

Academic Year 2012/13

Number of Aston Credits: 15

Number of ECTS Credits: 7.5

Staff Member Responsible for the Module:

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Pre-requisites for the module:

None

Mode of Attendance:

On Campus

Module Objectives and Learning Outcomes:

Many of the problems and issues besetting public and private sector organizations and their wider environments may be addressed using qualitative data and analytic methods. Much qualitative data is widely available, such as policy statements, company reports, analyst reports, media releases, press interviews and company videos, but is under-used for analysis purposes. Other data, such as interviews, focus groups, observations and various forms of archival and internal documentation provide effective ways of collecting focused evidence about specific business processes, issues and problems. Organizations and consultants routinely use such data in their own strategy formulation, implementation and change programmes. The analysis of such data, in order to evaluate business problems and provide effective and targeted outcomes, such as reports, presentations and feedback is thus an area in which employees typically need to develop competence. However, the purposes of these data, their reliability and the way that they can be used to resolve business problems are not self-evident. In particular, issues of subjectivity and evidence-based problem-solving arising from these methods are often not well understood. This module is targeted at understanding these types of data and developing students' skills and knowledge in using them for analysis and outcomes. It will be particularly valuable for students considering qualitative approaches to their dissertation, and those aiming to go into qualitative-oriented areas of business upon completion of their degree.

Knowledge

This module aims to provide MSc students with an effective body of knowledge about qualitative research methods for business around the following objectives:

- > To develop a problem-based approach to using qualitative methods
- > To place the specific methods and techniques from the course in the context of real-world case material from the core staff's own research experience
- > To link the problem-based approach to the development of student MSc dissertations, in order to increase application of the course material, improve understanding and support dissertation quality.

- > To enhance the student experience, knowledge and skill base through a practical, applied course on using qualitative data in business
- > To promote understanding of the theoretical principles and ethical issues underpinning the use of such data.

Skills

- > To identify suitable business problems and questions to address using qualitative research designs
- > To think critically and analytically about different qualitative data sources
- > To understand analytic techniques for ensuring robust outcomes from qualitative research
- > To understand different types of outcomes arising from qualitative analysis
- > To adopt a problem-based approach to using qualitative research methods for business analysis
- > To be capable of designing an independent qualitative research project

Module Content:

- Week 1:** What is qualitative knowledge for business? Philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research; suitable research questions; implications for generating knowledge
- Week 2:** Collaborating with business partners: Defining relevant questions; Gaining and maintaining access; Co-production of knowledge; Managing stakeholders in the study
- Week 3:** Research design: Research questions; Case sampling; Single or multiple; Boundaries; Cross-sectional, retrospective or longitudinal
- Week 4:** Data types and collection techniques: Interviews and focus groups; Observational techniques, including participant, non-participant and ethnographic
- Week 5:** Working with historical and documentary data sources: Establishing relevance; primacy of sources; tracing patterns
- Week 6:** Overview of practical techniques for analysis: Data sources; Thematic coding; Constant comparative method; Quantification; Rigour and reliability

- Week 7:** Reflexivity: Appraising your own research work
- Week 8:** Business outcomes: Report writing; Presentations; Targeting the audience; Ethical issues
- Week 9:** Summary, Revision and Final Coursework Briefing
- Week 10:** **Submit coursework**

Corporate Connections:

The module makes extensive use of the teaching faculty's own research examples and case material from their work with a number of leading companies. The focus of the module is on developing skills and competences in working with companies to identify, analyse and address business problems, develop applied knowledge and provide business outcomes.

International Dimensions:

Most, if not all of the material from the teaching faculty is developed from their international research designs, including trans-national European, North American and African contexts and case material.

Contribution of Research:

The module is totally oriented towards doing applied qualitative research for business. It takes a problem-based approach to each topic, drawing on the specific research skills, examples and knowledge of the teaching faculty.

Ethics, Responsibility & Sustainability:

Students are expected to be familiar with and adhere to university policies in relation to class attendance and general conduct and behaviour, including maintaining a safe, respectful environment; and to understand their obligations in relation to workload, assessment and keeping informed of any announcement made.

Method of Teaching:

The mode of teaching will use a combination of lecture sessions and real-life case examples for discussion. Lectures will expose students to the pivotal topics, frameworks and techniques necessary for understanding and analysis, while the case examples will

be about application of these techniques and appreciation of the pragmatic issues of doing qualitative research in practice.

Method of Assessment and Feedback:

Individual-based written assignments that generate a qualitative research project, covering issues of applied research question, research design, data sources, methods of analysis and probable outcomes (100%).

Learning Hours:

Contact and directed learning (lectures/case study work)	27
Private Study and reading	123
Total	150

The following essential and recommended readings are subject to change. Students should not therefore purchase textbooks prior to commencing their course. If students wish to undertake background reading before starting the course, many of the chapters/readings are available in electronic form via on-line library catalogues and other resources.

Essential Reading:

Myers, M. 2009. Qualitative research in business and management. Sage Publications.

In addition, students will be required to read a range of recommended articles from journals and texts, within different articles specified for the topic each week, as per the indicative reading list below.

Indicative Bibliography:

Alvesson, M. 2003. Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research. *Academy of Management Review*: 28.1: 13-33.

Balogun, J., Huff, A.S. and Johnson, P. (2003). Three responses to the methodological challenges of studying strategizing. *Journal of Management Studies*, **40.1**, 197-224

Burgess, R. G. 1984. *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research*. London: Routledge.

Dyer Jr., W. G., and A. L. Wilkins. 1991. "Better Stories, Not Better Constructs, to

- Generate Better Theory: A Rejoinder to Eisenhardt." *Academy of Management Review* 16.3: 613-19.
- Eisenhardt K.1989. Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14: 532-50
- Eisenhardt, K. & Graebner, M. 2007. Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, 50.1: 25-32
- Eisenhardt, K. 1991. "Better Stories and Better Constructs: The Case for Higher and Comparative Logic." *Academy of Management Review*. 16.3: 620-27.
- Fox-Wolfgramm, S. J. 1997. "Towards Developing a Methodology for Doing Qualitative Research: the Dynamic-Comparative Case Study Method." *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 13.4: 439-56.
- Golden, B. R. 1992. "The Past Is the Past - or Is It? The Use of Retrospective Accounts As Indicators of Past Strategy." *Academy of Management Journal*, 35.4: 848-60
- Langley, A. 1999. Strategies for theorizing from process data. *Academy of Management Review*, 24: 691-710.
- Lincoln, Y.S. and Guba, E.G. 1985. *Naturalistic Inquiry*. London: Sage
- Locke, K., K. Golden-Biddle, M. Feldman. 2008. Making doubt generative. *Rethinking the role of doubt in the research process. Organization Science*. 19 (6): 907–918
- Miles, M.B., A.M. Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative data analysis*. Thousand Oaks CA. Sage
- Pettigrew, A. 1990. Longitudinal field research on change theory and practice. *Organization Science*, 1, 3, 267-92
- Smith, A. D. (2002). From process data to publication: A personal sensemaking. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 11(4), 383-406.
- Stake, R.E. 1995. *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. 1998. *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage



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Suddaby, R. 2006. What grounded theory is not. *Academy of Management Journal*, 49:
633–642

Recommended Journals:

Academy of Management Learning and Education
Academy of Management Perspectives
Organizational Research Methods
Harvard Business Review
Long Range Planning
Sloan Management Review



For further information on any of the opportunities that Aston Business School offers, please contact:

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