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Citation: Runeson, G. 2018. Research Methods: A Practical Guide for Students and Researchers. *Construction Economics and Building*, 18:1, 83-84. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5130/AJCEB.v18i1.5979>

ISSN 2204-9029 | Published by UTS ePRESS | ajceb.epress.lib.uts.edu.au

BOOK REVIEW

Research Methods: A Practical Guide for Students and Researchers

Willie Tan

Research Methods: A Practical Guide for Students and Researchers

World Scientific Publishing, Singapore, 2017

ISBN: 978-981-3229-58-7 (hardcover), ISBN: 978-981-3229-61-7 (softcover). 228 pages

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5130/AJCEB.v18i1.5979>

Article History: Received 11/01/2018; Revised 30/01/2018; Accepted 05/02/2018; Published 28/03/2018

In the preface, Professor Tan sets himself an enormous challenge when he declares that the aim of the book is to “provide a *concise, practical*, and reasonably *comprehensive* guide on research methods. ... [for] ... readers who are just starting out on their research journey.” Any respectable university library would have several shelf metres of books that specialise in one or a few aspects of research methods and the thought of condensing all that into a single, practical volume is strictly for masochists.

Yet, in some respects, Professor Tan actually achieves the impossible. The section on quantitative analysis is both accessible and comprehensive and should be a “must” for any researcher that ever contemplates opening a statistical package. In a very practical way it explains the assumptions behind the techniques and all the tests required before getting to the analysis itself. This section is worth the price of the book on its own.

However, success comes at a price – in this case the quantitative analysis section of the book occupies almost a third of the space available which means that other concepts and methods suffer from an imposed brevity and there is very little about fundamental philosophy behind the different approaches. Important subjects like constructing surveys or qualitative analysis, which many people have written books about, gets a few pages while others like ethics are barely mentioned.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTEREST The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article. **FUNDING** The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

As a text for a course in research methods for undergraduate and coursework postgraduate students, which are the primary target for the book, the book would have few competitors. Among all the topics mentioned lecturers would be able to choose what to emphasise, given the research topics and prior knowledge. Similarly, it would serve as text for a good introductory course for postgraduate research students and professionals.

For undergraduate and coursework postgraduate students, using it for self-study, the text should be adequate for most aspects of their research projects. They may have to go outside the book for some specific aspects of their projects, but there is enough information in the book to identify these areas and the need will become obvious as they read. For the postgraduate researcher and the professional, the “guide” in the title should be taken literally to mean a guide to areas they have to master, and they can profitably start with the short list of references at the end of each chapter.

For obvious reasons, a book of 200 pages can't cover the total body of knowledge in the field – even experienced researchers often encounter new problems. What it does well is preparing new researchers for most issues and doing so, promises to save time – the ultimate resource limiting our work.