# Research Methods for business

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The book was published in the United States in 2003 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. The book contains 450 pages; the book is written with a view to providing the business students with the knowledge of business methods. In my view, this book is of great value to students in other disciplines such as management, economics, marketing, public administration, etc. as well.

Of special interest is the fact that the author cites some commonly research areas in business; they are, among others, the following: managerial leadership, performance, employee attitudes, managerial leadership styles, performance appraisal systems, employee selection, recruitment, retention, human resource management, strategy formulation and implementation, risk assessment, cultural differences, and the dynamics of managing a multinational firm, and keeping ahead of the competition in the new millennium, etc.

Most, if not all, of the mentioned research areas could be applied in other disciplines especially in public administration and management.

Since research is the formal, systematic application of the scientific method to the problems, it is highly praiseworthy that the author gives a lucid exposition of the hallmarks of scientific research. The hallmarks of the scientific research, according to the author, comprise the following:

1. Purposiveness. The researcher must have purposive focus; in other words, he or she must start the research with a definite purpose.

. Rigor. Research involves a good theoretical base and a carefully-thought-out methodology.

3. Testability. Scientific research must lend itself to testing logically developed hypotheses that are developed after a careful study of the problem situation.

4. Replicability. The results of the tests of hypothcscs should be supported again and yet again when the same type of research is repeated in other similar circumstances.

5. Precision and confidence.

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"Precision" refers to the closeness of the findings to "reality" based on a sample, whereas "confidence" refers to the probability that our estimations are correct. The greater the precision and confidence we aim at in our research, the more scientific is the investigation and the more useful are the results.

6. Objectivity. The conclusion drawn through the interpretation of the results of data analysis should be objective; that is, they should be based on the facts of the findings derived from actual data, and not on our subjective or emotional values.

7. Generalizability. It refers to the scope of applicability of the research findings in one organizational setting to other settings; the wider the range of applicability of the solutions generated by research, the more useful the research is to the users.

8. Parsimony. By and large, an unmanageable number of variables might well be totally beyond the manager's control to change. Therefore, the achievement of a meaningful and parsimonious, rather than an elaborate and cumbersome, model for problem solution becomes a critical issue in research.

From my standpoint I strongly agree with all the eight criteria of scientific research explained by the author.

Nevertheless, I doubt whether most of the researchers strictly adhere to these criteria when they conduct their research.

In Chapter Five, the author discusses four main types of variables, namely the independent variable, the dependent variable, the moderating variable and the intervening variable. From my observation, few research books touch on all four variables; most of the authors of research books focus on the independent variable and the dependent variable only. The definitions of the four variables provided by the author are specified below.

1. "Independent variable". A variable that influences the dependent or criterion variable and accounts for its variance.

2. "Dependent variable". A variable that is of primary interest to the researcher.

3. "Moderating variable". A variable on which the relationship between two other variables is contingent.

4. "Intervening variable". A variable that surfaces as a function of the independent variable, and helps in conceptualizing and explaining the influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable.

I have high hope that in the near future, apart from the independent variable and the dependent variable, both the students and researchers would give greater prominence to the moderating variable and the intervening variable. If so, the research findings would be valid and reliable to a greater extent.

It is worthwhile to mention that in Chapter Five. the author explains the features of theoretical framework in full details.

It is not an exaggeration to say that I have never seen any research books giving such details about the theoretical framework before. According to the author, there are five features that should be incorporated in any theoretical framework. They are the following :

1. The variables relevant to the study should be clearly identified and labeled in the discussions.

2. The discussions should state how two or more variables are related to one another.

3. If the nature and direction of the relationship can be theorized on the basis of the findings of pervious research, then there should be an indication in the discussion as to whether the relationship would be positive or negative.

4. There should be a clear explanation of why we would expect these relationship to exist. The arguments could be drawn from the previous research findings.

5. A schematic diagram of the theoretical framework should be given so that the reader can see and easily comprehend the theorized relationship.

From my observation, only No. 1 and No. 5 are commonly practiced by Thai students and scholars. This is why their findings have a lot of shortcomings and thus cannot be considered as scientific research to perfection.

In Chapter Nine, the author explains virtually all kinds of scales, encompass the following :

1. Dichotomous scale
2. Category scale.
3. Likert scale
4. Semantic differential scale
5. Numerical scale
6. Itemized rating scale
7. Fixed or constant sum rating scale
8. Stapel scale
9. Graphic rating scale
10. Consensus scale
11. Paired comparison
12. Forced choice
13. Comparative scale

It is noted that the author gives a clear-cut explanation with examples of all the scales except that the author fails to provide any detail of the consensus scale (or Thurstone scale). In my opinion, it is so largely because the scale is very complicated and difficult to construct. It is probable that only a handful of researchers especially sociologists still use the scale or else it might die out.

Aside from the scale, the author gives a description of the validity and the reliability of the study instrument.

With regard to the validity, the author mentions face validity content validity, criterion-related validity, predictive validity, construct validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

It is noteworthy that the way the

author explains each kind of validity is in a straightforward manner. For instance, the instrument has "content validity" if it adequately measures the concept. The instrument has "construct validity" if the instrument taps the concept as theorized; the instrument has "predictive validity" if the instrument differentiates in a manner as to help predict a future criterion and so on.

With respect to the reliability, the author describes and explains four types of reliability, namely test-retest reliability, parallel-form reliability, split-half reliability and interitem consistency reliability. As a matter of fact, the most popular test of interitem consistency reliability is the Cronbach's coefficient alpha (Cronbach's alpha). Meanwhile, test-retest reliability and parallel-form reliability seem to become obsolete.

Strangely enough, the author is neglectful of the level of reliability Cronbach's alpha. As far as I know, the British Psychological Society's Committee on Test standards suggests that 0.70 might be acceptable. If you have a scale with a small number of items, you are not likely to get reliability coefficient as high as this and you may consider using a slightly lower eriterion (of 0.6) if (and only if):

- There is good evidence for good validity.
- These are good theoretical and or practical reasons for the scale.
- The scale is short (less than about ten items).

All in all, I would like to say that the author is of the first water. All the material in the book can be put in to practical use.

Students who are itching to gain an insight into business research methodology are strongly encouraged to read this book. Please keep in mind that the book is of great help to virtually all researchers regardless of their fields of study in spite of the fact that the writing of the book is designed to meet the needs of business students in particular.