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About this Book

The original shorthand title for this book within the series was 'presenting and reporting', but we knew that the book was to be concerned with far more than presentation techniques and report writing. Although excellent face-to-face and written communication skills are undoubtedly vital to qualitative market researchers, it is clear that a wider set of skills and activities are involved in creating value for clients. These skills are engaged in turning the products of a research process into really useful information, designed for a specific client, and a specific need, at a specific time.

What this volume covers is actually one of the fundamental activities that defines qualitative market research and makes it different from other forms of qualitative practice – how commercial practitioners make qualitative methods work to the maximum benefit of their clients. To this end, it addresses the whole issue of client–researcher contact, and how researchers use their business and research skills within a client relationship in order fully to understand and address client needs. This means the book deals not only with the final interpretation and presentation of findings, but also with the way that the client's problem is interrogated and understood at the very beginning of the project.

Qualitative market research is carried out to certain standards, including ethical ones, and with expectations of impartiality and independence in the researcher. However, by definition, it is always carried out for the benefit of a commissioning organisation. This gives the practitioner a 'dual role', discussed in Book 1 and in other books in the series. This volume focuses on the 'committed agent and business partner' role of the researcher – exactly how researchers operate to ensure that, in the final analysis, the outcome of the research meets the client's objectives and genuinely provides value for the organisation.

This book sets down knowledge and a description of practice which is unique. It makes explicit aspects of the business – such as how business relationships are handled between buyers and providers of research, or what has to happen for a briefing to be really effective – which are rarely discussed and which have been largely inaccessible to those outside the industry. It makes it clear, too, that beyond general qualitative research skills, additional expertise is required by the commercial researcher, expertise to make the research really address the client's needs and objectives.

Commercial qualitative practice has evolved under, and is adapted to, a very specific set of conditions which help account for its distinctive nature. This book makes an important contribution to understanding these conditions and the ways in which they are changing. As such, it represents not only a valuable text in its own right, but also a vital context for any of the other books in the series.