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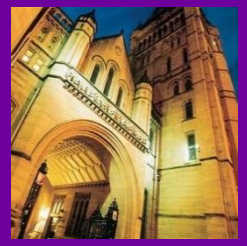

Academic Advise Tutorial 4: The dissertation research proposal

(MSc IB&M 2016/17)

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50 Years 1965 - 2015

Original Thinking Applied

Agenda

- **Purpose of the research proposal**
- **Structure of the research proposal**
- **Assessment of the research proposal**
- **Questions from students**
- **Note that information on the proposal will also be included in an IB&M Dissertation Handbook Supplement to be published on Blackboard later**

Writing Dissertation (Research) Proposal

Purpose of Dissertation Proposal:

- » Justify and plan your Master's degree research project.
- » Demonstrate the significance and contribution of your project to existing research.
- » Demonstrate that you understand how to conduct discipline-specific research within a set time-frame.

Writing Dissertation Proposal

Your proposal should address the following questions;

- **What** you intend to study (research aims and research questions).
- **Why** this topic needs to be studied (research gap/contribution).
- **How** you intend to study your topic (methodology).
- **When** you will complete this research (timeline).
- **Where** you will conduct this study (research context).

Working with the research proposal

- **Deadline: 28 February**
- **Make sure your supervisor reads and comments on a draft of the research proposal before submission!**
- **Agree on a deadline for sending the draft to your supervisor (should be at least one week before the deadline)**

Dissertation Proposal Structure
(Note: Slightly revised compared to Lecture 1 in RMDA I)

Word limit: 3000 Words ~ 10 pages

- **Title**
- **Introduction**
  - Motivation and research objectives
- **Literature review**
- **Theory/conceptual framework**
  - Literature review and theory may be combined
  - In total they should be 1,000 –1,500 words or 3-4 A4 pages
  - Visual conceptual framework if possible!
- **Methodology**
  - Description of the proposed research method
  - How you are expecting to analyse the data
  - Around 1,000 words or 2-3 pages
- **Expected contributions**
  - Basically, what kind of insights may your Dissertation lead to?
- **Reference list**
- **A GANTT chart (i.e. a work plan)**
- **Ethics form**

Title

- A good title conveys the key information about what the dissertation is about
  - » **DO CONSUMERS REWARD CSR? A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN AUSTRIA AND THE UK WITH FOCUS ON THE SPORTS APPAREL INDUSTRY**
  - » This title from last year neatly sums up the research question and the country and industry context

- It should be sufficiently detailed to inform the reader about the key aspects of your dissertation, but not too long (probably not much more than 20 words)

- **Note: The title might (and in most cases will) change from the proposal to the finished dissertation**

Introduction section

- **Discussing and motivating your broad research topic**
  - » E.g., “Cultural differences in cross-border M&As”

- **It should provide a brief description of the goals and expected contributions (see also below) of your research and the research question(s) you intend to address**
  - » E.g., “What factors can explain the effects of cultural differences in cross-border M&As”.

- **It is often advised that the Introduction should be a “mini-summary” of the article/dissertation/book**
  - » It should thus ideally mention key points from all the sections from the proposal structure

Literature Review section

- **Identify previous relevant literature on the topic as well as the research gaps you intend to address.**
  - » Remember that it is not enough to say that something was not studied before, you must also argue why it is important to study it!

- **Note that if the Dissertation carries out a systematic literature review, this part should be seen in relation to the Methodology (discussed later).**

Theory and/or Conceptual Framework section

- **Outline the main theories and/or frameworks you intend to use**
  - » E.g. Dunning's OLI framework, or Hofstede's culture theory

- **You may also sketch any theoretical arguments and hypotheses you have already thought about**

- **It may be very useful for this section to include a preliminary conceptual diagram showing hypothesized relationships between concepts using boxes and arrows.**
  - » Read article by Thomas et al. (2011, JIBS), but proposal does not need to specify all theoretical arguments yet

Methodology and Data section

- Describe your research strategy, including whether you intend to use primary and/or secondary data, and whether you will use quantitative (statistical) and/or qualitative (e.g. case study) methods.

- Describe specific potential sources of data if such sources have been identified, the logic behind case selection, how you plan to measure your key concepts, as well as the type of analysis you plan to use (e.g., regression analysis of quantitative data, or template analysis or content analysis of qualitative data).

- If you are doing a systematic literature review, this section should describe the methods of your review, such as the journals chosen, the search terms used, and so on.

Expected outcomes and contributions

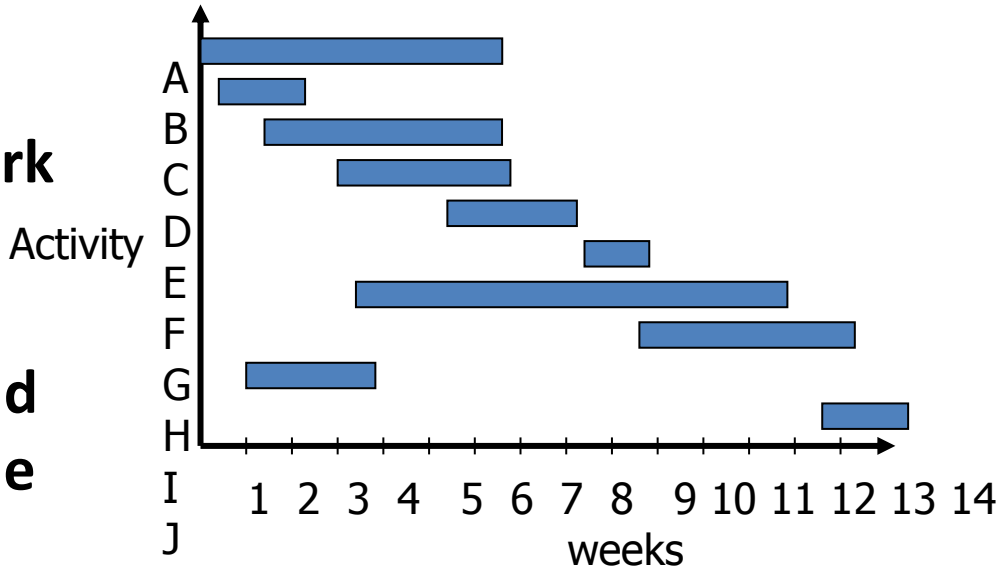
- Explain what kind of findings you expect
  - » Of course, this may not be very specific yet
  - » An example could be “I expect to be able to understand variables that determine the relationship between cultural differences and M&A performance”

- Explain how you expect that your Dissertation may be able to contribute to academic research, to managerial practice and, if applicable, to public policy
  - » For a discussion of different types of contributions, please see Academic Advice Tutorial 1

GANTT chart

- Named after the engineer and management consultant Henry Gantt who created them in the 1910s

- Set a Gantt Chart for your work (in weeks)



- Be realistic with your aims and timescale, and think about the sequencing of tasks and the implications of overlaps in tasks

- Consult your supervisor

Ethics Statement

- **You need to consider the ethical implications of your research and complete an ethics form**
- **There are university rules about ethics and some research may well need ethics committee approval**

- **Discuss ethical issues (if any) with your supervisor:**
  - » http://intranet.mbs.ac.uk/school-services/research/policies-procedures.aspx

Assessment criteria (1)

Structure and overall presentation
Quality of structure
Appropriate use of visual aids (figures, tables, etc.)
Quality of formatting (word processing skills)
Language and academic writing
Quality of the academic writing style (academic language, appropriate paraphrasing)
Quality of referencing

Assessment criteria (2)

Research problem and research questions
Quality of embeddedness in the literature
Quality of contextualisation
Clarity
Contribution to knowledge
Research questions logically derived from the research problem
Clarity of formulation of research questions
Literature review
Clarity and sufficient elaboration of main concepts
Critical analysis and discussion
Identification of the most significant contributions to the literature (books, journals and recent research)
Logic and coherence of arguments

Assessment criteria (3)

Methodology
Appropriateness of proposed methods
Quality of justification for chosen methods
Feasibility of proposed data collection
Conclusions
Appropriate description of potential ethical issues if applicable
Appropriate description of limitations of the proposed study

Some recurring issues in last year's proposals

- **Referencing issues**
  - » Copy-pasting from the internet
  - » Incorrect use of references (inc. "cited in …")
  - » Not attributing your framework properly (your own developed from scratch, or adapted/taken from existing work? Need to indicate source!)
- **Insufficient focus and lack of specificity/clarity**
  - » Too many concepts or too broad a question
  - » Not being specific in your claims and concepts
  - » Lacking a definition for your key concepts
  - » Not explaining your context clearly (country/industry)
  - » Not thinking about whose **perspective** you are taking (e.g. firms? consumers? both? etc.)
- **Subjective evaluations of what your dissertation can achieve**
  - » You cannot generalise from a small number or cases – the purpose of case research is deep understanding, the purpose of quantitative research is generalisation – be clear about which one you are going for

Some recurring issues in last year's proposals (cont'd)

- **Knowing the answer before you start**
  - » e.g. "I want to show that McDonalds has to adapt its products to be successful in India" – a dissertation needs to add to our existing body of knowledge and **tell us something we don't already know**
- **Unrealistic data collection plans**
  - » Is it realistic to get detailed / sensitive / primary data?
  - » Previously, many students were disappointed when not getting the access they expected
  - » Your personal contacts may not be able to get enough respondents for your survey or interviews – this needs to be confirmed early!
- **Confounding concepts**
  - » Confounding **qualitative research** with **quantitative research**
  - » Confounding **inductive research** with **deductive research**
- **Spelling and grammar**
  - » Use spellchecker and pay attention to sentence construction, do not use overly long sentences

Recommended Books

- Craswell, G., & Poore, M. (2011). *Writing for academic success*. Sage.
- Wallace, M., & Wray, A. (2016). *Critical reading and writing for postgraduates*. Sage.
- Cottrell, S. (2013). *The study skills handbook*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rudestam, K. E., & Newton, R. R. (2014). *Surviving your dissertation: A comprehensive guide to content and process*. Sage Publications.
- Biggam, J. (2015). *Succeeding with your master's dissertation: a step-by-step handbook*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Drew, S., & Bingham, R. (2001). *The student skills guide*. Aldershot: Gower.
- Pears, R., & Shields, G. (2010). *Cite them right*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oliver, P. (2013). *Writing your thesis*. Sage.