



## What is the purpose of the research proposal?

- The proposal is the planning and designing.
- The research is the executing and reporting

## The purpose for the research community and yourself as a researcher

- To get approval (and scrutiny!)
- Foundational document about your research
  - May be drawn on for ethics applications, scholarship / funding applications.
- Safeguard for universities
- Groundwork for thesis/Helps prepare student for what is ahead
  - Defining and communicating research aims clearly
  - Planning and action
  - Identifying resources
  - Anticipating difficulties

## Planning

Coolbear (1995, cited in Hampton, Emerson & MacKay, 1999) identifies 7 key steps in the planning stage of a research proposal:

- Identifying the research area
- Reviewing the relevant literature
- Identifying the specific research issue
- Clarifying the limits of the research question, which will help to identify the research aims and objectives
- Designing the study
- Preparing timetable
- Writing the proposal

## Scope

- Expense
- Logistics
- Feasibility of gathering enough students
- Getting permission
- Ethics
- Training
- So what
- Too broad
- Too specific
- Availability of equipment
- Time frames

## Key questions

- **WHAT** questions are you trying to answer?
- **HOW** will you answer them?
- **WHY** is it worth doing?

## Original contribution

- A question not answered previously
- Applying existing theory to a new context
- A new research design
- Synthesise issues that were previously discipline specific

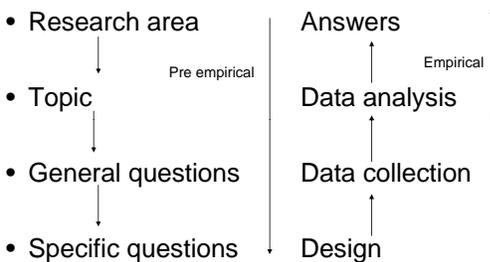
## How the research question is derived

- Why it is important
- How it fits in with other studies
- Where it comes from
  - Who initially raised it?
  - What has been discovered so far?
  - How has the question evolved?
  - What methods of investigating have been employed?
  - How well have they worked?

(Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 2004)

## Narrowing down your focus

(Punch, 2000)



## Example-focusing in on questions

- Immigration in New Zealand
  - Consistency of immigration policies across different nationalities
    - Is the immigration policy on family reunification applied consistently to applicants from Argentina, Korea and Tonga?
  - Now how would you measure this?
- (Manolo & Trafford, 2004)

## Examples

- Are advertised T.V snacks highly influential in children's diets?
- Are unhealthy snacks being disproportionately advertised to children at peak viewing times?
- What is the relationship between family background and incidence of youth suicide?
- What is the relationship between parental break up and incidence of youth suicide?

## Can't think of a topic

- What are your interests?
  - Work/community/hobbies/voluntary work
- What research have you done before
  - Essays/projects
- Think of a title
  - Empire strikes back
- Go with your hunch
- Use mind maps
  - Helps explore ideas/bigger picture
- **Once you have identified an area you at least have a body of literature**

(Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2000)

## Network-always be on the look out

- Talk to everyone and anyone
- Attend as many seminars/conferences are possible
- Correspond with other institutes/researchers
- Other theses



## Reading

- Reading must be purposeful-have a plan
  - Who are some of the most important researchers that have written on this topic?
  - What major themes do they deal with?
  - Is X dealt with by any of these authors?
  - Are there any differing points of view on this theme? How and in what ways?
  - What are other areas of disagreement where this topic is concerned

Know when to stop!

- (Manalo&Trafford, 2004)

## Getting started

- A brief focus on key questions
  - confront central questions
- Ideas paper
  - Write all ideas/context/background then develop questions

Just need to get writing!

(Punch, 2000)

## Pruning

- Too many topics
  - see where they lead
- Too many questions
  - Categorize,
  - prioritise,
  - hierarchy



Better to do small well than large superficially  
(Punch, 2000)

## The donut and swiss roll effect



- (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 2000)

## References

- Becker, L. (2004). *How to manage your postgraduate course*. Hampshire, England: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., & Tight, M. (2000). *How to research*. UK: Open University Press
- Drew, C.J. (1980). *Introduction to designing and conducting research* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). St Louis, MO: The C. V. Mosby Company.
- Hampton, J., Emerson, L., & MacKay, B. (Ed.). (1999). *Writing guidelines for postgraduate science students*. Palmerston North, New Zealand: Dunmore Press.
- Locke, L.F., Spirduso, W.W., & Silvermand, S.J. (2000). *Proposals that work*. London: Sage Publications.
- Locke, L.F., Spirduso, W.W., & Silvermand, S.J. (2004). *Reading and Understanding Research*. California: Sage Publications.
- Manalo, E., & Trafford, J. (2004). *Thinking to thesis: A guide to graduate success at all levels*. Auckland, New Zealand: Pearson Education.
- Punch, K.F. (2006). *Developing Effective Research Proposals*. London: Sage Publications.