

GUIDELINES ON WRITING RESEARCH PROPOSALS

This brief guide has been written specifically to guide students writing research projects. Although the example used throughout the manual is that of research on worker morale, one can substitute this with any other topic since the principles for proposal writing are essentially the same.

TITLE

Write the title of the research project and your name in bold capital letters on the very first page.

DECLINING WORKER MORALE: THE CASE OF BARCLAYS BANK

GROUP TWO

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INTRODUCTION

Before stating the problem, give a brief introductory statement on the topic for research. For example, give the context of the problem such as some information about Barclays Bank; its history in Zambia; its shareholding structure; its management style; its record in industrial relations; and the current operations in the country, including branch network; and investment or expansion plans.

IDENTIFICATION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

In this section, provide a clear description of the problem have identified at Barclays, namely, declining worker morale. Give a brief description of how this problem started backed by some empirical evidence in the form of statistics and other information from the relevant sources.

In doing this, keep in mind that a problem is an unsettling intellectual challenge, a matter of doubt, difficulty, or dissatisfaction that one experiences when an unsatisfactory situation is encountered.

A problem can be expressed in the form a discrepancy between the existing situation and the ideal situation which begs answers. For example, the low levels of worker morale despite improvement in the conditions of service.

A statement of the research problem is usually a declarative statement of what is wrong, doubted, unsettling, or perplexing about a given situation. The fact that worker morale is declining despite measures taken to improve the workers' conditions of service must certainly be unsettling!

This certainly is a problem warrants further study and investigation.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives in the proposal should be formulated in operational terms in reference to the issues(s) upon which the research will focus the research questions to be answered, and the type of results that are expected to be achieved.

The questions you should pose in formulating the research objectives are: Why do you want to carry out the research? What do you hope to achieve?

This section should include:

- a) General objectives(s). These are overall aims of the research project. For example, the general objective here might be stated thus:

To investigate the seriousness and extent of the problem of low worker morale among workers at Barclays Bank.

- b) Specific objectives(s). These are the concrete processes in the research which are directly addressable by the methodology and which are followed in order to achieve the general objectives.

For example, you can have, as specific objectives, the following:-

- i) To find out how many workers at the bank have low morale.
- ii) To establish who are among the workers have low morale.
- ii) To find out how long the problem of low morale has persisted.
- iii) To find out why workers have low morale.
- iv) To find out the effects of worker morale for the company.

This section should take up to 1 page, double spaced.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Objectives are closely linked to the research questions. Thus, on the basis of the objectives, some specific research questions can be formulated:

The problem of declining worker morale may be translated into several research questions such as:

- i) To find out how many workers at the bank have low morale.

How many workers or what proportion of workers have low morale?

- ii) To establish who are among the workers have low morale.

What are the characteristics of workers with low morale?

- ii) To find out how long the problem of low morale has persisted.

For how long has there been a problem of low morale in the bank?

- iii) To find out why workers have low morale.

What are the reasons for low worker morale?

- v) To find out the effects of worker morale for the company.

What are the effects of low worker morale?

Phrased in this way, research questions will help you to determine where and how to look for the necessary data to answer the question. In other words, the research questions largely determine the choice of method.

Formulating the research questions should take about half a word -processed pages, double spaced.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Give a brief and preliminary overview of the literature and/or research done in the field related to the problem. Find out the information already available on the topic.

To do this, search for materials in the library using card catalogues, the social science indexes, abstracts, periodicals, books reviews, and other sources, using key words related to the topic such as worker morale, motivation, attitudes towards work, absenteeism etc. If

you have a computer with INTERNET access, use the appropriate search engine for your literature review.

Once you have collected enough material, narrow it down to essential materials only. Then start writing. When writing, compare and contrast the findings of researches on the same topic from different contexts, environments, countries etc; examine their methodological approaches; take note of any gaps and weaknesses in the research; highlight the salient findings of the various researches; and then comment on their general significance. Conclude your literature review by indicating what your own approach might be.

Ensure that the referencing of sources of information and footnoting is properly done.

Include at least five empirical researched articles.

This should take about 3-5 pages, double spaced.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This is a theory which explains why the problem under study exists.

It is a theory that serves as a basis for conducting research.

EXAMPLE

Use this example from the lecture to guide you in this section.

FORMULATING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Based on the foregoing example, how should the theoretical framework formulated?

1. Specify the theory used as basis for the study

Protestant ethic (the ethic of hard work) and the spirit of capitalism.

2. Mention the proponents of the theory

Max Weber

Cite work done on the influence of religion on entrepreneurship in Srenje by Norman Long

3. Cite the main points emphasized in the theory

Central to the religious thought of John Calvin (1509- 1564) is the doctrine of predestination. This means that god has selected some people for salvation and others for damnation.

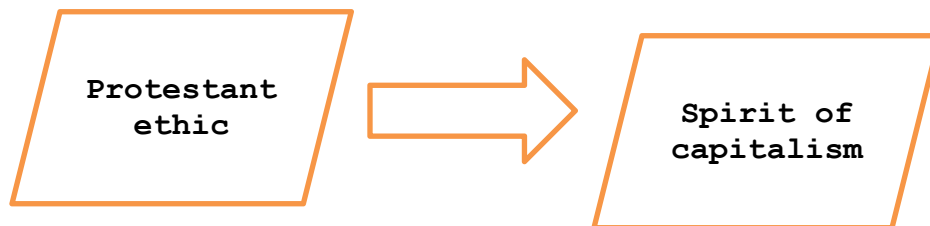
Fearful of of salvation or damnation, Calvinists sought signs of god's favour in this world.

They saw this in worldly prosperity. Thus they became absorbed in the pursuit of wealth. Calvinists reinvested their profits to reap even more profits. They practiced personal thrift and monetary discipline and had degree of personal discipline and motivation for success in the here and now. Their religious ideas fuelled social change and contributed to the growth of capitalism.

4. Support his exposition of the theory by ideas from other experts;

Norman Long in Zambia attempted to apply this among Jehova's Witnesses in Serenje in Social Change and the Individual.

5. Illustrate his theoretical framework by means of a diagram; and,



CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

After formulating the theoretical framework, the researcher has to develop the conceptual framework of the study. A conceptual framework is the operationalization of the theory.

It is the researcher's own position on the problem and gives direction to the study.

In the conceptual framework, you must attempt to show the relationships of the different constructs that you want to investigate.

Based on the foregoing example, how should the conceptual framework formulated?

1. Cite your conceptual framework;
2. Identify your variables;

Personal attributes of individuals underlie the spirit of entrepreneurship

3. Point out the dependent and intervening variables;

4. Show the direction of the study.

EXAMPLE

CONTEXTUAL

PREDICTOR

OUTCOME

*Political
Legal
Economic
environment*

**PERSONAL
ATTRIBUTES**
:
*Personal
discipline
Youth
Education
Religion
Profit
motive
Work ethic*

**ENTREPRENEUR
SHIP**
*Involvement
in money
making
activities
Street
vending*

HYPOTHESIS FORMULATION

Derive the hypotheses from the following:

- The research objectives
- The research questions
- The theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

For example in the Barclays Bank case, the following research objective and research question could lead to the hypothesis that immediately follows:

- To establish who are among the workers have low morale.

What are the characteristics of workers with low morale?

You can formulate this hypothesis:

The lower the educational attainment of a worker the lower the worker's morale

You can also use your intellectual creativity to formulate hypotheses from direct observations of the problem under study. It can also be inspired by the literature you have reviewed.

These hypotheses are precise statements of relationships between dependent variables and independent variables.

- i) The lower the income, the lower the worker's morale.*
- ii) Female workers have higher morale than male workers*
- iii) The more religious a worker is, the higher the morale*

This might take about 1 page, double spaced.

IDENTIFICATION AND MEASUREMENT OF THE VARIABLES

In this section, describe the variables or factors to be measured and/or addressed by the research. As a first step, indicate your independent and dependent variables. In the case of the first hypothesis, the dependent variable is **worker morale** and the independent variable is **income**. In the second and third hypotheses, **sex** and **religion** are the independent variables, while **worker morale** is the dependent variable.

You must also consider other influences here, i.e., those that might affect the hypothesized relationship, namely, alcohol abuse, peer pressure, stress etc... You must include relevant background variables such as age, marital status and others. Then operationally define all the variables in your hypotheses and the others you have identified. For example, in the preceding hypothesis, you would have the following definitions:-

- 1) **Income** – gross monthly salary before tax
- 2) **Religion** – one's commitment to God.

To operationally define income is straightforward. This can be done by way of questions to the respondents questions such as:-

- i) What is your gross monthly salary per month?
- ii) Do you have any other sources of income?
- iii) If yes, to the preceding question, what are these other sources?

2. To operationally define religion, these questions might do:

- i) What is religious affiliation?

- ii) Do you often go to church?
 - iii) How often do you go to church?
2. **Worker morale** – worker’s motivation to commit him/herself to work. To get information on this you would ask questions such as:-
- i) Do you enjoy the work you do?
 - ii) Would you rather stay at home than report for work on Monday?
 - iii) Is the work you do what you have always wanted to do?
 - vii) How many times are you absent from work in a month?

In effect, what you are doing here is to operationally define the variables of relevance to your research. It is important to do this early because these questions later are incorporated in your questionnaire. And remember to indicate the scales of measurement for all variables identified.

This section should take about 2-3 pages, double spaced.

METHODOLOGY

In this section, give a description of the population and sample(s) or target group(s) to be used as sources for data gathering, including the sampling or selection procedures, sampling unit(s), sampling criteria, and sample(s) size. For example, in the case of a research on worker morale on campus, you would define the population as consisting of all employees at Barclays Bank.

On sampling procedure, you could use simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, or systematic sampling. The sampling unit would be an employee of either sex. Remember to justify your grounds for adopting a particular sampling plan.

In the same section, give a description of the approaches and methods to be applied in collecting primary and secondary information, indicating the procedures and instruments to be used as sources of information. For the research project in question, for instance, you would use a close-ended questionnaire as the data gathering instrument. Explain why you are using this method of data collection rather than other methods. If you are not using interviews in preference to self-administered questionnaires, explain why. You can for example state that you are using self-administered questionnaires because the target group for your sample - comprising employees - is literate. Your preference for close-ended questionnaire, and not for participant observation, could be justified in terms of your desire for quantitative data which is to be analyzed statistically using computers.

Finally, this section should also include a description of the types of analysis to be carried out, the procedures and/techniques for processing and analyzing information, and the type of facilities to be used. Deciding on the statistical methods to be used will depend on various factors such as the sampling techniques used - is it random sampling or not? ; and the level of measurement of the variables in the hypotheses. If the relevant conditions are fulfilled, you can then select the appropriate statistical test. For example, in the case of the worker morale and income hypothesis, the variable worker morale may be defined and measured in terms of the frequency of the absenteeism from work in a month. This could be transformed into an ordinal scale variable so that frequency of use is reported as: 1) very frequently 2) frequently 3) rarely 4) never. Income could be classified in terms of 1) high 2) middle 3) low. This is an ordinal scale variable as well. If you want to test the existence of a relationship between these two variables, assuming the relevant conditions are fulfilled, you could use chi-square and some cross-tabulations. If these two variables were measured at an interval scale, and all parametric conditions are satisfied you could use, say, correlation analysis. Always remember to explain why you are using one particular statistical approach over another.

Once this is done, you can then indicate whether you are going to use a computer or an ordinary calculator to process the data. Obviously if you have a fairly large sample and a large number of variables you would be well advised to use a computer. If you are using a computer, indicate the software to be used such as SPSS, EXCEL, or STATA.

This section should take about 2-3 pages, double spaced.

JUSTIFICATION

Briefly state why this research is important. Give a rationale in terms of academic, theoretical or policy relevance. This is where you bring in those criteria for prioritization of the problem, with but one proviso: do not reproduce that stuff verbatim from the lecture notes. Select only those that are relevant and discuss them intelligently.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

In writing your proposal, adopt a good writing style. Use good and clear English. And, please, be coherent!

Good luck!

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