

Week 1: Introduction to Research Project

Students' Learning Outcomes

- To gain an understanding of the process of conducting research.
- To gain an understanding of how to develop a good research topic
- To understand how to identify and state a research problem
- To understand the purpose of producing a research proposal
- To examine the organizational structure and the key components of a good research proposal
- To develop a good research proposal
- To follow instructions for writing up a good dissertation thesis

Task - Forum

- Discuss the characteristics of a research problem based on the given problem
- Make pairs and work on the case study of week 1.

Section 1 - Introduction to Research Methods

Introduction

Humans try to find solutions to complex problems depending on their day to day living and experience and to understand the nature of the phenomena that present to their senses (Cohen et al., 2013). At the same time, scientists construct theories carefully and systematically and test their hypotheses so that their explanation has a firm basis.

What is Research?

The research could be defined as a systematic process of inquiry that aims to discover, unveil, interpret, and revise the truth and facts (Alhadeff-Jones, 2013). Bacon (2013, p.10), defines research as “a systematic and unbiased way of solving a problem by generating supportable data that are collecting from answering questions (by answering questions or supporting hypotheses) through generating verifiable data.” Research is the mean to set out to discover truth (Cohen et al., 2013). It produces and develops a greater knowledge of facts, actions, behaviors, theories, and laws. According to O’Leary (2004) “The Oxford English Dictionary (2002) defines research as ‘the systematic study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.’ Creswell (2002, p. 627) defines research as “a cyclical process of steps that typically begins with identifying a research problem or issue of a study. It then involves reviewing the literature, specifying a purpose for the study, collecting and analyzing data, and forming an interpretation of the information. This process culminates in a report, disseminated to

audiences that are evaluated and used in the educational community.” These general steps are the following:

1. Pose a question.
2. Collect data to answer the question.
3. Present an answer to the question.” (Creswell, 2002, p.3)

The term research also refers to a collection of information about a particular topic and is usually related to science and the scientific method. Different types of research can be classified according to the:

1. Purpose of the research. The rationale for conducting this research.
2. Process of the research. The way in which the data were collected and analyzed.

What is Secondary/Desk Research?

Secondary research involves the summary, collation and/or synthesis of existing research. Secondary research is contrasted with primary research in that primary research involves the generation of data, whereas secondary research uses primary research sources as a source of data for analysis. A notable marker of primary research is the inclusion of a "methods" section, where the authors describe how the data was generated. Common examples of secondary research include textbooks, encyclopedias, news articles, review articles, and meta-analyses. When conducting secondary research, authors may draw data from published academic papers, government documents, statistical databases, and historical records.

What is Business and Management Research?

Business and management research examines businesses, management and learning processes, human characteristics, relations and institutions that form the business outcomes. Moreover, business and management research embraces “the full spectrum of rigorous methods appropriate to the questions being asked and also drives the development of new tools and methods.” It is important to add and expand knowledge and increase our understanding, to test and propose theories and to improve practice, teaching, and learning (Morrell & Carroll, 2010).

What is good business and management research? (Originality of research)

According to Creswell (2002), in order to conduct a research, you have to identify the problem and define the goal. Then you have to make a prediction that resolves the problem and collect the relevant data. In order to be able to resolve the problem and to answer your research questions and support your prediction, as a researcher you have to analyze and interpret the data. The process of desk research consists of five steps:

- A. Identifying a research problem
- B. Specifying a purpose for research
- C. Reviewing the literature
- D. Analyzing and interpreting the data
- E. Reporting and evaluating research

Sertillanges (2011) describes originality as “something that has not been conceived of or done before by someone,” and Edward (2014) mentioned that in order to be original you must not depend on the ideas of others. In order to conduct a good educational research project, you have to read recent papers that are directly relevant to your project and to create a general idea of the subjects and topics have been published in your area. He added that a project could be original in terms of:

1. Tools, techniques, procedures, and methods when applying to an existing problem or context;
2. Exploring an unknown area or a new field of research;
3. Exploring an unexpected result, phenomenon, or research direction; or
4. Using existing data in a novel way, “interpreting the dataset differently from how it has been interpreted in the existing research literature or applying new techniques to process the dataset.”

According to O'Leary (2004) creativity has a main role in the development of your research ideas. Creativity is “responsible for as many advances in science as the tendency to follow the rules” (O'Leary, 2004 p.30). Edward (2014), mention that thesis examiners try to find evidence of original contribution to knowledge and creativity when researchers conduct their research. He referred to nine different criteria that Phillips and Pugh (2010) discovered through their research that examiners from various disciplines apply (Box 1).

Box 1 Nine concepts of originality

1. Undertaking empirical research that has not been done before.
2. Undertaking an original synthesis.
3. Interpreting existing material in a new way.
4. Trying out something in the UK that has only been undertaken abroad.
5. Using a particular technique in a new way.
6. Producing new evidence about an old issue.
7. Being cross-disciplinary and using alternative methodologies.
8. Researching unexplored areas in a discipline.
9. Providing knowledge in an original way.

(Adapted from Phillips and Pugh 2010)

Guetzkow et al. (2004), argued that the original topic is used when a proposal's topic was described as new in some way and “as have never been studied.” A topic could be original when it is non-canonical, unusual or subaltern.

Research Approaches

The choice of a methodology depends on the research objectives, discipline, and requirements of the particular research topic. The aim of the research method is to produce new knowledge. A research method may take four of the following forms (Gray, 2013):

1. Exploratory research: is used to enable the investigation of a identifiable problem which was not studied in the past
2. Descriptive research: is used to describe characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied.
3. Constructive research: is used to identify and develop solutions to a identifiable problem
4. Empirical research: is used to test the feasibility of a solution with the empirical data.

Business and management research

Based on the purpose of the study, we can classify research to:

- Basic
- Applied (Action Research)

Based on the approaches of collected data and methods, a research can be classified to:

Qualitative: Qualitative research methods are used in order to gain an understanding of the reasons, opinions, and motivations, and it refers to specific topics and issues. It is used to explore in-depth small groups of people or a problem and expose trends and opinions and support the construction of hypothesis. It is concerned with developing explanations of social phenomena and answer questions for the world in which we live, how people behave, etc. The findings of qualitative research are descriptive rather than predictive. “Qualitative research tends to be inductive. You look at specific instances and try to come up with a generalization.” (Morrell & Carroll, 2010, p. 31).

Quantitative: Quantitative studies are related to statistics. In order to answer quantitative questions, you typically follow some experimental design (Morrell & Carroll, 2010, p. 29), and you have to collect and analyze quantitative data, which requires large sample populations. “Quantitative research follows a deductive model— you go from the general to the specific. You have an idea or theory, you apply it to your sample (class, school, etc.), and see if it holds” (Morrell & Carroll, 2010, p. 30). Qualitative research describes current conditions; investigate relationships and study’s causes and effects.

Mixed: In a mixed research methodology, the researcher combines different qualitative and quantitative research data. Creswell (cited in Johnson et al., 2007, p. 119), defines mixed methods research as a “research design (or methodology) in which the researcher collects, analyzes, and mixes (integrates or connects) both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a multiphase program of inquiry.” While using mixed method research, the researcher aims to practice triangulation by checking the results from any relevant angle. In triangulation, the researcher permits the features’ identification of a phenomenon more precisely by approaching it from different critical facts using different methods and techniques like the combination of interviews and questionnaire surveys (Morse, 1991).

Methods and Purposes of Secondary Research

What are the methods of secondary research? When do we use each of these methods?

We can differentiate between three methods of secondary research: using a secondary data set in isolation, combining two secondary data sets, and combining secondary and primary data sets. Let's outline each of these separately, and also explain when to use each of these methods.

Initially, you can use a secondary data set in isolation – that is, without combining it with other data sets. You dig and find a data set that is useful for your research purposes and then base your entire research on that set of data. You do this when you want to re-assess a data set with a different research question in mind. Let's illustrate this with a simple example. Suppose that, in your research, you want to investigate whether pregnant women of different nationalities experience different levels of anxiety during different pregnancy stages. Based on the literature, you have formed an idea that nationality may matter in this relationship between pregnancy and stress.

If you wanted to test this relationship by collecting the data yourself, you would need to recruit many pregnant women of different nationalities and assess their anxiety levels throughout their pregnancy. It would take you at least a year to complete this research project. Instead of undertaking this long endeavor, you thus decide to find a secondary data set – one that investigated (for instance) a range of difficulties experienced by pregnant women in a nationwide sample. The original research question that guided this research could have been: “to what extent do pregnant women experience a range of mental health difficulties, including stress, anxiety, mood disorders, and paranoid thoughts?” The original researchers might have outlined women's nationality, but weren't particularly interested in investigating the link between women's citizenship and anxiety at different pregnancy stages. You are, therefore, re-assessing their data set with your own research question in mind.

Your research may, however, require you to combine two secondary data sets. You will use this kind of methodology when you want to investigate the relationship between certain variables in two data sets or when you want to compare findings from two past studies. To take an example: One of your secondary data sets may focus on a target population's tendency to smoke cigarettes, while the other data set focuses on the same population's tendency to drink alcohol. In your own research, you may thus be looking at whether there is a correlation between smoking and drinking among this population.

Here is a second example: Your two secondary data sets may focus on the same outcome variable, such as the degree to which people go to Greece for a summer vacation. However, one data set could have been collected in Britain and the other in Germany. By comparing these two data sets, you can investigate which nation tends to visit Greece more. Finally, your research project may involve combining primary and secondary data. You may decide to do this when you want to obtain existing information that would inform your primary research.

Let's use another simple example and say that your research project focuses on American versus British people's attitudes towards racial discrimination. Let's say that you were able to find a recent study that investigated Americans' attitudes of this kind, which were assessed with a particular set of measures. However, your search finds no recent studies on Britons' attitudes. Let's also say that you live in London and that it would be difficult for you to assess Americans' opinions on the topic, but clearly much more straightforward to conduct primary research on British attitudes.

In this case, you can simply reuse the data from the American study and adopt precisely the same measures with your British participants. Your secondary data is being combined with your primary data. Alternatively, you may combine these types of data when the role of your secondary data is to outline descriptive information that supports your research. For instance, if your project is focusing on attitudes towards McDonald’s food, you may want to help your primary research with secondary data that outlines how many people eat McDonald’s in your country of choice.

Table 1.1 Methods and and purposes of secondary research

METHOD		PURPOSE
Using secondary data set in isolation		Re-assessing a data set with a different research question in mind
Combining two secondary data sets		Investigating the relationship between variables in two data sets or comparing findings from two past studies
Combining secondary and primary data sets		Obtaining existing information that informs your primary research

Types of Secondary Data

The two most common types of secondary research are, as with all types of data, quantitative and qualitative. Secondary research can, therefore, be conducted by using either quantitative or qualitative data sets.

We have already provided several examples of using quantitative secondary data. This type of data is used when the original study has investigated a population’s tendency to smoke or drink alcohol, the degree to which people from different nationalities go to Greece for their summer vacation, or the degree to which pregnant women experience anxiety. In all these examples, outcome variables were assessed by questionnaires, and thus the obtained data was numerical.

Quantitative secondary research is much more common than qualitative secondary research. However, this is not to say that you cannot use qualitative secondary data in your research project. This type of secondary data is used when you want the previously-collected information to inform your current research. More specifically, it is used when you want to test the information obtained through qualitative research by implementing a quantitative methodology. For instance, a past qualitative study might have focused on the reasons why people choose to live on boats. This study might have interviewed some 30 participants and noted the four most important reasons people live on boats: (1) they can lead a transient lifestyle, (2) they have an increased sense of freedom, (3) they feel that they are “world citizens”, and (4) they can more easily visit their family members who live in different locations. In your own research, you can, therefore, reuse this qualitative data to form a questionnaire, which you then give to a larger

population of people who live on boats. This will help you to generalize the previously-obtained qualitative results to a broader population.

Importantly, you can also re-assess a qualitative data set in your research, rather than using it as a basis for your quantitative research. Let's say that your research focuses on the kind of language that people who live on boats use when describing their transient lifestyles. The original research did not focus on this research question per se – however, you can reuse the information from interviews to “extract” the types of descriptions of a transient lifestyle that were given by participants.

Table 1.2 The two main types of secondary data and their associated purposes

TYPES		PURPOSES
Quantitative		Both can be used when you want to (a) inform your current research with past data, and (b) re-assess a past data set
Qualitative		Both can be used when you want to (a) inform your current research with past data, and (b) re-assess a past data set

Sources of Secondary Data

The two most common types of secondary data sources are labeled as internal and external. Internal sources of data are those that are internal to the organization in question. For instance, if you are doing a research project for an organization (or research institution) where you are an intern, and you want to reuse some of their past data, you would be using internal data sources. The benefit of using these sources is that they are easily accessible and there is no associated financial cost of obtaining them.

There are several types of internal sources. For instance, if your research focuses on an organization's profitability, you might use their sales data. Each organization keeps track of its sales records, and thus your data may provide information on sales by geographical area, types of customer, product prices, types of product packaging, time of the year, and the like. Alternatively, you may use an organization's financial data. The purpose of using this data could be to conduct a cost-benefit analysis and understand the economic opportunities or outcomes of hiring more people, buying more vehicles, investing in new products, and so on.

Another type of internal data is transport data. Here, you may focus on outlining the safest and most effective transportation routes or vehicles used by an organization. Alternatively, you may rely on marketing data, where your goal would be to assess the benefits and outcomes of different marketing operations and strategies. Some other ideas would be to use customer data to ascertain the ideal type of customer, or to use safety data to explore the degree to which employees comply with an organization's safety regulations. The list of the types of internal sources of secondary data can be extensive; the most

important thing to remember is that this data comes from a particular organization itself, in which you internally do your research.

On the other hand, external sources of data, on the other hand, are those that are external to an organization or a research institution. This type of data has been collected by “somebody else”, in the literal sense of the term. The benefit of external sources of data is that they provide comprehensive data – however, you may sometimes need more effort (or money) to obtain it.

The list of external secondary data sources can be just as extensive. One example is the data obtained through government sources. These can include social surveys, health data, agricultural statistics, energy expenditure statistics, population censuses, import/export data, production statistics, and the like. Government agencies tend to conduct a lot of research, therefore covering almost any kind of topic you can think of. Another external source of secondary data are national and international institutions, including banks, trade unions, universities, health organisations, etc. As with government, such institutions dedicate a lot of effort to conducting up-to-date research, so you simply need to find an organisation that has collected the data on your own topic of interest.

Alternatively, you may obtain your secondary data from trade, business, and professional associations. These usually have data sets on business-related topics and are likely to be willing to provide you with secondary data if they understand the importance of your research. If your research is built on past academic studies, you may also rely on scientific journals as an external data source.

Once you have specified what kind of secondary data you need, you can contact the authors of the original study. As a final example of a secondary data source, you can rely on data from commercial research organisations. These usually focus their research on media statistics and consumer information, which may be relevant if, for example, your research is within media studies or you are investigating consumer behaviour.

Table 1.3 The two sources of secondary data and associated examples

INTERNAL SOURCES		EXTERNAL SOURCES
Definition: Internal to the organization or research institution where you conduct your research		Definition: External to the organization or research institution where you conduct your research
Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales data • Financial data • Transport data • Marketing data • Customer data • Safety data 		Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government sources • National and international institutions • Trade, business, and professional associations • Scientific journals • Commercial research organizations

Formulating a Good Research Topic

To select good research, the topic is not always easy. As a researcher, you need to develop the necessary skills for a good research topic. The topic needs to be focused and interesting. To achieve this, there are some points to bear in mind so as to formulate your topic as a thesis statement.

- Choose a topic you are interested in and generate your ideas. What do you know about these ideas? You can write down keywords or concepts interest to you that will help you to formulate a focused topic.
- Do some background reading. Read general information, articles, encyclopedias, or research for the topic that allows you to get an overview and the history of the topic, identify the subtopics and related topics and to understand how your ideas relate to the subject.
- Try to narrow your topic and focus on a time frame or discipline, theories, population group or other parameters.
- Create a list of keywords that describe and narrow your topic and read for them.
- Be flexible when it is necessary to modify your topic either to narrow your focus or to expand your focus.
- Formulate your ideas as focused research questions. “If a topic defines the general area you are examining, then the research question defines what aspects of that topic you plan to investigate.” (O’leary, 2004, p.32).
- Do mini research, read articles and information that allow you to find answers and solutions for your questions. Try to identify the body of your literature.
- Evaluate your information and resources if are useful until you have achieved satisfactory results.
- Formulate your ideas and opinions to develop your topic as a thesis statement.

Develop a good topic is an ongoing process through which you can define and revise your ideas. O’Leary, (2004, p.32) argued that “Moving from broad topical interests to questions that can be answered through the research process often involves finding an ‘angle.’”

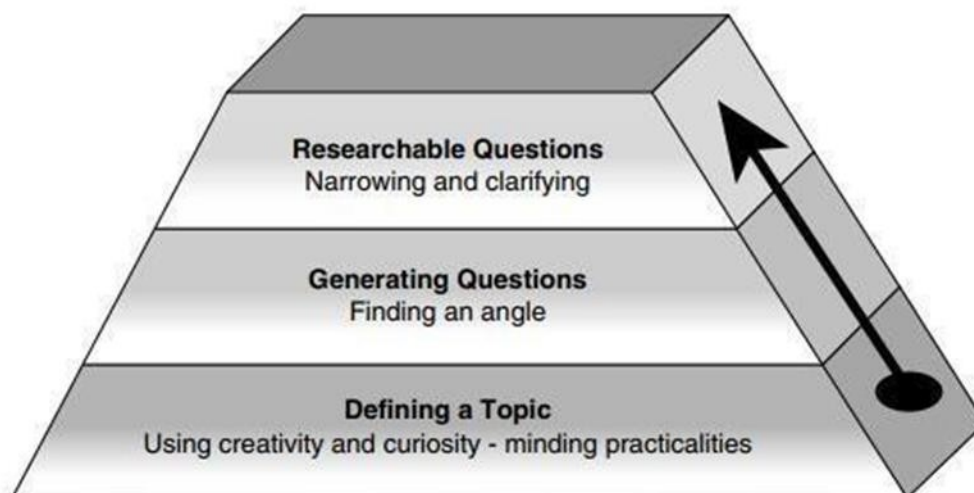


Figure 1.1: From topics to researchable questions (Adapt from O’Leary, 2004)

Components of a Good Introduction and Research Problem to Your Research

The presentation of your proposal is the most important part of your project. Your introduction must discuss the meaningfulness, the purpose, and aims of the study and include any necessary background information in order to guide the reader through the project. Moreover, it should present the problem and a brief background of the topic's context. The introduction of a research proposal needs to include:

- Clear Statement of the Problem
- Purpose of the Study
- Key terms and Definitions
- Significance of the Investigation
- Literature Review
- Questions or Hypothesis

Research problem

Research always stated from the words “what and why.” The problem of your research should present the why. You have to answer the question: **Why does this research need to be conducted?**

You have to be focused on your topic and explain how the topic relates to the area. As a researcher, you have to keep in mind aspects such as the knowledge about the specific area and the problem, your critical thinking, availability of the resources, etc. before you formulate the research problem. The problem statement is a brief introduction of a problem or observation succinctly identifying and documenting the need for and importance of the study. While describing and documenting the problem, appropriate published resources (i.e., available statistics from surveys indicating an issue of concern in your area of research) or relevant scholarly sources (i.e., that highlight the importance of research due to other limitations) that are documenting the existence of a problem is NEEDED at postgraduate level research.

Components of a Good Research Problem:

- Needs to be up-to-date
- Evidence of Past Research in the field is important
- Topic revealed from observation.
- Known or Probable solution - Justifies if the topic is researchable
- It is based on a Theoretical Framework.
- Scholarly peer-reviewed and other sources are documenting the existence of a problem worth searching for it.
- The originality of the study indicates the need for future research.

Section 2 - Guidelines for Writing a Good Research Proposal

What is a research proposal?

All postgraduate students are required to submit a research proposal for approval before proceeding to the writing process of their final study. Please read the guidelines below before preparing your proposal on the template provided.

What is a research proposal?

A research proposal is the plan of your proposed study that is designed to:

1. Define a clear research purpose and develop your research question
2. Discuss the methodology design that you are planning to follow in order to answer your research questions
3. Highlight its originality and/or significance at the introduction section in one or two sentences
4. Explain how it adds to, develops (or challenges) existing literature in the field at the introductory section in one or two sentences
5. Provide a timescale

Research proposals may be 2-3 pages in length, and no more or less than 500 words.

What is the research proposal for?

The research proposal is an important way of assessing the quality, the significance and the originality of your ideas. Also, your supervisor is responsible for checking the feasibility of your research study considering the choice of the proposed methodology and the research questions. Please think very carefully about the purpose and the approach of your research study and prepare a timetable in which you will demonstrate the on how you are planning to complete your study within the given timeframe. Research proposals are also used to assess your expertise in the area you want your research to be conducted, your knowledge of the existing literature (and how your project will enhance it). Moreover, they are used to assess and assign appropriate supervision teams. Noteworthy, research proposal allows you to express your passion and your interest in the subject area that you wish to explore further. It is also an opportunity to attract the interest and the attention of readers and persuade them about the significance of your study.

Is the research proposal flexible or fixed?

Good research proposals can be modified as the work progresses. It is common for students to modify their original proposal in light of detailed literature reviews, further consideration of research approaches and comments received from the supervisors. Take to consideration that your research proposal is an initial outline and not a summary of the 'final product.'

Structuring your Research Proposal

The following elements are crucial for developing a good research proposal. Each item corresponds to a section in the research proposal template:

1. **Title:** Your title is preferable not to be modified. Be assured that you have included important 'keywords' related to your study in your title. Wilkinson (1991) provides useful advice for creating a title:
 - Be brief and avoid wasting words, such as ': An Approach to ... , A Study of...," and so forth.
 - Use a single title or a second title. An example of a second title would be "An Ethnography: Understanding a Child's Perception of War."
 - Give a title no longer than 12 words which include the focus or topic of the study.
 - Pose the topic as a brief question. What question needs to be answered in the proposed study? For example, a researcher might ask: "What treatment is best for depression?" or "What does it mean to be Arabic in U.S. society today?" "What brings people to tourist sites in the Midwest?"
2. **Project Summary:** In this section, you have to provide a summary of your proposed research in a comprehensible manner in order to be accessible to readers who are not knowledgeable of the field; you need to present the aims, significance and expected outcomes of the research study.
3. **Review of research literature:** Give in one paragraph description of the current status of research that is related to your research study. Name the most important contributions of other researchers to the field. The proposal should contain a clear and logical discussion of the theoretical framework of ideas that will guide your research. The proposal needs to show your familiarity with the ideas you are applying to your study and that you grasp the methodological implications of those studies.
4. **Research study details.** This section should include the following sub-sections:
 - **Aims/Objectives of the Project:** According to Locke et al. (2007), the purpose statement indicates "why you want to do the study and what you intend to accomplish" (p. 9). For example:
 - a. What do you want to know, prove, demonstrate, analyze, test, investigate or examine?
 - b. List your aims in a logical sequence, e.g., This project aims to provide an outline of a research proposal
 - **Research Question -** This section should explain the research question(s) (1-3 should suffice) and may include the hypothesis/objective to be addressed.
 - **Significance of Contribution to the research study:** In this section you should discuss the importance of your research study in relation to the review of literature on the topic: discuss the areas which you believe they are most important for your study and demonstrate your understanding of the research issues, and present any existing gaps of the literature that the research is intended to address. You should also use this section to make links between your research and the existing practices of the field which your study will contribute to. Examine existing research taking place in the field and how your project can support this.

- **Research Plan and Timeline:** Provide a weekly outline of how you will complete the work within the time scheduled.

Writing up your dissertation thesis (Proposed outline of a dissertation thesis, it could be modified accordingly)

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

- A broad introduction to thesis topic and method. A page or two. Write after the remainder of proposal is completed.
- Research purpose and goals.
- Research problem. Identification of a business or management problem. Explain carefully. In one sense, usually, the problem is to expand the body of knowledge examined in the literature review.
- Need for the research. Who will benefit? Discuss applied contributions.
- Nominal definitions. Define central terms.
- Context. It must briefly involve an investigation of a company or industry issues. Add further info to clarify the research problem.

Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW METHODOLOGY

- Introduction. Description of the method and design of reviewing the literature.
- Analysis. Explanation of the literature sources, planning of the literature search strategy, method of conducting the literature review, and obtaining and evaluating the literature.
- An ethical approach to research.

Chapter 3: LITERATURE REVIEW (to be personalized by the student) (this is why it is important to add some information regarding the argumentative structure and critical analysis of information). Organize by the idea; avoid stringing together abstracts of articles.

- Overview. Theoretical foundations.
- Literature. Group articles by ideas. For a given idea, first discuss common strands in the literature, then departures.
- Hypotheses. For each, give brief restatement of justification tied to earlier sections; explain derivation and implications. Explicitly state plausible rival hypotheses (explanations of the process) of a substantive nature.
- Scope of the study. Theoretical assumptions; discuss the limitations they impose.

Chapter 4: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

- Discussion of Research Results
- Consultation / action plan / recommendations

Chapter 5: CONCLUSION

- Conclusion (summary of findings/results)
- Implication for future research

C. Distinctive contribution

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APPENDICES

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