Tutorial 3.1

# More on Review by Institutional Review Boards (IRBs)

Gaining approval from an institutional review board (IRB) has become a standard part of doing any research involving human subjects. However, the approval process can be anything but standard. For instance, if an IRB raises important questions about your research, you may have to undertake multiple submissions before gaining approval, and the time consumed by these submissions may affect your schedule for doing the research.

As a general matter, you will want to prepare carefully for the IRB’s review. Every university and research organization has its own IRB, usually consisting of five or more senior colleagues who volunteer to serve on a rotating basis. You can obtain a sound understanding of your local IRB’s expectations by first checking to see whether your IRB has its own website. Most such websites will provide detailed guidance about your particular IRB’s review procedures, experiences, and expectations.

Adding to this information, you might want to review previous submissions to your IRB that have covered research projects like the one you are proposing. Similarly, your literature review might highlight previous studies with highly similar topics and methods. If your study has an innovative flavor much less methodology, prepare ahead of time for the inevitable questions that the IRB might raise.

More broadly, you can familiarize yourself with the principles underlying the need to protect human subjects by reviewing other works that cover the procedures in greater depth, especially relying on sources reflecting your own substantive subject area (e.g., for business research, see Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, pp. 62–76; for social work and sociology, see Grinnell & Unrau, 2008, pp. 30–59; and for public health, see Speiglman & Spear, 2009). Likewise, you can consult the formal guidances issued by the various social science professions, selecting the one that you most identify with (e.g., see the citations to the several professional associations’ documents listed under the heading “Conducting Research Ethically” in Chapter 3, pp. 86-87 of *Case Study Research and Applications*, 6th ed.).

Remember that an IRB’s specific concerns may vary from institution to institution and from IRB to IRB as its membership turns over. Do not hesitate to speak with a member or two of your own IRB ahead of time, to gain direct insight into the review process and its expectations.

# Briefly Annotated References for Tutorial 3.1

Eriksson, P., & Kovalainen, A. (2008). Qualitative methods in business research*.* London: Sage. Treats case study research as one of nine methods in qualitative business research.

Grinnell, R. M., & Unrau, Y. A. (Eds.). (2008). Social work research and evaluation: Foundations of evidence-based practice. New York: Oxford University Press. Serves as a comprehensive textbook on research and evaluation in social work.

Speiglman, R., & Spear, P. (2009). The role of institutional review boards: Ethics: Now you see them, now you don’t. In D. M. Mertens & P. E. Ginsberg (Eds.), The handbook of social research ethics (pp. 121–134). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage. Describes the role of institutional review boards.