and deceit
   d. Control of the process
   e. Personal relationships/insider information
   f. Handling results and outcomes
   g. Angela's lack of assertiveness

4. Negative impact on people can occur in research. What is the prospect of this kind of consequential impact on participants in this case?

Case A6: Change management at Hattersley Electrics

Hattersley Electrics is a division of the Hattersley Group plc, a UK-based manufacturing conglomerate whose main markets were, until recently, the high tech aerospace and defence industries. In recent years both the recession in the airline industry and the contraction in defence spending by European governments have hit the division. In order to overcome these Hattersley Electrics has embarked upon the process of repositioning itself within the electronics marketplace niche of advanced civilian communications equipment. As part of this it has changed its manufacturing foci and chosen to downsize and restructure its workforce.

Initially the workforce was not resistant to change, owing to the extensive efforts made by management to keep them involved and informed at all stages. This involved restructuring the division (Fig. 1) into cells, and reducing the workforce from 380 to 250. After this restructuring the works council informed the division's management team that the workforce were concerned about the longer-term effects of these changes. In particular they highlighted possible loss of employment, future job security, a lack of division identity, a lack of direction from senior management, and a lack of employee involvement in recent decisions.

Fig. 1 Organisational structure of Hattersley Group plc Electrics Division

Chairperson

Departments	**Production**	**Quality** (9)	**Technical**	**Personnel** (5)	**Computer Systems** (3)	**Marketing & Commercial**
Cells	Stores & Dispatch (16) Communications 1 (27) Communications 2 (61) Machine shop (59) Inspection (11)		Prototype (10) Design (14) Testing (8)			Marketing (9) Sales (6) Commercial (12)

Figures in brackets refer to number of employees including managers

A consultancy group was hired by the management team and set three objectives to be achieved (at a 95% level of certainty) within a fixed budget and a timescale of 10 weeks from start to finish. These were to establish:

1. the views of the division's managers and employees about the effectiveness of change at Hattersley Electrics;
2. general perceptions of the division's managers and staff about general aspects of the experience of the changes at Hattersley Electrics;
3. whether there were any differences in general perceptions between departments and between managers and employees.

The agreed methodology involved three stages of data collection. In the first stage interviews were undertaken with the division's chairperson and six managers and a sample of employees. One employee was selected at random from each cell. These interviews were to enable the consultants to understand the background to the changes, and to establish the full variety of opinions regarding its effectiveness. In addition they covered a range of other issues associated with general aspects of the experience of the changes.

In the second stage a questionnaire was distributed, reflecting the issues generated by interviews in the first stage, to 50% of company managers and employees. This sample was selected from a sampling frame generated from the personnel department's staff database and was stratified by department and cell. Within each cell employees were listed in order of seniority. All employees other than those in the production department received a questionnaire; 28% of those employees in the production department received a questionnaire. The numbers sampled in each cell are given in Fig. 2. Overall there was a 97.6% response rate to the questionnaire, two non-responses coming from the computer systems department and one from the production department.

Fig. 2 Number of managers and employees in each cell who received a questionnaire

Production	**Quality**	**Technical**	**Personnel**	**Computer Systems**	**Marketing & Commercial**
	(9)		(5)	(3)	
Stores & Dispatch (4)		Prototype (10)			Marketing (9)
Communications 1 (7)		Design (14)			Sales (6)
Communications 2 (18)		Testing (8)			Commercial (12)
Machine shop (17)					
Inspection (3)					

After the analysis of the questionnaire, three follow-up group interviews were undertaken, each group consisting of five or six people (stage 3). One group consisted of production employees, another of managers from all departments and a third of employees from all departments other than production. In the interviews issues that had arisen during the analysis of the questionnaire were probed and clarified.

Case study questions:

1. a. Name the sampling techniques used at each of the three stages.
   b. List possible reasons for the choice of each of these techniques.

2. Given the quoted response rate of 97.6%, what is the accuracy (margin of error) of the questionnaire results for the division likely to have been?

3. a. What issues will need to be taken into account when generalising from the questionnaire results to:
      i. all employees in each department of the Electrics division?
      ii. all employees in the Electrics division?
   b. Give reasons for your answers.

4 a. Would it be possible to use the results from the three sample surveys outlined in this case to generalise about the management of change in the Hattersley plc group?
   b. Give reasons for your answer.

Case A7: the involvement of auditors in preliminary profit announcements[1]

Each year UK companies publish and issue an annual report and audited accounts, which are sent to numerous shareholders and other users. The process may take as long as three months from the end of the companies' accounting period. This delay could create problems: investors would be without up-to- date information, and the probability of insider trading is therefore increases the longer the delay between the data being prepared and the accounts being published.

For these two reasons the London Stock Exchange requires listed companies to issue preliminary profit announcements or 'Prelims'. Prelims are brief announcements (usually only about four pages long) made by companies to the financial markets. They give estimates of the financial performance of the company during the year, and should, in principle at least, represent a summary of the information to be included in the subsequent full annual report and accounts.

Tony and Jim had a good knowledge of the literature. Previous research had shown that the release of prelims had a significant impact on the share price of a company, and that stock market analysts ranked prelims as their most important source of information. Yet, despite this, prelims were relatively lightly regulated by the stock market.

They hypothesised that the content of prelims was more likely to differ from that in the annual accounts the greater the time period between the time when they were released and the publication of the annual accounts. A large sample survey of current company practice was therefore planned.

Companies have to issue their prelims through the Stock Exchange Regulatory News Service (RNS), which controls the dissemination of price-sensitive information to the financial markets. Many large financial institutions have on-line real-time access to the RNS. Using a contact in one of these companies Tony and Jim were able to negotiate (for a nominal fee) access to an RNS terminal for a few days. This enabled them to collect the relevant data on their sample of prelims. Luckily, the RNS system allows users to print out the various data, so they were also able to obtain paper copies that they were able to take away and analyse later. Data were collected on the release dates of 178 prelims, and copies of 166 of these were obtained. Unfortunately, it was possible to obtain the corresponding subsequent annual report and audited accounts for only 148 of these companies. Data were then compared between the 148 prelims and their related full annual reports (which were issued subsequently) and differences in financial data noted, as well as the time lag between the prelims being released and the accounts being published.

In collecting the data Tony and Jim were interested in the fact that some companies specifically mentioned that their prelims had been issued after the audit of the full accounts had been completed and others did not. In practice, most companies made no mention of the audit. A substantial minority said the audit had not been completed, and 32% said that it had been finished and that the auditors had signed their audit report.

[1] Case co-authored with Tony Beasley, Manchester Metropolitan University and Jim Keane, University of Gloucestershire.

Tony and Jim were aware of several reports that discussed the issues involved with prelims that made recommendations for improving their regulation. These reports actually asserted that, when the majority of prelims were released, the audit of the accounts was incomplete. These reports also suggested that some companies were disclosing that they were releasing their prelims after the final audit had been completed. Tony and Jim knew that these assumptions could be tested. If it was found that these reports were based on incorrect assumptions, this could significantly undermine the validity of many of the recommendations they were making.

They decided to re-examine the data to see whether they could find more evidence that is specific about the extent to which prelims were audited. Although the prelims contained very little mention of the audit, the associated (and subsequent) full annual report and accounts included the date upon which the audit had been signed off. This represented the end of the audit work. Since they already had the date of the release of the prelims, they simply had to go back and compare this date with the date the audit report was signed.

They found that the majority (56%) of prelims had been issued after the audit report had been signed. This appeared to be fairly strong evidence that the assumption that the audit of the accounts was incomplete when the majority of prelims were released was not correct.

Case study questions

1 a. Identify data sources used by Tony and Jim in this research.
  b. Which of these are secondary data and which are primary data?
  c. Give reasons for your answers.

2 a. What other methods (if any) do you think Tony and Jim could have used to obtain the data they needed to test their hypothesis?
  b. Give reasons for your answer.

3. What were the problems faced by Tony and Jim in using these secondary data?

4. What lessons can you learn from Tony and Jim's experience?

Case A8: Manufacturing strategy change in a textile company[1]

Huw was a part-time student who combined his studies with his work as a freelance consultant and writer. After graduating from business school a number of contracts arose that enabled him to become self-employed. He had developed a passionate interest in manufacturing at university and was keen to research the then developing field of manufacturing strategy, in particular the aspects of change associated with this. This, he believed, would also strengthen his position as a consultant.

Within 6 months Huw had the chance to join a team of consultants hired to develop a manufacturing strategy. The company involved manufactured textiles for export in the North of England and employed approximately 400 people. It had a traditional management style and was heavily unionised. When a new managing director was appointed he quickly became concerned about the production function's ability to respond to the changing requirements of the marketplace. Different consultants were invited to tender for a contract to help the company to develop and implement a new manufacturing strategy. A chief factor in the appointment of the successful consulting team was the emphasis placed on facilitating the existing management team to develop their own manufacturing strategy. The consultant team was involved for 24 months, initially for three days a week, reducing gradually to one day a week after 12 months. The team comprised a senior academic consultant with extensive industrial experience, a freelance consultant with interests in organisational change and Huw.

The consulting contract represented an ideal opportunity for Huw to engage in participant-observation research, although this was not part of his original plan. The other consultants in the team also had research interests and they were all comfortable with each other pursuing individual research interests. This was cleared with the managing director on the condition that the company was disguised in research outputs. The team spent several weeks gaining a thorough understanding of the organisation, meeting with managers at all levels, listening to them and probing key issues. Consequently managers were trained and helped to develop and implement their own strategy. Simultaneously the team got involved in meetings over several months helping to resolve short-term issues facing the company. This gained the team significant credibility and helped with access to data; they were readily provided with a wide range of reports, memos and strategic documents.

Huw recorded observations in his notebook throughout the meetings. On the right-hand page he would record observations regarding his participant role and on the left his reflections as an observer. The observer reflections were noted during meetings afterwards in the hotel and at home. This was an onerous task. The consulting team spent much time preparing for meetings and reviewing how they went; because all the team had research interests, this was a great stimulus for reflection.

Analytic induction was ongoing and iterative but took the following underlying logic:

- A list of 'activities' in which the team were involved in their consulting role was developed, e.g. understanding the organisation, education, various change activities and team preparation and review time. The duration of these activities was also mapped out using diary records of when meetings took place.

[1] Case co-authored with Huw Davies, Courtaulds Bodyware, Bristol

- The role the consultants played in each activity was described from notes, memos, reports and a handful of interviews with the other team members where gaps were evident.
- ‘Observations’ were noted for each activity. This was often an intuitive approach, noting points based on gut feel and interest.
- A set of ‘reflections’ then emerged that drew out unifying themes across the set of observations.
- ‘Conceptualisation’ then took place where links were made between the different reflections, and between the reflections and literature.

As a result of the research Huw gained a much deeper understanding of the change process that took place. This helped him forge a link between models of manufacturing strategy in the literature and models of change theory.

Case study questions

1. Describe the type of participant-observation role adopted.

2. What were the advantages/disadvantages of Huw’s approach?

3. What are the merits of Huw’s approach to recording data?

4. What were the strengths of Huw’s approach to analytic induction?

Case A9: The practices and styles of public relations practitioners[1]

Public relations (PR) practitioners are a significant and growing group in the UK. Some of them operate internationally with great sophistication to improve their companies' profiles and stock exchange status. Some peddle sex stories to the tabloid press. Another group in politics, known as 'spin doctors', are hired to make political moves more acceptable. However, in the UK there has been very little substantive research into PR practices and styles. This is partly because of the lack of a UK journal dedicated to research in public relations, and partly because PR has traditionally been subsumed within the discipline of marketing.

Valerie designed a case study that sought to examine the practices and styles of public relations practitioners. However, it was recognised that this group included a wide range of people, from the likes of publicity technicians to corporate communications professionals. The first stage of the research project was designed to examine the practices and styles of public relations practitioners through the eyes of those they interact with most frequently, namely journalists. The second stage was designed to gauge public relations practitioners' own assessments of the way they operate.

A theoretical basis for this study was established by using the model devised by Grunig and Hunt (1984). This identified a number of public relations styles based on research conducted in the USA:

- *Press agency.* Little research, main aim to get firm/product mentions in the media, truth not vital. Emphasis on one-way communication.
- *Public information.* Some research, main aim to get media exposure, truth matters. Emphasis on one-way communication.
- *Two-way asymmetric.* Founded on research, aim to seek behaviour change, can be manipulative.
- *Two-way symmetric.* Held to be the most ethical, sophisticated and far-reaching in that there is dialogue, negotiation and compromise to try and achieve understanding.

This research project, therefore, was exceedingly ambitious in seeking to recognise and verify the existence of such styles and relationships in the context of public relations practices in the UK. It also faced potential barriers of cultural misunderstanding, based as it was, in an unfamiliar area of analysis. Degree-level courses in public relations, which have progressed from the practical to the academic, have only been running at UK universities for the past few years. Graduates with knowledge of Grunig and Hunt's and others' key theories are only beginning to percolate into a few PR consultancies and in-house departments. The majority of public relations people have only a general degree or CAMS certificate, or are promoted from secretaries and assistants. Grunig and Hunt's model is, however, seminal to judging PR as either a craft, using technician-level thinking; or as something one could rightly call a profession. Because the terminology of the study was not familiar to many people it was decided that semi-structured interviews would be the best mode of approach in order to overcome these barriers by providing interpretation and clarification as necessary.

However, the selection of interview subjects posed equal problems:

[1] Case co-authored with Valerie Cowley, University of Gloucestershire

- There were time constraints to this research project.
- PR practitioners interact with all the media, using slightly different techniques with each.
- PR consultancies in certain locations such as London practise internationally and at a higher level of sophistication than others.
- Tunstall's (1972) important work on journalistic practice in the UK indicated there were also great differences in the standards and approach of journalists working for different specialist areas.

The decision was taken to concentrate the first part of the research on newspaper journalists, and to follow this up with journalists from radio and television. The journalists would be drawn half from national publications in London and half from the regional press, and four different specialisms would be covered: general news, women's interest pages, business pages, and political journalism. A major factor in this decision was Valerie's background in newspapers as well as in public relations, since it was important that, in seeking out subjects, the interviewer could be seen to have a background that was relevant and credible.

The choice of specialisms was made for the following reasons. The news section receives the widest variety of PR news releases and personal contacts. The women's pages receive the most concentrated approaches from public relations practitioners in the consumer goods areas. The business pages receive the most sophisticated forms of PR aimed at enhancing credibility, image and stock market standing of major firms. The political journalists receive the most intensive PR pressures of a governmental, party political and general lobby type.

The ideal targets to select, however, are rarely the simplest. The journalists who would best be able to illustrate the type and level of PR approaches they received would of necessity be working long anti-social hours; would have very busy and often unpredictable diaries; could frequently be protected by filter-style secretaries; and might possibly self-select because of polarised views about public relations practice.

It therefore took approximately 8 months to make appointments with 25 journalists who constituted the right spectrum and balance: 25 who agreed to be interviewed out of some 120 contacted overall. However, a random element entered the selection, in that, if a first phone call to a certain newspaper asking for a named person was unsuccessful, the caller would always ask whether a second name from that specialism was there, or, failing that, whether any of the journalists from an alternative specialism would be prepared to take the call. If a journalist agreed to help with the study, a confirmatory letter would be sent, and the appointment double-checked.

The use of a tape recorder during each interview did not prove an obstacle, as all the subjects were well used to this interview format themselves, and appeared quickly able to ignore a very discreet form of this technology. They were also promised anonymity.

In a pilot test interview it had been found that a broad approach to the topic – 'What do you consider to be the style of relationship between journalists and public relations officers?' – worked best, followed by questions on what they perceived the role of public relations practitioners to be. Many answers were reflected back to test understanding and to clarify what the journalists felt to be the most important factors of certain interactive processes between them and public relations practitioners. But the most successful ingredient of all was the critical incident technique: in recounting what they felt to be the best and the worst examples of treatment by public relations practitioners they had experienced, the journalists usually became much more expansive and revealing. These questions were posed at a later stage in the meeting when some rapport had been established, and often acted as a corrective to one or two somewhat guarded initial statements.

Both the interviewer and interviewees appreciated the dangers of generalising from the particular. Yet it was easier than Valerie had anticipated to delineate differences between reported approaches of public relations practitioners as press agents, and those who had a more sophisticated and more long-term approach to the building of positive media coverage and relationships. In the majority of cases it was the journalists who volunteered the information about when and how far they had ever felt in the position of being manipulated by public relations practitioners. But those few who had to be asked whether they had ever had this experience were not resentful of the inference and appeared to accept the existence of manipulative practice as a recognised by-product of public relations.

References

Grunig, J. and Hunt, T. (1984) *Managing Public Relations*, New York, Reinhart and Winston.

Tunstall, J. (1972) 'News organisation goals and specialist news gathering journalists' *in* McQuail, D. *Sociology of Mass Communications*, London, Penguin, pp. 259–80.

Case study questions

1. What are the strengths of the design of this research project? Give reasons for your answer.

2. What are the weaknesses of the design of this research project? Give reasons for your answer. How would you seek to overcome them?

3. What reasons would you advance for using semi-structured or in-depth interviews in relation to this research project?

4. What data quality issues are evident in relation to the conduct of this research project?

5. How were these data quality issues managed during the period of the research project referred to above?

6. What logistical and resource issues are associated with the research project, and what are the implications of these for its conduct?

Case A10: The provision of leisure activities for younger people in rural areas[1]

A report from the chairperson of the 'vandalism working party' was the last item on the agenda of the Littlebury town council meeting. Following extensive consultation with representatives of the local population, the group concluded that boredom amongst the town's 'young people' was a major problem and undoubtedly a contributory factor to the unprecedented rise in vandalism.

A number of preliminary suggestions had been made for projects that might be of interest to young people within the town and might help to combat the problem. However, the working party had agreed that, if they were really going to attract the support of the young people, they needed to have concrete information about what the young people wanted to see in the town. They believed that there was a need for a survey.

The chairperson reported that, following contact with the business school of the local university, a leisure management undergraduate had expressed interest in carrying out a survey as part of her research project. She was interested in looking at the provision of leisure activities for young people in small rural towns, and had met with him to discuss her preliminary ideas. They had agreed that a survey of the young people in Littlebury could be carried out and that its objectives would be:

- to find out what the town's young people did in their spare time;
- to establish what leisure activities they would like to have available in the town;
- to establish their potential interest in some of the ideas proposed by the working party;
- to compare leisure activities and preferences of different age groups.

The chairperson was able to report that funding such a survey would not be a problem, as a group of local businesspeople had agreed to support the costs of reproducing the questionnaires and sending them out. He concluded his report by seeking the council's agreement to proceed with the survey. There was unanimous support, and the meeting closed on a very positive note.

The student decided to collect her data using a postal questionnaire. She designed the survey and pilot-tested it on five members of the local youth club, all of whom thought it was fine. (A copy of the questionnaire is included at the end of this case.) 400 questionnaires were sent out to young people aged 11 to 18 living in the town. 187 usable responses were returned. She attributed the relatively high response rate to the high profile given to the survey in the town's local paper.

The results indicated that there was very little support for the existing clubs and societies in the town, with the exception of the youth club and the leisure centre. Membership of the youth club was predominantly from inhabitants of two of the town's housing estates. However, it was not clear which activities held at the leisure centre were patronised by young people. Football and tennis were the most popular sporting activities in all age groups. Shopping and listening to pop music proved to be the most popular out-of-school pastimes for all ages, whereas the younger groups preferred to watch videos.

[1] Case co-authored with Christine Williams, University of Gloucestershire

Of the ideas proposed by the working party, the coffee shop and swimming pool proved most popular overall, but especially amongst younger girls, who accounted for 58% of total responses. The younger boys said that the video games centre would be visited most frequently. Working respondents had a different pattern of response, suggesting that their interests were very different from their counterparts at school. Unfortunately, these people made up less than 10% of respondents, and it was felt that more information was needed here. The answers to question 8 were hardly revolutionary, and suggested that the best thing the town could do for all age groups was to attract some of the retail multiples to its high street and open a night club!

Overall, the working party was disappointed by the results. Although there was a much clearer picture of what the town's young people did with their spare time, the group did not feel any closer to finding out what would capture their interest and reduce the boredom.

Littlebury Leisure Survey

Please answer all of the following questions by ticking the appropriate boxes

1. How often do you use the following in Littlebury:

	more than once a week	**once a week**	**once a month**	**less than once a month**	**never**
The leisure centre	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The youth centre	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The library	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Church	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2. Do you belong to any of the following:

Girl Guides	**yes** ☐	**no** ☐
The army cadets	**yes** ☐	**no** ☐
The air training corps	**yes** ☐	**no** ☐
The theatre club	**yes** ☐	**no** ☐
Boy souts	**yes** ☐	**no** ☐
Youth club	**yes** ☐	**no** ☐

3. Which of the following sports you play regularly outside school:

Aerobics ☐	**Badminton** ☐	**Basketball** ☐	**Boxing** ☐
Cycling ☐	**Cricket** ☐	**Football** ☐	**Gymnastics** ☐
Riding ☐	**Martial arts** ☐	**Rugby** ☐	**Self Defense** ☐
Swimming ☐	**Sailing** ☐	**Table Tennis** ☐	**Tennis** ☐

Any other: Please state which...

4. Do you belong to any other clubs or societies in Littlebury?

Please state which...
...

5. Which of the following do you do regularly?

Watch videos	☐	**Listen to pop music**	☐	**Go to discos**	☐
Play music	☐	**Go shopping**	☐	**Voluntary work**	☐

6. Please list up to 3 other things that you do regularly in your spare time

...
...
...

7. If the following were available in Littlebury, how often would you use them?

	more than once a week	**once a week**	**once a month**	**less than once a month**	**never**
Indoor swimming pool	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Drama club	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Coffee shop	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Video game centre	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sailing club	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Karting club	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Any other: please state which

....	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. Please complete the following sentence:

'The one thing I would really like to be able to do Littlebury in my spare time is

...'

9. Please tell us about yourself:

How old are you?............................. **Are you** **male ☐ or female ☐?**

If you're still at school, which school do you attend?..

If you've left school are you:

	employed full time	☐
	employed part time	☐
	not employed	☐

10. Please tell us your postcode **GL__ _ _ _**

Thank you very much for helping us. Please return this form as soon as possible in the envelope provided. If it reaches us by April 1st, you will be included in the draw for the first prize of £25.00! Good luck.

Case study questions

1. Why were the working party members 'disappointed with the results'?

2. a. Design a table that shows which objective(s) are addressed by which questions.
   b. What other questions would you include to help ensure the data collected could meet the working party's objectives more closely?

3. What other changes would you make to the questionnaire?

4. In what ways could the method used to pilot-test the questionnaire be improved?

5. Do you think that a postal questionnaire was the best way of collecting these data? Give reasons for your answer.

Case A11: The Marketing of Arts Festivals

Jemma was interested in utilising secondary data from her placement organisation as part of her undergraduate research project on the marketing of arts festivals. In particular she was interested in:

- the extent to which audiences associated events with their sponsors;
- the socioeconomic status of those attending;
- the importance of different media for finding out about events.

Her placement organisation had undertaken a questionnaire survey with attendees at the local arts festival and agreed that Jemma could use the data for her research project. The data had already been entered into a spreadsheet. A copy of a completed questionnaire is included below:

The Anyshire Echo

ANYTOWN FESTIVAL OF ARTS

AUDIENCE QUESTIONNAIRE

Please help us to continue to improve the Arts Festival by completing the questionnaire below.

When you have completed it, please hand it to the Box Office or the Friends Information Desk or send it back to us **by 10th September** and you can enter **a free prize draw** for one of four £30 record tokens.

It takes just five minutes to answer the questions, and your opinions will help us plan next year's festival.

Please return your completed questionnaire to the address below (N.B. no stamp is needed)

FREEPOST 12345
Town Hall
Town Square
Anytown
AN50 2BD

To enter the free prize draw please write your name and address below:

Name: Mrs Lily Anners

Address: 15, Anytown Road
Anytown

Postcode: AN34 7MS

(N.B. this information will not be passed on to any other organisation)

PART 1: Please answer these questions by putting a circle around the appropriate number

1 Which Festival event have you attended?
Ruskin's Poetry Reading and Arias by Candlelight

2 Where do you live?

In Anytown	1	30 to less than 50 miles away	2

under 10 miles away	3	50 to less than 100 miles away	4
10 to less than 20 miles away	5	over 100 miles away	6
20 to less than 30 miles away	7		

3 What age are you?

Under 18	1	35 to 44	3	over 60	5
19 to 30	2	45 to 60	4		

4 Are you....

Female ?	1	Male?	2

5 Are you currently....

Unemployed?	1	In full-time paid professional employment?	5
Retired?	2	In full-time non-professional employment?	6
A housewife?	3	In part-time paid employment?	7
A student?	4	Other? (please say)	8

6 Which of the following organisations do you associate with this festival?

The Anytown Bank	1	Murial's Bookstores	6
Anytown Borough Council	2	Good Deal Records	7
The Anyshire Echo	3	Midshire Bank	8
Steven's Computers Ltd	4	Other (please say)	9
VHT Record Stores	5		

7 Did you take advantage of any of the following discounts when booking?

Early booking	1	Poetry pass	4	
Friends discount	2	Anyshire Echo pass	5	
Group discount	3	Student discount	6	*None of these*

PART 2: Please read the statements below; decide whether you agree, strongly agree, disagree or strongly disagree; then <u>circle</u> the number below your choice:

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
8	I found it easy to book/buy tickets for the Festival	1	2	3	4
9	The event(s) I came to was/were good value for money	1	2 *one*	3	4 *other*

PART 3: Please comment on the following:

10 Is there anything you would like to change to improve the Festival (i.e. the times, the programme, etc.)? *The battle for the best seats nearest the speakers. The middle classes are seen at their most devious here -sneaking in and laying coats on seats etc!!*

11 What did you think of the event you came to? *Good*

12 How did you find out about the Festival? *Programmes available in Book shop*

Case study questions

1. On looking at the questionnaire, Jemma noticed some problems with the way in which some questions had been coded.
   a. What were these problems?
   b. How might these have been overcome at the survey design stage?

2. a. Which of the questions were likely to be most useful to Jemma for her research project?
   b. How could Jemma have minimised the impact on her analysis of any coding problems with these questions?

3. Which diagrams, tables and statistics would you recommend Jemma to use to analyse those questions that were useful to her research project?
   (You should state precisely what your recommended diagrams, tables and statistics will enable Jemma to find out.)

Case A 12: Communicating bad news at Abco[1]

Fiona undertook an interview in an organisation undergoing a period of change. Communicating change was one of the major issues that had to be confronted in the organisation. One of Fiona's research questions was: 'How can the communication of bad news be managed to reduce its potentially adverse impact?' The following extract is part of an in-depth interview that relates to this research question.

'Does Abco have a close-knit community here in Southtown?

Yes, there is, but there's much more of a community in Northtown, and even more in Easttown, than there is in Southtown. There's a couple of reasons for this: people in Northtown tend to socialise outside work, after work, and they do in Easttown as well. People live very locally at both sites. People who work in Southtown live all over the place; they can live 60 miles away. There are even people who live in Netherford, which is 65, 70 miles away, and they commute every day. So it's not quite so easy for people to intermingle, but yes, they do associate very well. And the industry itself is a very close-knit one. They know people from other companies, and there are lots of people who are in dual income relationship, or whatever you call it, whose partners work also in industry or the same company: we've got one whose partner works for Cyco and the other one works in Abco. So there is quite a lot of that going on and people are fairly close and identify very closely.

Do you find that there's a problem with rumours and informal communication?

We did at the beginning, because in a place like Northtown, word just shot around, and people were sometimes – I wouldn't say deliberately – starting rumours, but I think when you are frightened and concerned about your job or whatever, you do start reading into things that people say, and sometimes you're reading things that aren't meant to be there or just aren't there. So, there's quite a lot of supposition made.

But these are bright people and it does not take them long to work things out. In most companies, if you've got issues going around the place there are usually a limited number of solutions. And if people think about these issues they will come up with the solutions and they will probably come up will the preferred solution in the same way as management will. So, what happens is people say, well yeah I knew that was going to happen. Well yeah, there is a good likelihood that they will.

That's one of the dangers of being very open about the processes and the solutions, and the options and the issues. You have to just face up to the fact that the grapevine may sometimes work against you. I think that what we've done in our communications has been so good that we've been able be very sensitive to what the needs and fears will be.

If you're closing somewhere down, like Northtown, with 2000 people and it's the second largest employer in the area, the effect on the infrastructure is huge. It's not just the effect on the individuals who work there – that's bad enough – but there's all sorts of other things that happen, like the retailers who lose business and so on. People in the area also get quite angry about it, because they see the prices of their houses go down.

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[1] Case co-authored with Fiona Campbell, University of Wolverhampton.

Was any training given on the delivery of bad news?

Yes, but it was not that sophisticated. It was really just getting people used to the idea that when they get to do this, they have to think about how they talk to the individual and what they're going to say. It's not the sort of thing when you hand someone a letter in a pub and say you've got to read that and mine's a pint. You know you have to be a bit more sensitive than that.

It was also stressed that it had to be done on an individual basis, and people had to be aware of the support mechanisms that were available. In the United States, for example, managers had to be taught about the security angle, because it's not uncommon for disaffected employees who have been fired to come back and shoot the person that did it to them!

Really?

Yeah, it happened at a couple of places in the United States. In one company someone came in and shot four people.

What we learn is put in a manual. This stuff includes the states people go through, like denial and despair; how to prepare, for example don't do it on a Friday; lots of do's and don'ts, whatever; why people are different; the processes people go through. There's also lots of handouts, and it gives you all sorts of advice on the logistics of breaking bad news.

But handling some cases is more difficult than most. There have been quite a few people who have been identified as high flyers, but we haven't been able to find a job for them and they are so angry about it because they didn't expect the news. So what to do when you meet this situation? Well don't mess about; get to the point straight away; don't come in and go, 'how's the family?'; be clear about it.

Try and avoid using words like 'fire' and 'terminate' but don't get into arguments about it. That's one thing you have to make sure the person realises – that the decision has been made, nothing can be done.

You also need to know how people might react, common questions they might ask, how to answer them etc.

Do you think the training was useful in practice?

I think managers realised that it is important, and it has been obligatory for them. But I think some of the logistics are quite difficult. Last week, last Thursday in fact, we got everyone in Product Development together in the United States, and what they had done was to tell everyone the previous Monday whether they had a job or not, and that created an awful lot of hype and excitement and trepidation among people. Because they had so many people, they had to walk people from one part of the building to the other, I mean it's a big building, so people could see them being walked across and could see how they reacted afterwards, so it was a bit public, and that's when its a bit dangerous to do it all at once.

What could be done to improve the training about breaking bad news?

Make it longer, more chance to practise what we tell them as theory. We could test their ability to do it – test them in a realistic situation before we ask them to do it for real. Maybe we could do more about breaking this news to those who have to do this to those they've been working with for years. They're likely to be friends. It's difficult, hard to do this in this situation. We need to recognise the difficulties – evaluate what we do – this should improve this training.'

Case study questions

Given the focus of the research question, above conduct the following process to commence the analysis of these qualitative data.

1. Devise categories to label these data and 'unitise' or code these data using these categories.

2. Which passages of text would you avoid categorising, if any, and why?

3. Do any relationships or patterns begin to emerge in the data and, if so, what are these?

4. What are the important themes that you feel stand out in your categorisation that you would seek to explore in subsequent interviews?

Case A13: Writing Lata's project report

Lata had worked hard on her research. She was pleased with the project report she had submitted, and was quietly confident it would receive a good grade. But this was not to be. She was horrified when she received a note from Louise, her course tutor, telling her that her report had been referred back for substantial reworking. Lata went to see Louise immediately. She told the story of how her research had developed from the time she had first discussed it with Eddie, her project tutor, to the time her report was submitted. This is that story.

'My research question was: "What have been the effects of office automation on the social relations between staff?". I was conducting a case study in Midshire, a large local authority. My data collection methods were questionnaire and semi-structured interviews.

'I was enthusiastic about my research. In the early days I had frequent meetings with Eddie. I wanted to start collecting data immediately. However, Eddie counselled caution. He was concerned that I should think through more thoroughly my research objectives and the questions I was going to ask in my questionnaire. To be honest, I became impatient with Eddie's approach, which I thought was too fussy.

'I went ahead and collected the data. I had piloted the questionnaire with friends whom I met when working in Midshire's education department. I was pleased with the response rate of over 60%. I then went ahead and conducted my interviews. I interviewed those people I was friendly with and who would be more likely to give up their time. I suppose that by the time I had finished my data collection I had not seen Eddie for several months.

'I had taken Eddie's advice not to leave all my writing until the last minute. I was determined to write up my research as I went along. Early on in my research I had written a literature review that was current and comprehensive. I was pleased with this, and decided that this would form a part of the final report. I was also writing up my data as I went along. My questionnaire analysis formed a major part of this writing. My results were in the form of computer-generated tables related to each question. I wrote an extensive commentary on these tables. I also wrote a separate section on my interview data, reporting in some detail what each interviewee had said. The result was that I had a major section on my data, which I was satisfied would form the bulk of my report.

'Meanwhile I had a meeting with Eddie to report progress. He seemed pleased that I had collected so much data. He said he was in the annual process of chasing some students who seemed to have done little, despite the fast-approaching deadline for handing in. I had done a lot. But I think Eddie felt I was rather complacent about what I had done. He asked to see a copy of my draft report. I said that a little more time was needed to get it up together. We agreed that it would be with Eddie in two weeks' time.

'I must admit that the deadline passed and the draft report did not arrive. I had been hit with the normal rush to finish assignments for other parts of my course. I was pleased that I had gone ahead with writing my project report because it meant that I was able to hand in all my work. I also thought there wasn't much I could do to the report since I had already hit the word limit. I sent Eddie a note to explain the problems I had experienced. I told him that I would "polish up" what I had written and submit that for examination.'

Louise went to see Eddie to report on her meeting with Lata. This was Eddie's reaction:
'To be honest I'm not surprised it turned out like this. The report is far too descriptive. It's good at the description, but that is about all. There is no attempt to link the data to the literature review, and not really much connection between the data and the research questions. It reads a bit like two separate reports. One of these is a review of the literature in the field and the other a report of what Lata found out in Midshire. Both, in their own right, are quite good but as a project report it simply doesn't come together. However, my main criticism is that it doesn't actually say anything; ...you know, it doesn't draw any conclusions. When I finished reading it I couldn't help saying: "so what?".

'The material is there for Lata to write a decent report. But I'm afraid she has a lot more work to do.'

Case study questions

1. Where do you think Lata went wrong in her approach to the process of preparing her research report?

2. How do you think Lata could have overcome Eddie's criticism that 'it reads a bit like two separate reports'?

3. How might Lata have approached the writing of her results section?

4. How could Lata have prevented Eddie saying 'so what?' to himself after he had finished reading her report?