Research Methods for Business Students

Chapter 2

Tang Weijun (Shanghai Jiao Tong University)
Contact

Tang Weijun
Shanghai Jiao Tong University

E-mail: wj.tang@yahoo.com.cn

URL: http://www.drtang.org/
Learning points

- To generate ideas that will help in the choice of a suitable research topic
- To identify the attributes of a good research topic
- To turn research ideas into a research project that has clear research questions and objectives
- To draft a research proposal
2.1 Introduction

- Before you start your research you need to have at least some idea of what you want to do.
- How to formulate and clarify your research topic and your research question.
- Formulating and clarifying the research topic is the starting point of your research project.
- In the initial stages of the formulating and clarifying process you will be generating and refining research ideas.
2.2 Attributes of a good research topic

- Need to check the assessment criteria for your project and ensure that your choice of topic will enable you to meet theses criteria.
- Your research topic must be something you are capable of undertaking and one that excites your imagination.
- Your ability to find the financial and time resources to undertake research on the topic will also affect your capability.
2.2 Attributes of a good research topic

- Capability also means you must be reasonably certain of gaining access to any data you might need to collect.
- For most topic it is important that the issues within the research are capable of being linked to the theory.
- If you have already been given a research idea you will need to ensure that your questions and objectives relate clearly to the idea.
- And it is important to consider your career goals.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- **Generating research ideas**
  - More frequently used techniques for generating and refining research ideas.
    - Rational thinking
    - Creative thinking
    - *See box 2.2 in page 17*
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Examining own strengths and interests
  - It is important that you choose a topic in which you are likely to do well and, if possible, already have some academic knowledge.
  - If you plan to work in financial management it would be sensible to choose a research project in the financial management field.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Looking at past project titles
  - Looking at past projects is a useful way of generating research ideas.
  - A common way of doing so is to scan a list of past project titles for anything that captures your imagination.
  - You can think of new ideas in the same general area that will enable you to provide fresh insights.
  - Scanning actual research projects may also produce research ideas.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Discussion
  - With colleagues, friends, university tutors et.al
  - Or with practitioners and professional groups.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Searching the literature
  - You can browse recent publications, in particular journals, for possible research ideas.
  - Reports may also be of use.
  - Searching for publications is only possible when you have at least some idea of the area in which you wish to undertake your research.
  - When the articles, reports and other items have been obtained it is often helpful to look for unfounded assertions and statements on the absence of research to provide fresh insights.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Keeping a notebook of ideas
  - Write it down at the time.
  - Then you can pursue the idea using more rational thinking techniques.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Exploring personal preferences using past projects
  - To explore your personal preferences using past project reports from your university.
  - However, by examining the report list you will begin to understand those project characteristics that are important to you and with which you feel comfortable.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- **Relevance trees**
  - Relevance trees may also prove useful in generating research topics.
  - As you proceed down the sub-branches more ideas are generated and recorded.
  - These can then be examined and a number selected and combined to provide a research idea.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- **Brainstorming**
  - To generate and refine research ideas.
  - It is best undertaken with a group of people, although you can brainstorm on your own.
  - How to:
    - Define your problem as precisely as possible
    - Ask for suggestions relating to the problem
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Brainstorming
  - How to:
    - Recording all suggestions observing the following rules:
      - No suggestions should be criticized or evaluated in any way before all ideas have been considered.
      - All suggestions, however wild, should be recorded and considered.
      - As many suggestions as possible should be recorded.
    - Review all the suggestions and explore what is meant by each.
    - Analyze the list of suggestions and decide which appeal to you most as research ideas and why.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Refining research ideas
  - Delphi technique
    It involves using a group of people who are either involved or interested in the research idea to generate and choose a more specific idea.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Refining research ideas
  - Delphi technique
    - To brief the members of the group about the research idea.
    - At the end of the briefing to encourage group members to seek clarification and more information as appropriate.
    - To ask each member of the group, including the originator of the research idea, to generate independently up to three specific research ideas based on the idea that have been described.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Refining research ideas
  - Delphi technique
    - To collect the research ideas in an unedited and non-attributable form and to distribute them to all members of the group.
    - A second cycle of the process (Step 2 to 4) in which individuals comment on the research ideas and revise their own contributions in the light of what others have said.
    - Subsequent cycles of the process until a consensus is reached.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Refining research ideas
  - The preliminary study
    - Review the literature
    - Revisiting the techniques and informal discussions with people who have personal experience of and knowledge about your research ideas.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Refining research ideas
  - Integrating ideas
    - The integration of ideas from theses techniques is essential if your research is to have a clear direction and not contain a mismatch between objectives and your final research report.
2.3 Generating and refining research ideas

- Refining research ideas
  - Refining topics given by your employing organization
    - You will have to weigh the advantage of doing something useful to the organization against the disadvantage of a potential lack of personal motivation.
    - And you need to achieve a balance.
2.4 Turing research ideas into research projects

- Writing research questions
  - One of the key criteria of your research success will be whether you have a set of clear conclusions drawn from the data you have collected.
  - The extent to which you can do that will be determined largely by the clarity with which you have posed your initial research questions.
2.4 Turing research ideas into research projects

- **Writing research questions**
  - Defining research questions is not a straightforward matter. It is important that the question is sufficiently involved to generate the sort of project that is consistent with the standards expected of you.
  - It is perhaps more likely that you fall into the trap of asking research questions that are too difficult.
  - The pitfall that you must avoid at all costs is asking research questions that will not generate new insights.
2.4 Turing research ideas into research projects

- **Writing research questions**
  - It is often a useful starting point in the writing of research questions to begin with one general focus research question that flows from your research idea.
  - Consulting your project tutor
  - To conduct a brainstorming session with your peers or use the Delphi techniques.
2.4 Turing research ideas into research projects

- **Writing research objectives**
  - Objective are more generally acceptable to the research community as evidence of the researcher’s clear sense of purpose and direction.
  - Led to greater specificity than research or investigative questions.
  - *See table 2.2 in page 25*
2.4 Turing research ideas into research projects

- The importance of theory in writing research questions and objects
  - The material included in textbooks is theory, whereas what is happening in the real world is practice.
  - It is a short step from the why research question to the testing of an existing theory in a new situation or the development of your own theory.
  - This may be expressed as a hypothesis that is to be tested, or the eventual answer to your research question may be the development or amendment of a theory.
2.5 Writing your research proposal

- Writing a research proposal is a crucial part of the research process.

- The purpose of the research proposal
  - Convincing your audience
    - If your proposal has not convinced your audience that the research you have proposed is achievable, the you will have saved yourself a great deal of time and frustration.
2.5 Writing your research proposal

- The purpose of the research proposal
  - Contracting with your client
    - Acceptance implies that your proposal is satisfactory.

- The content of the research proposal
  - Background
  - Research questions and objectives
  - Method
  - Timescale
  - Resources and references
2.5 Writing your research proposal

- **Criteria for evaluating research proposals**
  - The extent to which the components of the proposal fit together
  - The viability of the proposal
  - The absence of preconceived ideas
2.6 Summary

- The process of formulating and clarifying your research topic is the most important part of your research topic.
- Attributes of a research topic do not vary a great deal between universities. The most important of these is that your research topic will meet the requirements of the examining body.
2.6 Summary

- Generating and refining research ideas makes use of a variety of techniques. It is important that you use a variety of techniques including those that involve rational thinking and those that involve creative thinking.
- The ideas generated can be integrated subsequently using a technique such as working up and narrowing down.
- Clear research questions, based on the relevant literature, will act as a focus for the research that follows.
2.6 Summary

- Research can be distinguished from intelligence gather. Research is theory dependent.
- Writing a research proposal helps you to organize your ideas, and can be thought of as a contract between you and the reader.
- The content of the research proposal should tell the reader what you want to do, why you want to do it, what you are trying to achieve, and how you to plan to achieve it.
The End
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THANK YOU!

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