INTRODUCTION

> Never before have so few, by their actions and inactions, had the power of life and death over so many of the species … Study the colonizers rather than the colonized, the culture of power rather than the culture of the powerless, the culture of affluence rather than the culture of poverty. (Laura Nader, 1972)[1]

WHY RESEARCH POWERFUL PEOPLE?

Powerful people are the cause and cure of social problems. They may be inefficient or abuse their power, or create positive change and social progress. Yet the familiar focus for studying social problems is **down–system** – people who are poor, vulnerable, oppressed or powerless.[2] As anthropologist Laura Nader argued in the 1970s (above), 'studying up' is important.[3] Anthropologists had a long experience of studying traditional leaders and elites in settings such as Africa and South America. And they evolved this approach to study other forms of 'up', from government officials[4] to gang leaders.[5] Sudhir Venkatesh extended the idea of 'participant observation' when, as a 23–year–old sociology student at Chicago University, he joined a gang to collect data used in his book *Gang Leader for a Day*.[6]

But Nader did not mean that 'studying up' replaces 'studying down' or 'studying side–ways'. She was arguing that that 'up' is an important complementary perspective.[7] While studying 'down' in relation to a disadvantaged group, such as street–working children,[8] it may be helpful to study similar 'sideways' groups, such as homeless adults. But it is also relevant to look 'up' at the factory owners who exploit the children, the educationists who try to help them, the political processes that cause their problems, and the police who abuse them (Figure 8.2).

There are many reasons for doing **up–system** research. The oldest is to demonstrate **legitimacy** (C1.2).[9] Since the King lists of the Egyptian Pharaohs, powerful people have tried to affirm their **status** on the questionable basis of "borrowed power" through researching and glorifying their ancestors and **superiors** (Figure 0.1). More recently, the former president of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak tried to mimic the ancient Egyptian tradition, until the 'April 6th Movement' (Arab Spring) of 2011 brought an end to his neo–dynastic ambitions (see Figure 0.2). And that change happened because ordinary
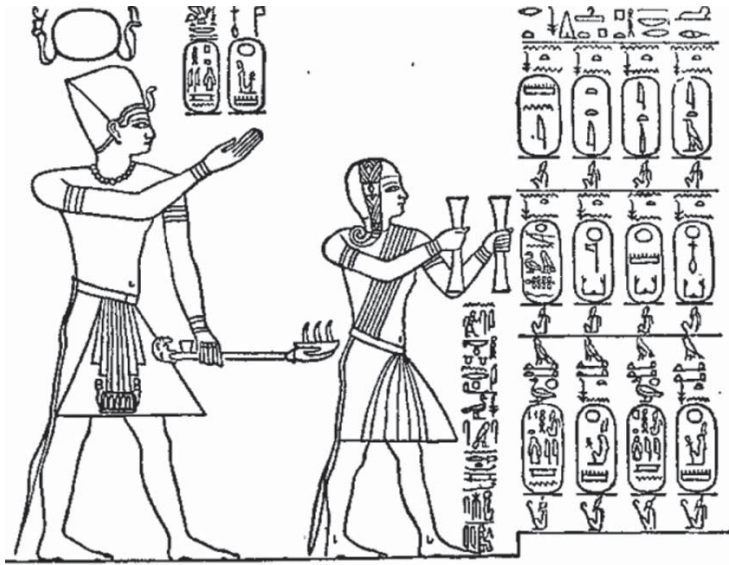
Seti, his son Ramesses II and the Abydos King List. Temple of Seti I, Abydos.
King lists, researched by court historians, adorned Egyptian temples and other public places, to 'borrow power' from ancestors to create legitimacy.

FIGURE 0.1   Egyptian dynasties – Seti

Source: Sutherland, B.J. (1903) *Encyclopaedia Biblica*. Toronto: Morang.

Analysing the 'backdrop' used by powerful people in their offices provides useful insights into how they want, or need, to 'borrow power' to create legitimacy. The power of (then) Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak was evident in the office of the president of Al-Azhar University, Ahmad Omar Hashem, in 2003. But Hashem also displayed Islamic texts prominently.

FIGURE 0.2   Egyptian dynasties – Mubarak

Source: Lee, Yun-joo (2010) 'Leadership and development in South Korea and Egypt: the significance of cultural shifts', unpublished PhD thesis, School of Oriental and Asian Studies, University of London.

WHO THIS BOOK IS FOR

Up-system research is very diverse, yet those working within specific traditions and disciplines often do not realize or appreciate the wide range of people doing similar research that has common problems and solutions. Interest groups include academics, students, leadership trainers, commercial researchers and 'head hunters', civil society organizations, journalists, investigators, media researchers and public officials. The approaches are also relevant to ordinary people seeking up-system redress, for example citizens mistreated by police, constituents holding MPs to account, unions checking managers, and others who want to assess if power is being used correctly.

As the apparent difficulties of researching powerful people can seem daunting, very simple approaches are included throughout this book. Anyone can start doing up-system research by analysing the banknotes in their pocket (Figure 7.7). These commonly depict national elites that a country wants to show off. A little more investigation can sometimes uncover fascinating stories beyond the images on the notes. When Chung Ju-yung, founder of the *Hyundai* group, went to London in 1971 to get a loan to start a shipyard, bank managers did not take him seriously, saying that Korea had no industrial tradition. He showed them a banknote depicting the Korean 'turtle ship', which was built in the sixteenth century. These ships had five types of cannon, including a dragon head at the front that could also shoot fire. They had armoured metal decks, iron spikes to deter boarders, and were part submerged – a proto-submarine. Chung pointed out that this was about 300 years before Britain had used metal for cladding ships in 1860 (Figure 0.8). He got his loan, and one of the most successful engineering companies in the world was born.

This book facilitates cross-disciplinary thinking and encourages a critical stance. Powerful people do not always give straight answers, but it is also important to be critical of the whole 'paradigm' of up-system research, which itself can be a form of power (C2.5) and sometimes an abuse of power (C1.1). But powerful people can also be vulnerable, and

Chung Ju-yung, head of Hyundai, used a Korean banknote showing the technologically advanced 'turtle ship' deployed by Admiral Yi Sun-shin (1545–98), to impress British bankers.

FIGURE 0.8   Admiral Yi Sun-shin and the 'turtle ship'

so can their families and associates, and they usually deserve the same ethical standards that would be applied in other forms of research (C4.6). The approaches to up-system research are diverse, and extend standard academic methods to embrace other perspectives. These include police and journalistic investigatory strategies, intelligence techniques deployed by diplomats and military analysts, reconstruction methods used by archaeologists, and meta-methods that are familiar to IT experts. These professional methods are often ignored by academics, yet they are sound, well-tested and practical. Increasingly there is overlap between professional and academic spheres. The book is therefore based on research across many different fields, in many countries, and can potentially interest a wide range of people who may not know that they may be interested.

KEY CONCEPTS

RESEARCH

An investigation directed to the discovery of some fact by careful study of a subject. (*OED*)

METHOD

A way of doing anything, especially according to a regular plan. A special form of procedure adopted in any branch of mental activity, whether for exposition or for investigation. (*OED*)

METHODOLOGY

The science of method. A treatise or dissertation on method. (*OED*)

In the past, studies of power, elites and leadership have usually been framed as distinct and separate areas of interest, with different theories and methodological approaches. But in practice the methods have much in common. This book brings these perspectives together, for the first time, and (borrowing Nader's injunction to 'study up') the term 'up-system' research is used to describe this general perspective. Methods books do not use terms consistently, and so methodologies need to provide conceptual frameworks and clarify terminology. This section and Figure 0.9 explain how the basic concepts are used throughout this book, and Appendix 1 shows how a case study can be mapped using this framework.

Elite studies usually concern select groups at the top of a hierarchical relationship with those within a non-specific **populace**. A distinction is often made between political and non-political elites.[22] Historically, elite status has often been **ascribed** – allocated at birth. **Leadership studies** usually concern specific up-system individuals and their relationship with specific down-system **followers** to achieve specific aims. Leadership status is often **achieved** through personal endeavour. Elite and leading organizations – TNCs, banks and UN organizations – can be conceptualized similarly, as can countries such as those in the OECD or OIC. The **hegemonic** leadership of countries, such as China or Germany, requires other countries to position themselves in relation to that power, and transnational forms of hegemony are now evident.[23] **Political** studies consider systems, parties and constituents, which is a distinct field.[24] This book only covers politicians as individuals in terms of political leadership (C2.3) and biographical research.

Research about powerful people is therefore likely to be conceptualized in terms of elite *or* leadership studies, but this is not clear-cut. Not least, who are the leaders or elites, who defines them as such and how are they defined?[25] Might those concerned agree or not with this description? Within one place or domain, the role of elite and leader may coexist, and power relationships can be circumstantial. In an expensive private school, pupils from royal families may be seen as elites, but senior teachers are the leaders and may have arbitrary power to punish those elites. Power sometimes arises because of a capacity gap between people. If the research site is a care-home for older people, low-paid care workers can represent leaders who have immense power over those in their care who may be wealthy elites. People who have the role of elite in one place or domain may be among the **masses** in others. Similarly, someone who has the role of a leader in one place or domain may be a follower in another. Business elites and leaders will probably not also be sports elites and leaders at the gym. A tribal warrior chief from Northern Nigeria would, on the Northern line of the London underground, just be one of the crowd, and in an emergency led by the train staff.

Powerful or influential people may be conceptualized as both elites and leaders – members of the US Senate, the Saudi Royal family, fighter pilots or the Taliban. They might change between being elites and leaders. The virtuoso pianist and composer, Paderewski, also managed to be a prime minister of Poland and Ambassador to the League of Nations, signing the Treaty of Versailles. Ronald Reagan, the actor, became Governor of California and then President of America. Arnold Schwarzenegger, bodybuilder, actor, businessman, similarly became Governor of California. Therefore the same person – for example, Princess Diana – may be an elite in one study – "The British **monarchy**" – and a leader in another – "Leading the changing attitudes to HIV/AIDS". Individuals may become leaders because they are elites, as have the royals throughout history, or achieve elite status through leadership, for instance a military hero who started as an ordinary soldier. People may become elites and leaders simply because they grow old, as with village or religious elders. Some studies of "leadership groups" could also be termed "elite studies", for example about the chief executives of transnational companies.[26] A study about a particular place or domain could be conceptualized to consider both elites and leaders, although this is not common. In some circumstances it may be more appropriate to talk of **leadership roles** or **elite roles** rather than 'leaders' or 'elites'. Deciding how to conceptualize a study is therefore crucial (C4.4, Appendices

1 and 7). In the future, perhaps there will be more interest in the interaction between elite and leadership roles – how powerful individuals use their two personas to create and maintain their power. Ayatollah Khomeini is an interesting example (Appendix 1).

Elite and leadership groups are often themselves internally **stratified** or **hierarchical**,[27] and so are the populace or followers. Understanding these hierarchies is crucial when trying to analyse individuals within them. Political leaders may have remarkably little power within their own parties or legislative chambers. A member of the 'masses' or the 'followers' may have a lot of power if leading thousands of protestors or strikers. Together, all actors constitute a definable **population**, and they all inhabit a geographical **place**, such as a country or factory, which can be framed as a research **site**. They may also represent a **domain** of endeavour – commerce, arts, sport[28] – within which they may exhibit exceptional ability or '**genius**'.[29] A domain could also be a social institution – religion, politics, family, military, education. So a study might be defined in terms such as, "The reputation of elite sports clubs in Paris" or "Power relations among religious leaders in Pakistan".

The common factor unifying these approaches to research is that all up–system actors have some form of **power** (C2.1) – an 'ability to act upon or affect something strongly' (*OED*) – which is exercised through a mix of **influence** and **coercion** – "carrot and stick". Elites may have obvious power in the form of wealth and social networks, or less tangibly through originality or virtuosity within a creative domain such as music. A leader will have power expressed through the **control** of followers. **Mass communications** permit those up-system to inform, influence and **control** those down-system (C2.4). All power is based on some form of **legitimate authority** – an accepted and/or successful claim to power (C2.1).[30] The discussion of power in relation to elites and leaders tends to be about groups, organizations and individuals, but power is also discussed at the level of nation states,[31] regions, international systems such as the UN,[32] globally,[33] or in terms of specific theoretical stances such as feminism[34] and disability rights.[35] Power is also evident in interpersonal relations, but the focus of this book is the power of the few over the many.

HOW THE BOOK WAS RESEARCHED

Curiously, authors of methodology books rarely describe their own methods. This book is based on the obvious question – how have powerful people been researched in the past and present? The *Researching Powerful People* project stemmed from work at the UN University Leadership Academy, interviewing UN leaders.[36] Academic and professional researchers in the fields of elite and leadership studies were circulated, asking for examples of innovative methods, and the usual database and library searches provided further information. Relevant illustrative material was identified in theses and dissertations, and elites and leaders were asked their views on being researched. Novel approaches were tested on up–system entities such as telecommunications companies, banks, professional regulators, police, government departments and line managers. Innovatory up-system approaches were coded, categorized and organized under new terminology where necessary, to systemize new research frameworks (C5), data collection techniques (C6) and analytical methods (C7). Initial findings were discussed at forums in Japan, Korea, China, Geneva
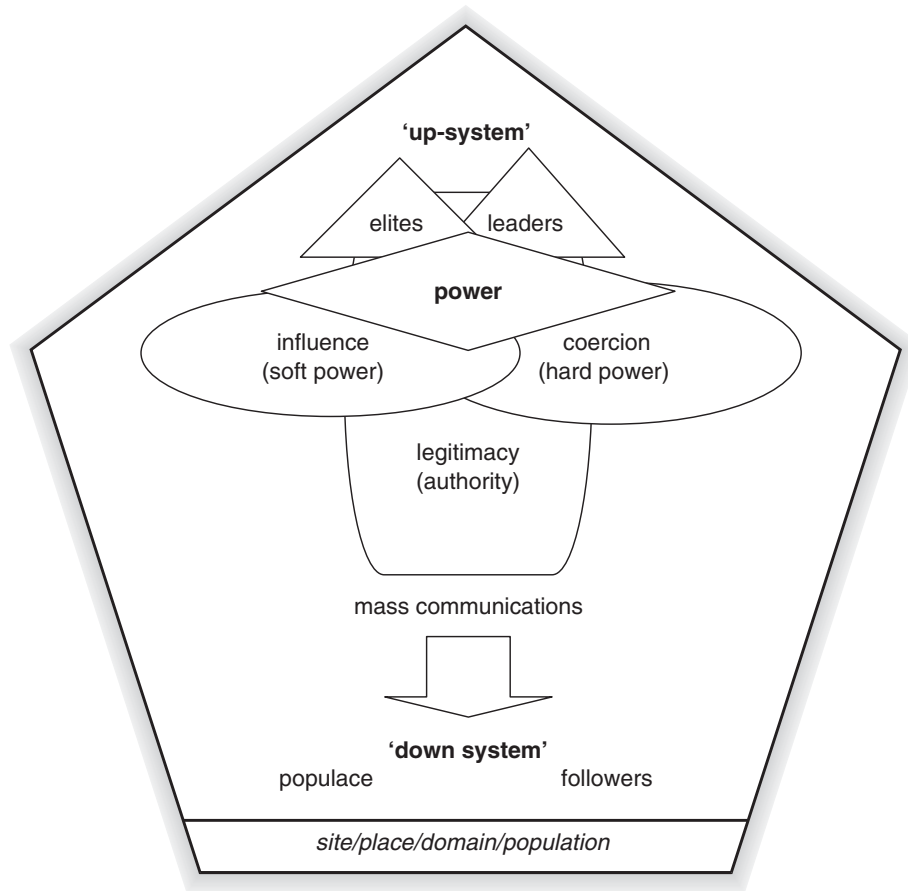
FIGURE 0.9   The conceptual framework used in this book

and UK. An historical perspective (C1) came from a reconstruction of past endeavours in the light of contemporary up-system research. Much of what is presented as recent methodology has been around a long time, albeit under different terminology (C1).

Field work in South Korea provided an East-meets-West perspective that is thought-provoking, and shows how a case study can contribute to broader understandings. Korea is now seen as a country of up-system extremes – typical and atypical cases – encompassing the closed communist elites in the North and the global capitalist elites in the South.[37] But this is not new. The peninsular has previously been divided into two or three warring countries. It has an interesting history of leadership innovation and research, including the unique methodology of the Choson 'annals' which assessed Korean rulers for 472 years (C1.2). King Sejong the Great (1397–1450) invented the rain gauge and public flood markers, because the country suffers severe storms, which 'crowdsourced' the ability to collect data about rainfall and floods.[38] He also replaced the Chinese script with the simple Hangeul alphabet, which permitted the masses to read and write. Acts like these represented the democratization of power well before Kim Dae-jung formally introduced **democracy**.

In the twentieth century Korea has changed from being the 'hermit kingdom' with a rigid social class system (Figure 6.4), suffered brutal colonial rule and ongoing war (Figure 3.1) and evolved from autocratic **dictatorships** to democracy.[39] Yun-joo Lee points out that all but one of South Korea's post-World War II presidents has been in prison. Korea's young people have been fearless resistance and democracy movement leaders, including "Korea's Joan of Arc", Kwan Sun Yu, who was killed by Japanese occupying forces age 16. Since World War II, the country's commercial and political leaders have brought it from being the second poorest country in the world to eleventh richest. The country has strived to host elite international gatherings including the Olympics, Asian games, Winter Olympics and G20, and has produced world class sports stars, internationally recognized classical musicians, and the young celebrities of K-Pop.[40] Korea has also produced international leaders for the WHO, FIFA, ICC and *Rotary International*, and a Secretary General of the UN. How did that trajectory happen, how can this distinct experience be researched, and what are the lessons for leaders in other countries? [41]

A QUICK GUIDE TO THIS BOOK

Methodology books appear linear and logical, but real research is circular, chaotic and often crazy. This book is structured in a start-to-finish way, for easy reference, but it is not intended as a step-by-step instruction manual. It explains a wide range of research frameworks and methods, and proposes how to view them critically. But it does not advocate a particular perspective. Chapters provide basic explanations of relevant methodologies, and link these to relevant international sources and examples. But discussions of general methods and technical details that are well explained in many other methodology books are not repeated here.

Key concepts are in **bold**, and the Glossary provides definitions of terminology in relation to power. Topics, names of organizations and counter-intuitive ideas are indicated by *italics* (as well as being used for emphasis). Explanations and examples are usually presented directly, or indicated by brackets or dashes − to avoid repeating 'for example', 'for instance', 'e.g.', and 'i.e.'. Double "quote marks" show illustrative words and phrases, and terms that should be understood very critically. Definitions at the start of sections and chapters are from the *Oxford English Dictionary*. References to other chapters in the book are shown in brackets − (C5.6). Further relevant sources can be accessed through the superscript numbers.[95, 68] Appendices provide templates and tools for planning and teaching, and a list of internet sources provides quick access to a wide range of relevant materials.

Although the main elements of a research project are presented in separate chapters, outlined below, it is important that there are logical connections across all stages − "threads" that connect all elements of a study from start to finish and beyond. Appendix 2 provides an example of how a study can initially be planned in relation to a linked understanding of the chapters in the book.

THE CHAPTERS

Part One: Understanding

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the *origins* of researching powerful people, within the disciplines of anthropology, history and philosophy. This helps to identify the key questions and concepts that have interested researchers for many centuries, and to recognize the basic tools for systemizing this form of research. This is the first time that a comprehensive history of up-system research methodology has been c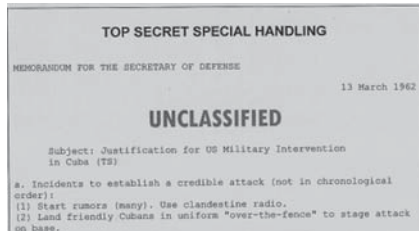ompiled. It derives from examples of what we would now call 'leadership' and 'elite studies', but these have been presented under a range of different headings across 4000 years. It is arguable that up-system research is one of the oldest forms of social research. Understanding the origins of up-system research provides the basis for understanding a wealth of relevant theory then described in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 covers the main *theories* of research about power, elites and leadership. The start is to understand the significance of ontology and epistemology, and that this is not complicated. These are explained and exemplified in relation to relevant issues such as the existence of gods, and how we know about the mass fear that may stem from terrorist or authoritarian leadership. This is the first time that these four areas of theory have been presented together, and leads to a conclusion that they may be viewed more holistically in the future. A particular omission in previous texts is the consideration of power together with understandings of those who are the subjects of the exercise of power – masses, crowds, populace, followers. Marx represents a notable exception. The chapter outlines the practical strengths and weaknesses of a wide range of conceptual discussion, as a basis for selecting theoretical stances that are appropriate to a research problem. A critical view suggests that leadership theory may be more questionable than theory arising from studies of elites and power because, as a 'paradigm', it has a 'utility' function to provide material for leadership training, and is therefore constructed primarily to fulfil that purpose. This critique is rarely expressed, for obvious reasons.

Part Two: Doing

Chapter 3 describes the starting point for doing the research – searching and critically reviewing relevant *literature*, to ensure that the research is sound and significant. How can keywords be identified, material organized, dubious information detected and gaps in knowledge identified? The problem for any up-system researcher is information extremes. There may be very little information available about the subjects of the study, and the information that is collected therefore becomes over-valued – an "exclusive quote" may be little more than a passing thought in the mind of the elite who said it. Alternatively, there may be too much information, but it is sanitized and is just a repetition of official rhetoric. Finding a "gap" in the literature, *which realistically may be filled through research*, is not easy. The chapter therefore ends by suggesting topics that are likely to be innovative because they have been marginalized or not perceived as potential research areas, and discusses new methodologies and conceptualizations, including evolutionary psychology and the emergence of global elites.

Chapter 4 explains how to *plan* a study. A research design is a provisional "map" that may evolve as methods are thoroughly explored and implemented. Powerful people are often hard to access, and so this needs to be feasible and effective. Access needs to be planned early in a study, and alternatives considered before problems arise. Plans rarely work out as planned. Ethical and legal aspects need to be assessed carefully, to ensure the integrity of a study. Badly judged research designs can cause bias and irresolvable problems and, with powerful people, serious legal problems. As most social research is down-system, there has been little formalization of the unique ethics of up-system research, and this chapter provides the basis for others to develop this aspect further. Up-system study raises many distinct problems for research ethics, not least, can unethical methods be justified to investigate unethical conduct by powerful people, and if so why and how?
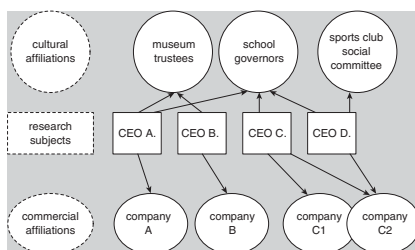
Chapter 5 considers and develops research *frameworks*, the general approaches to a research project. Many of these are new for an academic textbook, because up-system research is widely used in professional contexts such as military intelligence. Because 'access' is a significant problem, distinctions are made between direct face-to-face

research, indirect research that need not entail face-to-face contact, and studies that analyse groups and relationships rather than individual actions – network and systems analysis. Specific up-system frameworks are discussed, including investigatory methods, legitimacy research and intelligence gathering. And new frameworks are developed, including crowdsourcing, distance research and reconstructive techniques. As with ethics (above), the past emphasis on down-system research means that there are opportunities for considerable innovations in the frameworks for researching powerful people.

Chapter 6 describes relevant *data collection* methods – how can evidence be gathered from texts, people, objects and buildings? In particular, how can the challenges of interviewing powerful people be addressed? Many easily available data sources are often overlooked. It is not always necessary to meet powerful people face-to-face to find out a lot about them. Webcasts, online historical archives and social networking sites provide a wealth of new data that can be accessed and analysed anywhere via a laptop. Up-system research requires the innovative development of multi-methods, for example applying archaeological methods to the 'backdrops' in the offices of powerful people. Once collected, data is then tested and perhaps subjected to some initial analysis to create findings. Findings may be used to inform decision-makers directly, by others for analysis, or for further analysis by the researcher (C7).

Part Three: Using

Chapter 7 utilizes the findings for further *analysis* and explains the significance of comparison. It considers how to argue causation, the distinct role of assessing consistency in up-system studies and the conundrum of applying common sense to assess the plausibility of conclusions. A new framework, Critical Process Analysis (CPA), provides a comprehensive way to manage and critically assess up-system data, which accommodates the relevant frameworks and methods, and helps to address many of the problems of researching powerful people. This encourages the 'reverse engineering' and 'reconstruction' of data about up-system processes, and counterfactual analysis, to check if those involved really did what they claimed they did. Up-system processes are not always as straightforward as they seem. Was a new "equity policy" really to improve equity, or to provide an excuse for firing people who challenge the system? The chapter concludes by considering how analysis leads to conceptualization and theory, and particularly the difficulty of making micro data fit within macro frameworks.

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PRESS RELEASE

Leaders are better at cheating

New research finds that 90 percent of men with high leadership skills are also good at cheating.

Last month many MPs were found to have misused their expense accounts. Yesterday Professor Ivan Ego from the *Centre for the Psychology of Power* (CPP), Sudo University, provided an explanation. His recent study found that male students who are above average on the Leadership Potential Scale were also better at deception skills.

Chapter 8 describes differing approaches to using the *outcomes* of a research study. These include writing up or reporting research for academic or professional audiences, presenting findings effectively and how to influence political and social change. Finding a 'space' to negotiate change is central. Research is a very expensive activity, and it can only be justified if there are clear benefits which exceed the cost of the endeavour. Good outcomes are not always dramatic, but there should clearly be some form of new understanding, practical or intellectual. Put crudely, any research must pass the "so what?" test.

Up-system research can be demanding, daunting, demeaning and dangerous. But it can also create the basis for significant social change. Well-evidenced investigations may support a good leader or bring down a bad one. Meticulous study of archives can help a writer decide whether a film should present elites as benevolent or corrupt. The study of political speech-making can help to teach young leaders to give good speeches or avoid making bad ones. Effective intelligence gathering can create a strategic advantage for a company or effective action plans for human rights NGOs. Whatever the specific purpose, the general outcome hopefully will reflect the eighteenth-century Quaker duty – to '*Speak truth to power*'.

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