

Research Methods for Business and Management

Session 2- Clarifying your Research
Topic

Andre Samuel

Last Session

- Purpose of the Module
- The Research Process
- **What to Research?**
- Defining Research
- Types of Research
- Mind Map of Research

This Session

- What is Expected at this level
- Selecting a Problem theme
- Project Title
- Formulating a Research Question
- Defining your Research Aim
- Specifying Research Objectives

What is expected?

- Type of work- Scope and Scale
- Type of analysis
- Type of outcome

Remember the Type of Outcome

- You need to determine what is the **strategic intent** of your research
- Essentially you would be closing your dissertation with some **recommendation that would solve the issue you started of with**
- These recommendation could be:
 - specific to the organization or
 - A generalization for an industry, group of companies in a sector or area focused on e.g. eMarketing

Defining the Research issue

Key questions to consider

- What is the research issue?
- Why is it an issue?
- Why is it an issue now?
- What could this research shed light on?

What is the issue?

- Think of the overall issue
- Then try to break it down into 2 or 3 areas
- Example
 - Main issue: customer loyalty
 - Sub Issues: loss of customers, loss of market share, competition, changing consumer behaviour

Why is it an issue now?

- You will need to show relevance of the issue in today's environment
- Must provide evidence of the issue
- Example
 - Get data on market share of main players in the industry showing your company's position
 - Draw a graph to illustrate

Contextualize the issue

- Consider the issue from Trinidad and Tobago's Business Environment
- Could be useful to look at
 - the economic outlook
 - The political outlook
 - Industry outlook
- This means that you would have to research local data sources e.g. central bank, ministries, state enterprises for statistical data, policies etc.

- Very useful to use theory as well
- So for instance this author said that if there is no customer loyalty strategy then the ramification is declining profit
- Also it could be a case that there is no existing research of this issue in Trinidad and Tobago
- Search online databases with keywords Trinidad and Tobago after the topic area e.g. Public Sector Leadership Trinidad and Tobago
- Another issue could be there is some gap in previous research

What could this research shed light on?

- This is the outcome of solving the issue
- What are the strategic benefits of solving the issue to the business?
- Again theory would be the main source of justification e.g. Smith (2010) suggest that by retaining 5% of your customers profitability would increase by 15%.
- You should also use Best practice examples, for instance. Amazon or Tesco Loyalty programme has generated x % profit

- The main rationale is that your research would contribute to knowledge.
 - i.e. solve a real business issue
 - It can be applied to all businesses in the industry
 - Your research is original, contextualized to Trinidad and Tobago

Your Project Title

- The title is the **name of your project** – rather like the name of a novel, something that catches a potential reader's attention but just gives a hint as to what the work is all about
- Think of it as a kind of nick name or slogan for your project
- It is not a good idea to use the same set of words for the title, Research Question and Aim

- Be careful with titles, there is a tendency to use the title to say what you will do. The purpose of the title is to **give a name to what you do**
- Your title should not be over long
- Titles have two key elements:
 1. **Aspect** – this is the particular focused area of your study
 2. **Why** – this says why it might be a useful aspect

Some examples of titles

- Leadership in the Private Sector: A study of ANSA Mcal Group
- A critical exploration of Training and Development in the IT Service Industry
- E Marketing: a case study of Trinidad and Tobago retailers using the Internet
- E Administration- a key success factor in enhancing Government Human Resource Services

More Example Titles

- Surviving the Economic Crisis: a critical exploration of Customer Management in the Hotel Industry
- Social Networking - A New Trend in E-marketing
- A critical analysis of the growth strategies available to SME's a case of ... Industry in TT
- Leveraging Leadership Competencies in the TTPS: Driving the Transformation Process

Research Question

What is a Research Question?

- Research questions designate what researchers want to understand about the research problem that led to their study.
- Research questions further specify the stated purpose of the study, which in turn addresses the stated research problem.

Quantitative vs Qualitative RQ

- Research questions in **qualitative research** are broad enough to permit the discovery of the specific experiences, events, artifacts, concepts, or other empirical and/or analytic subjects that will ultimately be the focus of study.
- Research questions in **quantitative research** restrict, and commit researchers to, the variables that will be addressed. This usually leads to a Hypothesis

General Tips

- Make sure it is a clear question
- Ideally one wants an **open question**: that is one that does not just end with a yes or no answer
- **A question is an expression normally used to request information in the form of an answer**
- Questions can sometimes be like commands used to elicit a response such as "Would you pass the salt?" looks like a question but in fact is a request or action, not for an answer
- **We want questions that elicit an answer i.e information**

Using theory to Refine your RQ

- Having developed the initial research question, the researcher's task is then to find out **what the literature indicates** on the first formulation of the question.
- The most efficient way to do this is to find **five or six major papers (sources) on the topic** that are recent.

Basic Research Questions Form

- When attempting to construct a question, think about what sort of answer is expected
- Think of the FORM of answer
- There are four kinds of answers that can be elicited:
 - Bi-Polar answers
 - Explanatory answers
 - Descriptive answers
 - Exploratory answers

Bi-Polar Answers

- Essentially questions that imply a limited range of possible answers.
- Typically, a bi-polar question starts with **interrogative words** such as WHAT, IS, CAN or DOES
 - Is it possible to sharpen this pencil? (Y/N)
 - Does it make sense to allow children to sharpen pencils (Y/N)
- Bi-polar questions can of course be useful but more often than not they have no great utility and the answer is obviously yes or no
- **Don't use this type of question, as it will be obvious that you did not think about the info you want to elicit from your research**

Explanatory Answers

- In this type the expected answer is an explanation and it is often in the form of a procedure or process
- Typically, explanatory questions that start with 'HOW' or 'WHY'
 - How can a pencil be sharpened safely by young children? (a procedure)

Descriptive Answers

- Here the expected form of answer is a description most often in the form of an evaluation
- Typically, these questions start with WHAT or WHY
 - What is the purpose of HB0 pencils? (simple explanation)
 - Why are HB0 pencils difficult to sharpen? (an evaluation)

Exploratory Answers

- Where the expected form of answer implies an answer as an exploration of something
- Typically, exploratory questions start with HOW or WHY
 - How should we use HB1 pencils to get the best drawing? (often an exploration is needed here leading to an explanation)

Essentially.....

- In your project you are looking for **one significant Research question** and one significant answer
- **In practice one should express the answer to their research question in the Research Aim**

An Example

- Question: Are you enjoying the course?
 - Form of the answer will be just Yes/No
- Whereas: What is it about the course that you like most?
 - Then the form of the answer would be a
 - topic or
 - workshop session or
 - the project research itself
- Alternatively: How can workshop sessions be used to enhance the learning experience of students?
 - The form of answer would possibly be a workshop session protocol or a guide/framework for conducting workshops

- How can operating costs be lowered by the use of online procurement to gain low cost leadership advantage?
- Then the answer might be: a series of factors or a procurement model or a cost framework
- **This is the type of question we are looking for**

Make Sure.....

- That whatever form the answer will take you can actually construct it and
- When it is constructed as part of your research it is in fact **useful strategically in some way**
- That is, it is **actionable**
- This will determine the success of your research

Testing your Research Question

- **Paraphrase** – if it's a good question you will be able to ask it in several different ways.
- **Bi-polar** – this means that the question has a fixed and limited range of answers such as “Y/N”, “bad, good, excellent” and so on. Avoid this feature
- **Discussion** – look at your question and honestly ask ‘will this question produce discussion?’
- **Reverse** – it is often illuminating to reverse the question – try this and see what ideas occur to you. But as a rule you should not use negative questions.
- **Interrogative** – try writing your question with a different interrogative. That is, if you question starts with ‘how’ try re-writing it with ‘what’ and so on.

Some more examples

- **RQ** = What are the strategic constraints that affect investment into e-applications for SME's in Trinidad?
- Form of Answer:
 - A list of constraints or
 - A strategy to deal with the constraints or
 - A feasibility report on e-application implementation
- **RQ**= How can the use of Instant Messaging lead to better personal communication protocols and business success?
- Form of Answer:
 - A feasibility study on its use in offices or
 - A series of factors that must be in place before IM adoption or
 - A cost/benefits report

More RQ Examples

- What are the Leadership Competencies needed to drive transformation in the TTPS?
- How can Small Business owners strategically position their company to maximize opportunities for sustainable growth and development?
- How can e Auctioning be used to achieve value for money and competitive collaboration with a range of suppliers?

Research Aim

Formulating your Aim

- This derives from the problem definition and is best thought of as expressing the overall activity and intention of the research to generate an outcome
- The aim expresses **the target** (or purpose) for the whole research outcome
- Avoid having an outcome that amounts to something like yes or no
- Remember that **the aim expresses the answer to your research question**. Consistency is important

- So when you write the aim keep in mind your research question
- **For each project we want one overall aim**

Characteristics of an Aim

- **Action** – what are you going to do? *A strong high level verb is required that suggest critique, evaluation, synthesis.* Use a single activity that sums up the whole project process for generating the intended outcome
- **Intention** – what useful thing to you hope to achieve?
- **Target** – what is the real world intention? That is the research outcome should be useful in the sense that it addresses the real world problem theme on which the research is based
- **Form** – here you link the aim to the Research Question in effect the aim should says what the answer to the question will be.

An Example

- **Title:** The Internet- Revolutionizing the foreign used car industry in Trinidad and Tobago
- **RQ:** How can the e Channel be used as a strategic tool to gain competitive advantage in the foreign used car industry in Trinidad and Tobago?
- **Aim:** To synthesize a comprehensive E Channel Strategy to enable industry to evolve from a state of e commerce awareness to e commerce readiness. thus enabling SME's to gain differential competitive advantage in the foreign used car industry in Trinidad and Tobago.

Breakdown using characteristics

- **Action:** to synthesize
- **Intention:** for SME's to gain competitive advantage through differentiation
- **Target:** to enable the industry to evolve from e Commerce awareness to e Commerce readiness
- **Form:** sell side e Channel strategy

Research Objectives

Formulating your Objectives

- The aim expresses the overall outcome for the project but to get there we normally have to pass through a number of minor outcomes on the way and these are expressed as being generated by objectives
- Their purpose is to show more or less sequentially how the aim will be achieved
- Ideally an objective should represent a major sequential research milestone that could stand on its own

- Care must be taken that objectives are **not** confused with ordinary research tasks
- For example, an objective that set out to build a leadership model best suited for public sector could easily be a milestone and can easily stand on its own
- However, the design of a questionnaire is most likely to be a project task since it is something that needs to be done but only has meaning within the project
- **For your research we are looking for 3 to 4 objectives**

Characteristics of an Objective

- **Progressive** – the objectives must build sequentially so that collectively they amount to reaching the aim
- **Action** – Ideally we look for a single activity that will generate a minor project outcome. Again a high level verb is need.
- **Outcome** – this should reveal an answer or the accomplishment of a milestone. It should be documented.
- **Evidence** – there must be some tangible evidence of the stated outcome. Often the outcome and the evidence will be the same object.

Some Examples

- **Title:** Transformation at the Public Service Transformation Division (PSTD): A critical evaluation of leadership.
- **Objectives:**
 1. To analyse the current leadership style practiced in the undertaking of the New-systems Facilitators (NsF) Initiative
 2. To amalgamate a suitable framework for measuring the effectiveness leadership style deployed
 3. To evaluate the impact of the NsF Initiative on the Public Service
- **Aim:** To develop a leadership model that is best suited for the implementation of transformation initiatives for public sector management

- **Title:** ECRM- an opportunity for competitive advantage in the Spare Parts retailing industry.
- **RQ:** How can the spare parts retailing industry in Trinidad strategically gain competitive advantages through customer e-loyalty?
- **Objectives:**
 1. To critically evaluate current strategies used by spare parts retailers to gain competitive advantages and build customer relationships.
 2. To critically analyze the perception of customers in order to assess their current levels of loyalty, value and satisfaction towards spare parts retailers.
 3. To strategically assess the customer loyalty gap
- **Aim:** To create an ECRM framework for spare parts retailers to achieve competitive advantages and build customer relationships through e-channels.

- **RQ:** How can product innovation be used by local food manufacturers to differentiate and position products for international markets?
- **Objectives:**
- To evaluate parallel food products on the local market and decisively cross examine variations in product details/designs/purchasing patterns/preferences to international success products.
- To explore a range of vital product innovation strategies necessary to manufacture comparable food items to those stipulated in the international market.
- **Aim:** To formulate critical success factor and key performance indicators for introducing local products into international markets

- **Title:** Procurement in the Public Sector: A critical Evaluation of eAuctioning Strategies
- **RQ:** How can eAuctioning be used to achieve value for money and competitive collaboration with a range of suppliers?
- **Objectives:**
 1. To critically assess the legal, security and ethical issues surrounding eAuctioning
 2. To critically evaluate the current procurement procedure and practice in public sector
 3. To ascertain best practice eAuctioning by benchmarking against international public sector case studies
- **Aim:** To formulate critical success factors for the implementation of an eAuctioning strategy for the public sector

- **Title:** A critical exploration of Employee Retention in T&T Insurance Sector
- **RQ:** What are the critical success factors for implementing employee retention in the Insurance Sector?
- **Objectives:**
 1. To critically analyze the existing employee retention policy across the top 4 players in the insurance sector
 2. To critically appraise the level of commitment and continuity through the insights of employees
 3. To assimilate the industry's best practice in employee retention

- **Title:** A critical evaluation of e Learning at UWI Open Campus
- **RQ:** How can UWI Open Campus use their eLearning strategy to gain a competitive advantage and strategically position itself as a market leader in the tertiary education sector?
- **Objectives:**
- To critically evaluate the eLearning strategy currently used by UWI Open Campus in the delivery of their online learning tertiary education programs
- To ascertain any gap by benchmarking current strategies against e-learning strategies from international best practice.
- **Aim:** To design a framework for the development and implementation of an eLearning strategy for UWI Open Campus

- **Title:** Strategic Global Integration of Multi-National Companies- A critical evaluation of XYZ Trinidad Ltd.
- **RQ:** What are the challenges and critical success factors of the global integration of business functions?
- **Objectives**
 1. To critically evaluate the pattern of integrating modes used in the key business functions
 2. To critically analyze the problems faced by XYZ Ltd in the context of the restriction placed on the subsidiary's initiative due to global integration.
 3. To critically assess the impact on the performance at XYZ Ltd as a result of the global integration strategy being in conflict with its local responsiveness.
- **Aim:** To synthesize critical success factors for a balanced Global Integration-local responsiveness framework for XYZ Ltd