

## **The crucial importance of access to the advancement of governance research**

### **Abstract**

Governance research has entered troubled waters. Despite the absence of a unifying theory, the dominant research agenda has used a plethora of performance proxies, statistical analyses and hypothetico-deductive science. The goal of much of this research appears to have been motivated by the identification of patterns and regularities, without any apparent interest in providing an explanation of why such patterns or regularities may occur – or even why they may be important. An impasse has now emerged, beyond which much governance research has been unable to proceed.

The aim of this paper is to make a methodological contribution to corporate governance research, by discussing the importance of access to boardrooms to gather primary data, and exploring the benefits of access to support alternative approaches to advance governance research. The importance of gaining access to make first-hand observations was highlighted in the literature decades ago. First-hand knowledge, of the powers and mechanisms that can produce events, appears to be a necessary antecedent of credible postulates of how boards can influence performance outcomes. However, most organisations and groups are unwilling to agree to grant researchers access to boardrooms. Consequently, the majority of research has been limited to the utilisation of performance proxies, and anecdotal accounts and surveys of directors out of context.

Direct access appears to be necessary to the collection of reliable – and sufficiently complete – first-hand data, to enable a deep understanding to be gained, and credible postulations to be proposed and tested. Preliminary insights gained from recent research, informed by the analysis of data from first-hand observations inside boardrooms, are discussed.

**Keywords:** corporate governance, research methodology, access

**Peter Crow** | [peter@petercrow.com](mailto:peter@petercrow.com)