Strategies for Gaining Access in Doing Fieldwork: Reflection of two Researchers

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Abstract: One of greatest pitfalls in conducting research successfully is the inability to obtain access to the research field. Obtaining access to the research field can vary to a considerable extent, depending on the kind of cases being investigated. In fact, researchers often spend considerable amount of time on this task. However, many researchers do not even describe their access to the research field in their research reports. The main aim of this paper is to share the experiences of two researchers in gaining access to fieldwork practice. We believe that the issues we discuss based on our experiences in gaining access would benefit other qualitative researchers. We also hope that comparing the experiences of two different researchers in two very different research fields would help highlight issues which are often neglected in doing qualitative research. In this paper, we present our comparison of the different approaches we used in the various stages in gaining access. We discuss our strategies in gaining access using a four stage model: pre-entry, during fieldwork, after fieldwork and getting back. Finally, we present a basic framework for gaining access successfully which other researchers can use, and also critically analyze our experiences in using the two different approaches, formal and personal, in gaining access in our respective research projects.

Keywords: gaining access, ethnography, gatekeepers, fieldwork, mixed method

1. Introduction

One of greatest pitfalls in conducting research successfully is the inability to obtain access to the research field. Researchers often spend considerable amount of time on this task, especially when the research requires an in-depth study of their respective research field (Okumus et al., 2007; Patton, 2002; Shenton and Hayter, 2004). This task can be even more difficult if it involves a sensitive topic. Many researchers do not even describe their fieldwork practice in their research report. It is only in ethnography based research access to the research field is often described explicitly.

Obtaining access to the research field can vary to a considerable extent, depending on the kind of cases being investigated. For instance, obtaining access in large profit enterprises can be more difficult as their managers would value the cost of time. Thus, for such situations questionnaires are often considered to be more feasible rather than interviews and observations (Easterby- Smith, Thrope and Lowe, 2002). According to Van Maanen and Knolb (1985), gaining access to the research field is crucial and should not be taken lightly. As for ethnographic research work it requires negotiating environments that are foreign to the researcher. The need for social skills is greatly required (Wasserman & Clair, 2007). It is important for one to gain the trust and acceptance of the participants in order to conduct one's research (Wasserman & Clair, 2007). This would involve some combination of strategic planning, hard work and opportunities. Furthermore, researchers who are considered outsiders of an organization are often not welcomed, especially if they ask questions that are considered to be sensitive and awkward (Okumus et al, 2007).

Often many academics face numerous obstacles in trying to gain access to various organizations where they would like to carry out their research. The hurdles are often neglected or it is seen as merely tactical issue (Gummesson, 2000). Organizations are usually skeptical about the role of outsiders and may not value academic studies (Laurila, 1997). In addition, many organizations deny access due to academic's failure to provide answers about what, how and why they are carrying out the study, and whether the study would provide value to the organization itself (Coleman, 1996). It has been acknowledged the importance of gaining access but very minimal has been written on issues and problems of gaining access (Feldman et al, 2003). We address this oversight by sharing our experiences in gaining access to the research field, based on our respective doctoral studies (Johl, 2006; Renganathan, 2005).

Our main aim of this paper is to contribute our experiences to building of the literature on gaining access. This paper shares the experiences of two researchers on fieldwork practice. We believe that

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the issues we discuss based on our experiences of gaining access into our respective research fields, would benefit other qualitative researchers. First, a brief background of the two research projects that this paper is based on will be discussed. Next, by combining Laurila's (1997) and Buchanan's (1988) classification, we present our comparison of the different approaches we used in gaining access to our respective research fields at different stages. We discuss our strategies in gaining access to our respective research fields using a four stage model: pre-entry, during fieldwork, after fieldwork and getting back. Finally, we critically examined our experiences in using the different approaches in gaining access into our respective research fields. We also hope that comparing the experiences of two different researchers in two very different research fields would help highlight issues which are often neglected in doing qualitative research.

2. Gaining access to fieldwork

In conducting research it is important for the researcher to think about how to go about gaining access. Gaining access involves convincing people that the researcher has decided upon on who should be the informants that would provide information in conducting research. (Feldman et al, 2003). This would require the researcher to talk to many people by developing rapport with them and to be in a position to learn from them (Feldman et al, 2003). Therefore, gaining access is not a simple task where it requires some combination of strategic planning, hard work and luck (Van Maanen and Kolb, 1985).

Some researchers have tried to categorize and organize their access to the research field. Buchanan et al (1988) developed a four-stage access model: getting in, getting on, getting out and getting back. At the getting in stage researchers are expected to be clear about their objectives, time and resources. Once access has been gained it becomes necessary to renegotiate entry into the actual lives of people in the organization, whereby having basic interpersonal skills and procedures such as good appearance, verbal and nonverbal communication plays an important role (Burgess, 1984). As for the getting out stage, the best strategy is agreeing on a deadline for the closure of data collection process. Finally, the option of returning back for further fieldwork should be maintained, thus, the researcher must be able to manage the process of withdrawal from the organisation favorably (Buchanan et al, 1998). On the other hand, Laurila (1997) suggested three types of access. The first type is considered to be formal access which refers to achieving an agreement between the organization and the researcher on specific condition in terms of what, when and how empirical data are collected and what might be the return. The second type is personal access where the researcher knows relevant executives, managers and individuals in the organization. Finally, in the third type of access, the researcher is able to foster individual rapport where a good understanding is developed and there is collaboration between the researcher and the organization.

Gummesson (2000) also identified three different types of access. The first, physical access is where the researcher is considered to have the ability to get close to the object of study. The second, continued access, refers to maintaining an ongoing physical access to the research setting. The third, mental access, refers to the researcher being able to understand what is happening and why it is happening in the investigated settings (Okumus et al., 2006).

Gaining access to individuals may require years of preparation depending on the level of access required by the researcher (Feldman et al., 2003). Researchers need to develop reputation for consistency and integrity. This is very much required when one is conducting an ethnographic based research that requires the researcher to live and show commitment to the community before being trusted with the information that he/she is seeking for. Also, finding the right individuals to interview or observe can be challenging especially if the study is on individuals that are not connected to an organization (Feldman et al., 2003). Often in the early access process it is important for the researcher to have someone of the community to vouch for his or her presence. In addition, this will help the researcher to build webs of relationships which will aid and provide the researcher lateral and vertical connections to people. Also, Feldman et al., (2003) finds that it is important for researchers to establish relationship with gatekeepers to gain access to multiple informants. These gatekeepers' maybe individuals but often are organizations. It is important to bear in mind in order to be granted access the study has to be in line with the gatekeepers' hidden agendas, ideologies and cultures which may require the researcher to change how the research is talked about to conform to the gatekeepers attitude about what is being researched on (Lee, 1993). Gatekeepers can stop the access process into some parts of the sample and prevent introductions to certain key informants who can provide valuable information due to political and personal reasons (Gummesson, 2000). This is very much described by Cole (2004) in her longitudinal study in eastern Indonesia on how power relation relations between her and the gatekeeper seesawed as he introduced her to some people before others and made some meetings much easier than others (Okumus et al., 2007). Often researchers are in the weak position due to their few bargaining resources beyond their academic respectability (Lee, 1993).

In terms of informants who can provide information about the investigated area are categorized into four groupings by Laurila (1997): survivors, disbelievers, cautious and candid analyzers. The analyzers that are categorized as survivors will only provide basic information reluctantly and the disbelievers would talk about general issues which will not provide any useful information. As for the cautious analyzers simple issues will be discussed openly but will not provide sufficient information on the investigated area. On the hand, the candid analyzers talks about the investigated area in a very open manner and provides very detailed information (Okumus et al., 2007).

Categorizing access to the research field, based on the literature above, would provide some form of structure for researchers to follow. However, issues related to access may vary according to the types of research being investigated. Thus, suggestions from existing literature are not always appropriate for every researcher at different stages of their research. In fact, the obstacles related to gaining access are often neglected or seen as merely a tactical issue (Gummeson, 2000).

3. Background of the two research studies

In this section we briefly discuss the context and methodology of the two research projects this paper is based on. Both research projects are in the field of Social Science. Research Project 1 (Table 1) is based on a doctoral study in Business and Management (Johl, 2006) and Research Project 2 is based on a doctoral study in Education (Renganathan, S., 2005).

Table 1: Comparing background information of research project 1 and 2

Research Project 1	Research Project 2
Mixed-method approach (qualitative – quantitative – qualitative); Questionnaires, interviews, secondary data (annual reports); Social science – Business and Management discipline.	Mixed-method approach (quantitative – quanlitative); Questionnaires, interviews, observations; Social science – Language and Education discipline.

Research Project 1

The first researcher explored the relationship between corporate governance and corporate entrepreneurship activities among the FTSE 100 companies. This study used a mixed method approach for testing propositions, triangulating and elaborating the relationship between corporate governance and corporate entrepreneurship activities in firms. Two qualitative studies were undertaken to ascertain the nature of corporate entrepreneurship and corporate governance. This, along with other evidence, enabled the development of a corporate entrepreneurship index and a corporate governance index. A quantitative analysis was then undertaken, based on the FTSE 100 companies to ascertain the nature of any relationship between the two indices. Qualitative case studies were then used through an interview process to gain a deeper understanding of the issues involved.

This study collected data in three stages. In stage one an exploratory study was conducted to obtain the perception of corporate entrepreneurship and to determine the understanding and familiarity level of this concept. The second phase of this study used the quantitative approach to measure the entrepreneurial and governance levels of the companies. Two indexes were developed to measure the corporate entrepreneurship and corporate governance levels of the FTSE 100 companies. Finally, in Stage three the qualitative approach was used to ascertain consistent patterns in the results identified earlier as well as to elaborate the quantitative findings.

Research Project 2

In this research, the researcher explored the social practices of learning and using English among university students in a private university in Malaysia (Renganathan, S., 2005). The private university uses English language as its medium of instruction, and thus, the research explored the use of

English as a social practice among the university students. This research adopted an "ethnographic perspective" (Green and Bloome, 1997) and the relevant data were obtained from surveys, interviews and observations. These data were used to explore students' perceptions of using English in their everyday lives both inside and outside the language classrooms in the university.

The second researcher also used a mixed method approach. However, the qualitative aspect of the research had more weighting as compared to the quantitative. Data for the research were collected in three stages. In Stage 1, through a pilot study, the researcher gathered information from the students in the university through survey questionnaires. The researcher intended to identify relevant issues that will require in depth investigation in the following stages. Thus, in Stage 2, the researcher carried out interviews with some of the students and two of their language lecturers, gathered information from a larger population of students through surveys in the form of questionnaires, and observed some of the language classes. Finally, in Stage 3, the researcher carried out follow-up interviews with some of the student participants in Stage 2 of the research and interviewed the rest of the language lecturers in the university.

4. Strategies in gaining access

Pre-entry to the field

In this section, we describe and compare (Table 2) how both researchers using different types of access employed relevant strategies in gaining access to their respective research sites.

Table 2: Comparing pre-entry access of research project 1 and 2

Research Project 1	Research Project 2
Formal access; Online-directory, telephone calls (to public relations manager), eMail (questionnaire attached), eMail (cover letter with official letter head attached); Fix appointments based on interviewees availability; Researcher felt obligated because of infringement on interviewees' time; Need to emphasise benefits of research to the organization; Issues of anonymity and confidentiality assured.	Personal Access; Informal eMails, telephone calls to familiar people; No formal appointments were made; Colleagues felt obligated to help; Benefits of research is taken for granted by the organization; Issues of anonymity and confidentiality assured.

Research Project 1

The first researcher used a formal way of obtaining access in organizations. The Northcote Website: http://www.northcote.co.uk, an online directory of public listed companies in the U.K was used to identify the population of the FTSE 100 companies. Listing 100 top companies in the country, the latest version (2004) at the time of the research was used to obtain their addresses and contact numbers. A number of ways were used to gain respondents' co-operation and motivate them to respond (Oppenheim, 1992) and in identifying the most appropriate person within the firm that would be able to participate in answering the questionnaire. Firstly, telephone calls were made as a preliminary notification to the companies in explaining about the research project and to identify the most appropriate person prior to eMailing the questionnaires. The telephone calls were made to the company's Public Relations Manager to determine who would be the most appropriate person in the corporation that would be able to participate in answering the questionnaires according to his/her best knowledge. This strategy was utilised with the intention of maximising the response rate. Also, this approach helped to identify a contact person within the firm who could then be referred back to in order to obtain any further information about the organisation. After locating the most appropriate person within the firm, eMails were then sent that contained a cover letter stating the research objectives and requesting participation. This was designed and attached as a file with the eMail and questionnaires (Bell, 1993; Cohen and Manion, 1994; Oppenhiem; 1992). A similar letter was also eMailed to each of the case study participants. Although the cover page of the questionnaire contained an introductory statement to indicate the purpose of the study (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982), it was considered important that respondents understood and accepted the aims of the study and hence, willingly imparted information (Foddy, 1993). Also, it was crucial to seek legitimate access to avoid the participants from being bias to non-response (Oppenhiem, 1992).

Respondents were promised anonymity in terms of revealing information as their name and contact numbers would not be revealed publicly. This helped to gain their trust and confidence in terms of revealing information. In addition, to obtain the requested information as legitimate and to garner respondent trust (Foddy, 1996), it was essential to promise confidentiality to the respondents. Oppenhiem (1992) argued that it is crucial for all surveys to be treated as confidential in the sense that only researchers have access to them and steps were taken to ensure that no information about identifiable persons or organisations was published without permission. Both the survey and case study respondents were also promised a copy of the results in due course (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Also, the respondents were provided with a named contact in the event of a query and finally the letter ended with a note of thanks (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982).

There being no interviewer to provide additional information, the length of the cover letter in the eMail questionnaire might be longer than the introduction to a personal interview (Sudman & Bradburn, 1982). However, the length of the cover letter was limited to one page in order to prevent respondents from skimming and ignoring it completely. The letter used the official letterhead of the University of Nottingham Institute for Enterprise and Innovation as a channel in building contacts and network with the organisations. This was expected to be significant in securing widespread co-operation (Johl, 2006; Oppenheim, 1992). In addition, telephone calls and eMails were used to fix appointments with the interviewees based on their time availability.

<u>*Research Project 2*</u>

In the second research project, the researcher used “personal access” (Laurila, 1997) and established individual rapport to get the relevant information for the study. In this research project the researcher was a staff member who was on study leave from the organisation where the field work was carried out. Thus, the research site was familiar to the researcher and thus the researcher employed various familiar ways to gain access to the research site.

Entry to the field was established through informal emails, and phone calls to familiar people in the organisation (the university). The researcher was familiar with the university’s semester system, thus it was easy to determine suitable time to gain the relevant information from the research site. Furthermore, the researcher was a member of staff, thus, the researcher’s requests were often easily met. In addition, because of the researcher’s familiar identity within the research site, access to relevant information was mostly based on trust. Some of the interviewees for the research were the researcher’s colleagues. Thus, none of these colleagues declined to be interviewed. In fact, the researcher believes that her colleagues even felt obligated to help her with the research.

The issue of confidentiality was also very important because the researcher was a member of the staff. The researcher was aware that the interviewees, especially those who were colleagues, would not be comfortable disclosing information which can be considered “private” or sensitive” to another member of staff. Thus, the researcher promised that the information obtained would be confidential and only pseudo names will be used in the writing of the research. As for the students, they were given a confidentiality letter, which promised to treat all information obtained in the interviews confidentially.

During Field work

In this section we compare the issues we experienced and discuss the strategies we employed during our fieldwork at the respective research sites.

Table 3: Comparing issues and strategies in Research Project 1 and 2

Research Project 1 (formal)	Research Project 2 (personal)
Dressed formally; Adapting from Asian culture to Western culture; Addressed interviewees formally using surnames – vice versa; Familiarizing with British accent; Permission obtained to tape-record interviews.	Dressed casually; Share same cultural practices, values and languages; Encourage interviewees to use researcher’s first name; Well-versed in interviewees’ mother tongue language; Permission obtained to tape record interviews.

<u>*Research Project 1*</u>

During the field work, the first researcher dressed in a formal way in order to gain the trust and confidence from the interviewees. This was considered to be very pertinent as the researcher interviewed individuals who are from the top management team of the corporation and it is important to set a good impression to these individuals. Also, the researcher's background is from the Asian culture therefore she had to learn and adjust to the Western culture in order to blend in and to be accepted as knowledgeable in their business practices. This was pertinent to gain the trust and willingness of the interviewees to reveal information without any hesitation. In addition, the researcher had to familiarize herself with the British accent in order to communicate effectively with the interviewees. The interviewees were addressed formally by using their surnames as it was the first time the researcher was meeting them. All respondents permitted the conversations to be tape-recorded. The interviewees expressed their views openly. This is because the researcher was able to make them feel comfortable by assuring them about confidentiality and anonymity in revealing information.

Research Project 2

The researcher's familiarity with the research site also facilitates the information gathering process. The research was carried out in a multilingual, multi ethnic population. Thus, the researcher's familiarity with the interviewees' cultural practices, values, and languages helped greatly in obtaining the relevant information for the research. The second researcher purposely dressed casually especially when interviewing the students to avoid emphasising power relations in interviewing students in an educational setting (Scot and Usher, 1999). According to Scot and Usher (1999), respondents in an interview will give responses based on the setting and role they are positioned in. Therefore, they stated that an education researcher may find the interviewees responding as they would to a teacher in relation to their role as a student. Furthermore, the students were also encouraged to call the researcher using her first name which is uncommon in an educational setting where the research was carried out. These were purposely done to encourage the students not to strictly see the researcher in the role of a lecturer. Using the languages which were familiar to the interviewees was also an advantage. The researcher did not share the same mother tongue language as the interviewees. In fact, many of the interviewees preferred to be interviewed in their mother tongue language. Thus, it was crucial for the researcher to be familiar with the interviewees' mother tongue language in order to obtain the relevant information.

After Fieldwork

Table 4 below, summarises our experiences after leaving the research sites once we have collected the relevant data for our respective research.

Table 4: Comparing after fieldwork practices of research project 1 and 2

Research Project 1 (formal)	Research Project 2 (personal)
Transcribed each interview session; Analysed using 2 steps: within case analysis and across case analysis; Used conventional method – to establish unique patterns; EMailed a formal thank-you note immediately; As promised, sent a copy of the result (report) to the respective organization.	Transcribed verbatim each interview; Used QSR Nudist software to assist analysis; Informal appreciation; Results were not revealed to the organization.

Research Project 1

The case study interviews were recorded and then transcribed after each interview session. This permitted greater flexibility in analysis and provided a better grasp of the underlying meanings. A primitive classification system was created which was continually revised as more data was assimilated. The data was searched for patterns, and regularities which formed the basis of the initial categories into which units of data could be placed. The explanation building process was iterative and based upon the propositions that were developed. This study did not utilize any qualitative data analysis package (for example, NVivo or QSR NUDI.ST software) which allows rich text documents to be coded and thus formulate models of underlying categories and constructs. This was because the research study involved a relatively small number of interviews and the use of primitive classification systems was considered to be a sufficient and convenient way of analysing the data. The data was analysed in two steps: within case analysis, followed by across case analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). As a first step, detailed case study write-ups were generated. Although primarily descriptive, they helped to cope with the high volume of data, while at the same time enabling familiarity with each case as a stand-alone entity. This, in turn, allowed the unique patterns of each case to emerge by comparing the similarities and differences across cases thus allowing the generalization of patterns across cases. Immediately after each interview session, a formal thank you note was eMailed to the interviewee. This is to ensure good rapport is being built with these individuals and to ensure if any further information is required form these individuals they would be willing to share it. Also, as promised a copy of the results were provided in a report form to the respective individuals.

Research Project 2

The researcher left the research site to analyse the data obtained from the interviews and observations carried out in Stage 2. All the interview data were transcribed verbatim. The interview data in the students' mother tongue language were retained and only necessary excerpts were translated for the research report.

The analysis of the interview transcripts for this research was facilitated with the use of the QSR NUDI.ST programme. QSR NUDI.ST is a computer programme which assists the data analysis of qualitative data. This programme was very helpful in coding sections of the transcribed interview texts, and enabling easy retrieval and search of coded texts segments, words, and phrases.

Using QSR NUDI.ST, the researcher established a preliminary list of coding categories by going through each interview transcript. The initial coding categories reflected a combination of themes and issues that were closely related to the research questions as well as categories of expressions that the interviewees themselves used. The coding categories formed different levels of generality in order for retrieval of information at various levels. From the preliminary list the researcher identified eight coding categories that best fit the whole data.

Getting Back

In this section, we discuss the options we had on whether there was a need to get back to the research sites again.

Table 5: Comparing the choices of getting back for research project 1 and 2

Research Project 1 (formal)	Research Project 2 (personal)
Established good rapport, easy to get back to the research field; Sufficient information gathered to complete research; Need not get back to the organization.	Familiar with the research site, easy to gain access again; Insufficient data collected, this required to get back again to the research site.

Research Project 1

The researcher had built good rapport with the interviewees and thus, would not have faced many obstacles if there was a need to get back to the research site to obtain further information. However, the researcher was not required to do so as she has had sufficient information and managed to complete her research project without getting back to the organisations.

Research Project 2

After the analysis of data obtained at Stage 2, the researcher realised that further information was needed. Thus, the data at Stage 3 was collected a year after obtaining information from the students at Stage 2. Although, it was easy for the researcher to go back to the research site again, it was difficult to contact all the students who took part in the interviews at Stage 2. However, with the help of some of the administrative staff, the researcher managed to get in touch with some of the students. The purpose of this interview was to clarify certain issues and information which emerged during the analysis of data obtained at Stage 2.

5. A framework for gaining access successfully

Based on the discussion above, we provide a basic framework (Figure 1) which a qualitative researcher can use in gaining access either using the formal or informal approach as discussed in this paper.

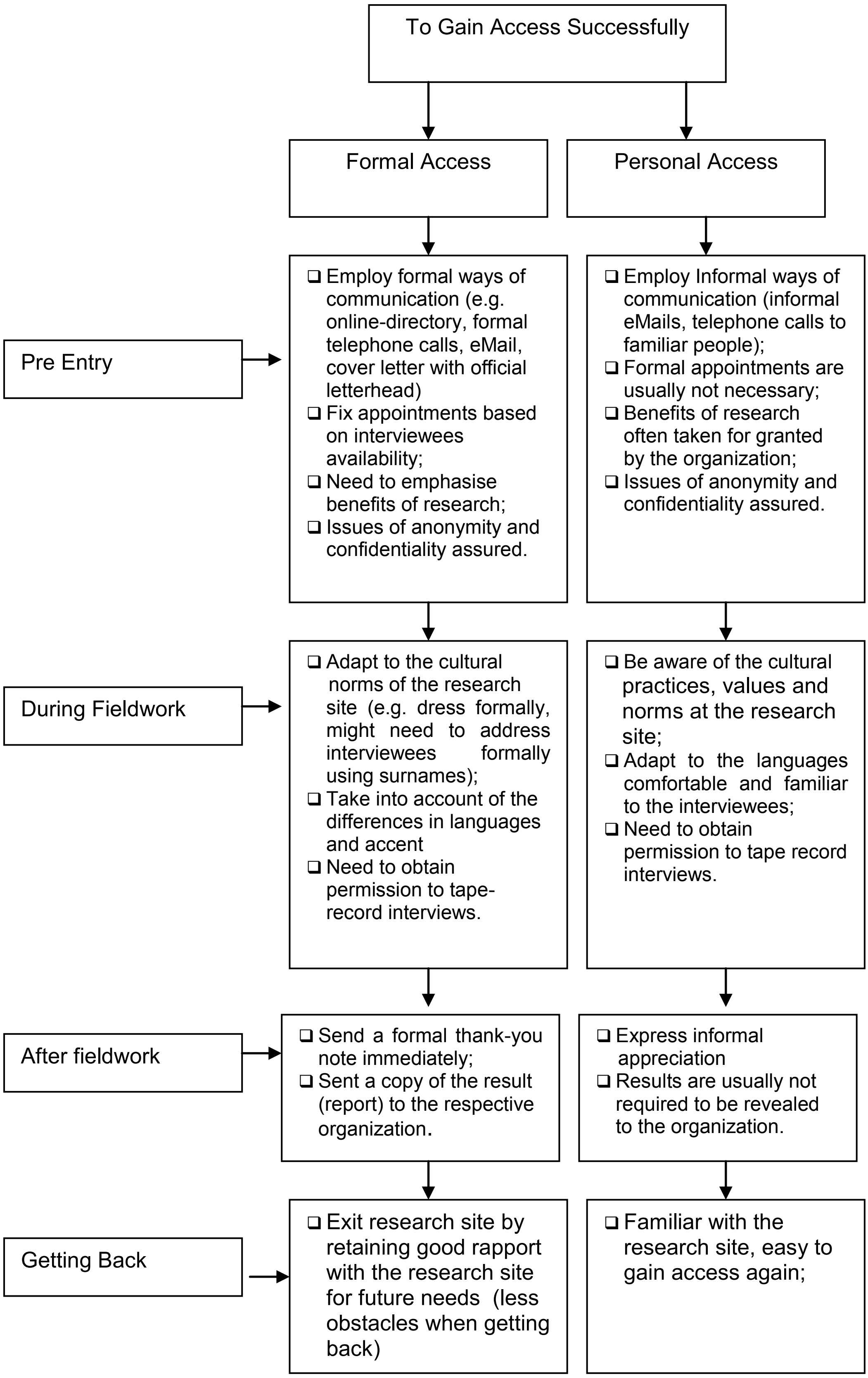

Figure 1: A framework for gaining successful access

We believe this framework can provide a basis for other researches to utilize in gaining access to their respective research sites.

6. Critical analysis of using two different approaches in gaining access

Gaining access to the field is considered crucial in ensuring success in conducting research. As discussed in the earlier section there are two ways of gaining access: formal and informal. The first researcher used a formal approach in gaining access whereby the researcher was not familiar to the field which can be considered as a drawback. However, the researcher was able to benefit using this approach due to the following reasons:

- A formal structured way was used in approaching the respondents. The first researcher was very sensitive in terms of the respondents' availability. She fixed appointments according to the interviewees' convenience. This was very much appreciated by the interviewees and they were very cooperative during the interviews.
- The first researcher is not familiar to the field. Therefore, she has no preconceived ideas about the organization. Thus she was not biased towards the information given by the interviewees;
- The first researcher comes from different cultural background and country where business practices differ from that of her research site (United Kingdom). However the interviewees took extra effort and were patient enough in providing detailed explanation about their business practices;
- The first researcher had no prior relationship with the interviewees. Therefore, the answers given to her were not influenced by any form of prior relations between the researcher and the respondents. In fact. The respondents were very frank in giving their views and opinion;
- As a formal approach was used in gaining access to the companies the interviewees kept to the appointments seriously without any cancellation as they would need to set a good impression of their company and themselves;
- The letters that were sent to the respondents bore University Nottingham letter head and were endorsed by the researcher's supervisor who holds a prominent position in the university. This gave an impression of the importance of the research project and therefore the interviewees paid extra attention and gave full cooperation to the researcher.

On the other hand, the second researcher used the personal approach in gaining access to her research site. Although existing literature supports that if the researcher is familiar with the research site, obviously gaining access would be easier as compared to an outsider. However, a critical analysis of the researcher's access to her research site showed that although as an insider it is much easier, it should not be taken for granted.

- As the research site was familiar to the researcher, appointments and schedules were often changed. This is because the interviewees, especially the researcher's colleagues, and the researcher could easily accommodate one another at short notices without jeopardizing the relationship between the researcher and participants.
- The researcher was familiar to the research site under investigation, thus, it was extremely important for the researcher to consciously acknowledge her own personal feelings towards the research. The researcher also paid careful attention not to influence the interviews and observations with her own preconceived ideas.
- The researcher shared many of the values and cultural practices of the participants. The researcher is even well versed in the participants' mother tongue language. During the interviews, the participants made a lot of assumptions that the researcher would be able to easily understand their explanations. Thus, sometimes there were awkward situations where the participants were asked to explain explicitly the meanings underlying their explanations.
- The researcher had known the participants, especially her colleagues, before embarking on her research. Thus, there is always the possibility that the participants' responses during the interviews are influenced by the relationship the participants share with the researcher.
- Since the researcher made informal appointments, often they were not taken seriously by the interviewees. There were quite a number of last minute cancellations and changes. Some interviewees did not even turn up at the agreed time.
- During fieldwork at the university, the importance of the research was only acknowledged by the researcher. The participants and the university merely assisted the researcher. None of the participants or members of staff from the university questioned any of the researcher's actions during her fieldwork.

7. Conclusion

In this paper we have shared our experiences especially on the various strategies we used in obtaining access to the two different research sites in our respective research projects. We discussed specific issues which were salient in gaining access using the four stage model: pre-entry, during fieldwork, after fieldwork and getting back. The first researcher found that choosing the right strategy in gaining access to the field is considered to be paramount in ensuring a high response rate. This is demonstrated in her research as she was able to obtain a high response rate of 42%. Also, all the six interviewees for the case study that were contacted after the questionnaire session were all agreeable to be interviewed. As for the second researcher, she found that planning was very important in gaining access to obtain the relevant information for her research. However, the second researcher also believes that it is also equally important to be flexible and adaptable to the changes which occur at the research site. Different researchers would encounter and experience different types of issues in gaining access to their research sites. However, it is only through the sharing of the researchers' experiences in gaining access that important issues can be highlighted and discussed for the benefit of other fellow researchers. It is hoped that the various issues and strategies we discussed in this paper would benefit other researchers in gaining access in doing field work for their own research projects.

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