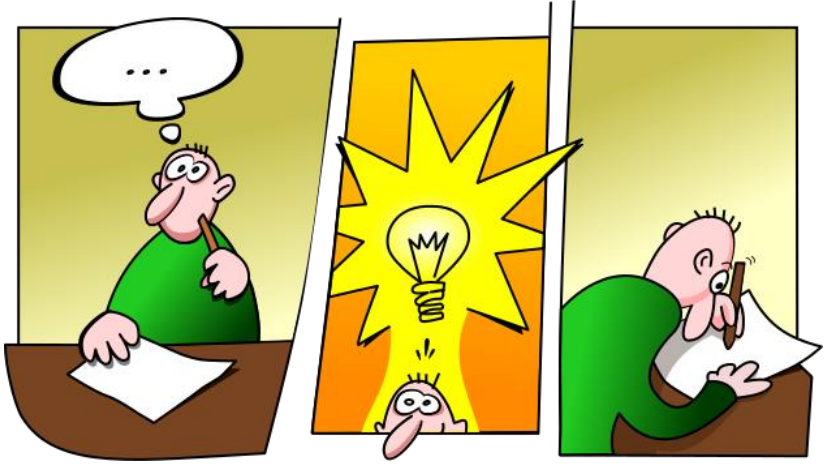

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Consultancy Project

The Research Proposal:

Choosing a Research Topic

Gaining Entry

Last time

- To define the terms consultants and consultancy
- To highlight the qualities required by consultants
- To identify & analyse the functions undertaken by consultants
- To consider some of the key issues faced by consultants
- To identify & discuss the different stages of the consulting process
- To consider 'the client' and the term 'client engagement'

http://youtu.be/I0UPGVmS1QI

Tutorial:

Applying the consulting cycle:

The Consultant in Action – The Hotel Inspector

Today's Objectives

- To examine why research is relevant to the consultancy process
- To identify the key stages in this research project
- To consider how to choose a good research topic
- To explore how to develop effective project questions/aims and objectives
- To acknowledge the difficulties of gaining access to the organisation and data and to consider strategies for doing so

Topical Research?

http://youtu.be/oc1iIRKZE9w

Why is research important?

- Organisations depend on reliable data
- Without the use of proper research methods, the data gathered is not reliable and incorrect decisions may be made
- It is essential that consultants have an understanding of research techniques even if they do not carry out the research themselves

Diagnosis and data collection - steps

1. Identify the ‘real’ problem that the client wants to be solved
2. What data needs to be collected to solve the problem?
3. Where is the information that will solve the problem available?
4. What is the most appropriate manner to collect this information?
5. What conclusions will be able to be reached by the information collected?

Project's key stages

- Bid for work
- Ethical approval (Form E3)
- PID agreed (and signed)
- Feedback
- Plan research methods in detail
- Undertake research
- Analyse findings
- Brainstorm with client
- Present findings and informed ideas
- Report
- Action!
- Feedback/analysis
- Does the project achieve the PID goals?

Choosing the research topic

- An exciting moment
- Your voyage of discovery begins
- Discover lots about the topic – and yourself!
- Chance to express your individuality, imagination, ingenuity, resourcefulness & personal organisational skills

So…take charge of your research topic now

http://youtu.be/8aYA1ooRce8

Which topic and why does this matter?

- The right one for you
- Gives you the best chance of success
- Choose wisely – this matters!
- Adopt a systematic approach to selecting it
- You have to live with it until May
- You need to enjoy it & be interested in it!

So….make sure the topic's right for you

- What really interests you?
- Can you 'match' this interest to a relevant organisation to give you a viable research topic?
- More interesting and motivational for you
- Once chosen, there's no going back!

Top tips

- Choose something you're capable of doing well
- Make a list of your skills and knowledge first:
  - personal strengths/weaknesses
  - previous/related knowledge
  - or be keen to learn about a new situation
  - review your modules to identify areas of interest

Key questions

- What are you good at – interviewing/designing questionnaires?
- Can you learn about your area and become a specialist through this project?
- Could this help your future career development?
- What resources can you use to help?
- Where can you get help?

Why choosing a research topic is difficult

- You are on your own here
- Must come from you
- There's too much choice
- Is it original or been done before?
- Is the application new? (e.g. staff motivation)
- Can you make it business related?
- Can you offer sufficient theory? (your lens)
- Re-use previous work: enlarge it. OK but generally not that good a 'fit': no shortcuts here

Research question

http://youtu.be/R_V1LMaD1e4

10 ways to generate ideas for a research topic

1. (Really) Thinking
2. Looking at past project titles
3. Using past projects
4. Using past assignments
5. Using relevant literature
6. Following the news media
7. Brainstorming
8. Concept mapping
9. Making a note of ideas
10. Discussion with others

Next step: refine ideas

- Balance between researching something useful for your client organisation and your personal enthusiasm for the topic – strike a balance
- Scale – not too big, needs to fit the course requirements
- Drill/narrow down – isolate a relevant part
  - the general area
  - the more specific field
  - the precise focus of the research
- Gain a good understanding of your organisation – how?

Summary: what makes a good research topic?

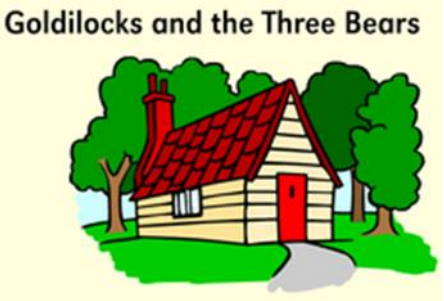
- You're enthusiastic about it; it matches your career goals
- There are resources available (data/time)
- Subject is topical
- Whatever the outcome, your project will be worthwhile
- It fits the module's specifications
- It links clearly to the relevant literature
- Fresh insights are provided
- You can state the research question and objectives clearly

Turning an idea into a research project

- Identify research questions and objectives
- **Define these terms please**
- The questions the research will address/aims
- Precise statements identifying what you wish to accomplish as a result
- If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up somewhere else

Exercise:
‘Why are women under-represented in senior management positions?’

- Good research question?
- Can it be answered definitively?
- How can you find out? Who would you ask?
- Is access to those people possible?
- Without it can you really properly understand?
- So – question but be not too easy, not too difficult – the ‘Goldilocks test’
- Too big/small/hot/just right
- Just right for investigation now, by this researcher, in this organisation



Developing research objectives

- Add precision to the question/aim

- Clear, specific statements that identify what the research process seeks to achieve as a result of doing the research

  (Saunders & Lewis, 2012:21)

- Are they SMART?

Using theory for aims and objectives

- What is theory?
- An explanation of the relationship between two or more concepts or variables
- Basically, ‘Why do certain things happen when some variables are present and others not?’; do people behave one way not the other? Does A lead to B?
- Range of academic theories available to help you explain what’s going on in your organisation

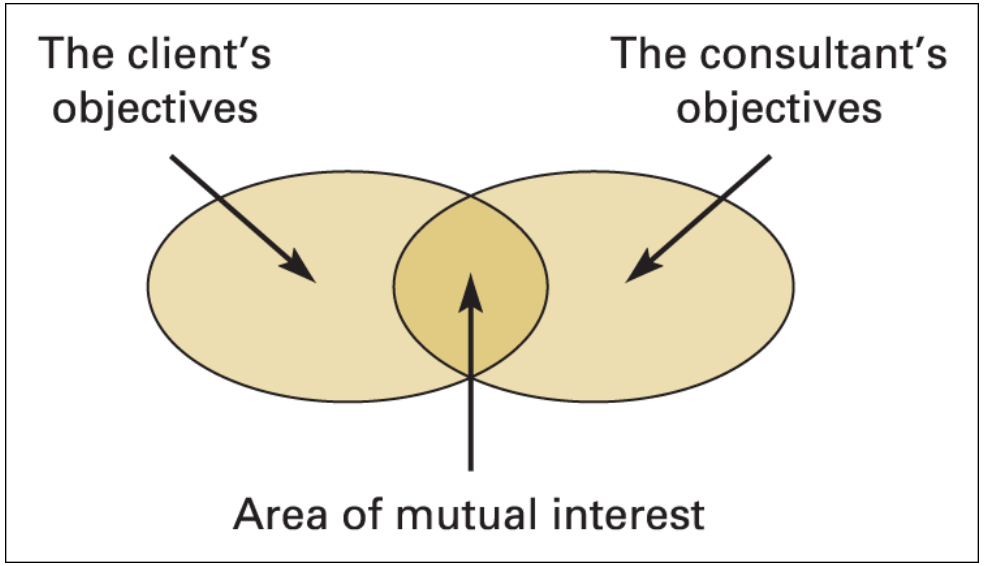


Figure 5.3 Negotiating objectives

Key objective

- **To pass the module and the course!!**

- Choose the best topic to help you do that
- Not always the <u>easiest</u> option

Getting access – potential problems

- Are you an ‘insider’ or an ‘outsider’?
- Do you have some form of connection?
- Will your chosen organisation be keen to help you? (hopefully – most not so keen, why?)

Stage 1: Gatekeeper concerns

- What's in it for us?
- Oh no! Not another request!
- Oh no! Not another student – more time needed.
- Who is going to get hold of this information?
- Well maybe, but not just now….

Access to data issues

- What do you wish to collect and how?
- Extent of access required to answer the research question and meet the objectives?
- Can you get this sufficiently?

The ‘insider’

- You are already known to the organisation
- Hopefully positive about you
- Still potential problems however, but different ones
- Formal approval needed to do the project?
- Status/power/internal politics
- Do they expect you to already know the answers to some of your questions?

6 strategies for successful and appropriate organisational access

1. Try to use existing contacts
2. Put yourself in the shoes of the manager receiving the request
3. Give yourself enough time to set up access (can take time so get started)
4. Make the written request professional
5. Work hard to ensure there are no concerns about how you'll use the information
6. Underline your credibility – do your homework!

……do what's **possible**