

Preface

Methodology is the field which is indisputably complex. In the academic world, it is often said to be important, yet in everyday academic practice, it is not always treated accordingly. In teaching, methodology is often a mandatory course. Usually, it consists of learning how to adopt several common approaches when doing research, and how to conceive a *research design* (often leading to a survey). This usually leads to collecting data on a modest scale and – when the opportunity arises – analysing the data with the help of some statistics. Ask the students of their opinion at the end of such a course and they tend to heave a deep sigh of relief and say, “I have got through it.” Then their real courses start again, in which methodology often does not play a role at all.

We are of the opinion that writing-off methodology in this way is a real pity. It ignores the valuable role that methodology should play in academic teaching as a whole. Here, methodology is presented as a form of *thinking and acting* that, while obviously entailing research work, can also include the design and change of organisations. This broad approach has been purposefully chosen, as it is almost obvious from research and graduation projects that the students do not really have a clue what methodology involves and, therefore, wasting their time by producing work that has a little quality. The successful Dutch edition of this book demonstrated the need to provide a brief yet concise introduction to the field of methodology. We sincerely hope that this revised and elaborated English edition can meet similar needs.

This book has not been written for fellow academic methodologists. It is mainly aimed at teachers and lecturers who want to pay attention to methodology in their courses. This may involve working on research assignments, explaining certain methodological aspects of specialised knowledge, as well as supervising Master’s and, sometimes, PhD projects. Above all, this book is aimed at students who work in the field of management sciences and to those who are specifically involved in the studies that concern the functioning, structuring, diagnosing, or changing of organisations. The goal is to offer them a preliminary guide to define and carry out various forms of research. Our overall objective here is to provide the student with

a clear understanding of methodology and its value for their academic work. Hopefully, it will also encourage specialised lecturers to actually assign methodology a more important place in their teaching.

As it is common in a preface, we express our thanks to all those persons, authors, and colleagues, who have contributed to this book. We are grateful for using their texts, ideas, and critical remarks. In particular, we are grateful to all (Master's and PhD) students who have had to struggle with various preliminary versions of the manuscript, as well as with the many ideas and notions "under construction."

Special acknowledgement is due to the former Nederlandse Organisatie voor Bedrijfskundig- en Economisch Onderzoek (NOBEM), a Dutch graduate network of universities that provided academic teaching to PhD students in particular with respect to research methodology. Over the years, this network offered us a systemic opportunity for cooperation in bringing a fine result in the Dutch edition of this book. We recognise the valuable support of Louwe Dijkema and Jacqueline Koppelman (both at that moment employed at Royal Van Gorcum Publishers in Assen – The Netherlands) who supported that first edition. This English edition is revised and rewritten on the basis of teaching experience gained since the first release of this book. We express our gratitude to Frau Dr. Martina Bihn at Springer Verlag for being so patient and supportive. We feel honoured to be guided by her.

We thank Anneliene Jonker who has spent countless hours working on the figures, references, and glossary. We are also indebted to Sarah Trenker who helped turn our original text into proper English. Special thanks also go to Jacques Igalens, professor at the IAE of the University of Toulouse 1 (France) who provided time, space, and company for editing the final version of this manuscript. Finally we acknowledge our academic employers. They have allowed us – admittedly sometimes under duress – to give courses outside the regular teaching schedule for more than a decade. Without this valuable support, little would have come of what initially started as an idea to make methodology more accessible to a broad group of students during their studies.

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Please note: Everywhere in the book where "he" is used, "she" can also be read. It goes without saying that this also applies for the term "researcher," which obviously includes both male and female researchers. The choice for the grammatical "male" form is not based on any form of discrimination whatsoever, but purely aimed on achieving a more readable text.



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