How to Write A Research Proposal

1. Introduction: 
   Different disciplines, organizations and institutions have different formats and requirements for writing a proposal. There are, however several key components which must be included in every research proposal.

For the MBA proposal, the key components are:
- A description of the research problem
- The problem statement
- The aim, objectives and research questions
- The significance of the study
- A review of literature relevant to the research problem
- A description of the proposed research methodology
- A description of how the research findings will be used and or disseminated
- A provisional instrument.

2. Describing the research problem: 
   Before a proposal can make sense to the reader, one must clearly understand what the proposed research will be about. Therefore, it is important to begin with a clear and simple formulation of your research problem.

   Read the following example:

   This research explores the extent to which the growing migration of health workers impact on the quality of service delivery offered to patients in Zambia hospitals. Recent reports in the media detailing the causes of the migration have created public interest and concern. And there are important implications for health policies. The purpose of this study is, therefore, to examine the causes of high labour turnover in hospitals in order to ascertain the shortcomings so that recommendations may be made to management to ensure that staff are satisfied and high labour turnover is minimized or eradicated.

   Note: A problem statement is one paragraph that explicitly states the purpose, nature and reasons for the study in order to achieve a specifically stated outcome.

   Fill in the blanks to help you write a precise, direct statement of what your research is all about.

   The purpose of the study is to………in order to……..so that ………..ensures that …….is achieved.
3. The Aim/Objectives/Research questions

3.1 The Aim:
Formulate a clear and definite aim that sheds light on the whole topic.

Read the following example:
The aim of this study is to investigate the causes and impact of high labour turnover in hospitals.

3.2 Objectives
Break the aim into 4 objectives. These objectives form the basis of your Literature Review as well as your instrument.

Read the following example based on the above aim:
The objectives of the study are:
- To ascertain if salaries contribute to high labour turnover.
- To assess how de-motivation affects the quality of service delivery.
- To assess the impact of a lack of medical equipment on hospital operations.
- To make recommendations on how skilled manpower may be retained.

3.3 Research questions:
Answers to the research questions ensure that your objectives have been achieved.

Read the following example based on the above objectives:
- Are salaries an issue in labour turnover?
- Does motivation affect the quality of service delivery?
- What impact does a lack of medical equipment have on hospital operations?

NOTE: THE AIM/OBJECTIVES/RESEARCH QUESTIONS MUST BE ALIGNED. This is a critical success factor.

4. The significance of the study [Why the research is important]
This section is often referred to as the rationale of the study. It is very important because it provides the researcher the opportunity of convincing the reader, supervisor, external moderator that his research is worth undertaking.

There are several ways of doing so:
- Describe how the results will be used.
- Explain how each stakeholder involved in the study will benefit.
- Describe the contributions your research will make.
- Think about how your research may:
  1. resolve theoretical questions in your area
  2. develop better theoretical models
  3. influence managers and decision makers
4. change the way people do their respective jobs or may change the way people live.

Information regarding the above points will help you in producing a convincing argument as to the usefulness of the study.

Read the following Examples based on the Labour Turnover Topic:

- The results will be used to improve salaries, job expectations and working conditions of doctors/nurses etc.
- Improve awareness amongst managers and leaders about the plight of employees.
- Amend current policies on remunerations, and basic conditions of employment.
- Ensure that all hospitals are equipped with adequate medical supplies and equipment.
- The lives of the patients will improve.

5. The Literature Review
The literature review presents one of the greatest challenges of the research proposal to all researchers. The literature review provides a conceptual framework, based on your objectives, so that your research questions and methodology can be better understood. It is imperative that you provide an integrated overview of your field of study. This means that you must show awareness of the most important and relevant theories models and studies pertinent to your study.

This section gives you the opportunity to show that you have benefitted from the MBA coursework. Read widely on a topic and provide a comprehensive overview of the current theoretical knowledge of your proposed study. Ideally use current literature [not more than 5 years old].

5.1 Read the following extracts that demonstrate an unsuccessful and successful literature review.

Topic: The causes and impact of high labour turnover in hospitals.

Unsuccessful Literature Review

High labour turnover among health workers is a problem which management must address. The problem is critical that the workers attending to patients are overworked. The workers look after un-recommended number of patients. Health workers are dissatisfied with their working conditions and especially the uncompetitive wages. Therefore, lack of job satisfaction is the cause of turnover.
Successful Literature Review

This study will draw on the diverse approaches to a study of the causes and impact of high labour turnover in hospitals. A reflection on the nature of staff and hospital organizations indicate that there are several factors that contribute to high labour and the resultant adverse effects of it [Russell and Taylor., 2004:757]. For example skilled human resources are important in successfully completing tasks and the lack of it results in failure or mediocre completion of tasks.

Therefore, it is important that managers in hospitals appoint the right personnel for the right job in order to ensure job satisfaction and successful completion of tasks. A study by Luthans [2002 :230] revealed that if there is considerable job dissatisfaction, there is likely to be high turnover. Luthans’ [2002 : 230] findings also stress emotional response to a job situation. When employees feel that they are not been treated fairly they develop negative attitudes towards work. This has implications for their performance and productivity.

NOTE:
- The objectives of the study form the basis of your literature review as well as your instrument. In other words your Objectives/Literature Review and Instrument must be aligned.
- Use current literature to write up your overview.
- Use full Harvard referencing.
- This section should be 10 pages for the proposal and 25 to 30 pages in the dissertation.

6. Research Methodology
This is also referred to as the strategy for the research. You need to clearly indicate:

- the methods of data collection within a quantitative or qualitative methodology
- the techniques for data collection, [questionnaires, interviews, observation, case studies]
- the measurement for validation of the techniques[ attitude scales, rating scales etc].
- the target population [definition, who constitutes your target population, size]
- the respondents and the sample size [choice of sample, definition, size]

Study the following examples:

6.1 Research according to quantitative methodology:
In this study, the researcher utilizes a quantitative methodology to obtain the primary data. Quantitative research is associated with analytical research, and its purpose is to arrive at a universal statement from an analysis of the data that is collected.

Data can be collected by observations, pilot studies and surveys. A research instrument[questionnaire] was compiled to collect the primary data for this study. This method was considered suitable because……………[complete as per your study].

6.2 Research according to qualitative methodology:
In this study, the researcher uses a qualitative methodology to obtain the primary data. Qualitative methodology refers to research which produces descriptive data through the written and or spoken word. In qualitative research, methods such as case studies, in-depth interviews, participant observation and perusal of personal documents are used to obtain primary data.

For the purpose of this study, interviews and participant observation was used to obtain primary data. These methods were considered suitable because …………[complete as per your study].

7. Measuring Instruments

Measuring instruments are applied to test or measure the reliability of the methods of data collection.

Attitude scales are designed to measure different degrees of attitudes towards issues such as autocratic managers, democratic managers, price increases, brain drain etc.

Rating scales assess the behaviour of respondents. The respondent selects an appropriate response on a scale of a five rank –order points with two extreme ends of the scale being ‘good/well and bad/poor’. Each point on the scale is assigned a score of 1 to 5 or 5 to 1. By adding up the scores as represented by the reaction of the respondent and assessed by the rater, the attitude towards a particular issue cab be determined.

- Strongly Agree [SD] = 5
- Agree [A] = 4
- Unsure [U] = 3
- Strongly Disagree [SD] = 2
- Disagree [D] = 1
- Mean [M] = the average of the score

**Study the following example:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>SA</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>M</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>My employer helps me to meet my goals</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 reveals that 65% of the respondents agreed that their employer helps them to achieve their goals. A total of 15% were unsure, while 20% disagreed with the statement. The mean of 3.4 reveals that there is slightly more agreement than disagreement to this statement.

8. Validity and reliability of data measuring instrument
The validity and reliability of data measuring instruments are crucial to scientific research.

8.1 Validity
Validity refers to the potential of a design or measuring instrument to measure what it is supposed to achieve and or measure. It is concerned with the what of data collecting procedures. The researcher must cite the following types of validity and then explain how he applied them to his instrument:

- Content validity
- Criterion- related validity
- Construct validity
- Face validity
- External validity

8.2 Reliability
Reliability pertains to the accuracy of measures. The same instrument must be able to produce the same data at a later stage under similar conditions. The researcher may do this by means of a test – retest.

9. Hypothesis or Research questions to be tested?
A hypothesis is a tentative answer to a research problem, while research questions are general questions about relations among variables.

Examples of research questions:
- What factors determine job satisfaction in a library?
- What are the causes of a decline of the use of libraries at Mancosa?
- What are the factors that lead to user satisfaction in the library?

These questions can be converted into a series of hypotheses on job satisfaction.
Examples:
- Job satisfaction is significantly related to salary offered to employees in the library.
- Job satisfaction is significantly related to opportunities for promotion provided in the library.
- Job satisfaction is significantly related to the environment prevailing in the library.

The researcher may EITHER use hypothesis testing if he considers it feasible and necessary for his study, OR he may pose research questions to be answered.
10. Data Gathering
There are three methods of data gathering:
  - Observations
  - Measurement
  - Questioning

Observation is the systematic recording of nonverbal as well as verbal behaviour and communication.

In measurement, the researcher uses a device [instrument] to express judgment or opinion regarding a phenomenon, based on a criteria.

Questioning is one method for gathering data. Within the questioning method, there are a number of techniques such as questionnaires [structure and unstructured], interviews, checklists and diaries.

While the researcher may use one or several methods of data collection it is important he justifies their use for the current study.

11. Data Analysis
Once the data has been gathered, the analysis of the data is undertaken. The basic steps are:
  - Categorizing data
  - Coding data
  - Calculating appropriate statistics [ descriptive or inferential statistics]

Categorizing data is concerned with actual assigning of data into different categories. Data about managers can be categorized by personality style, age, gender etc.

Coding is the process of identifying and classifying each answer with a numerical score or other character symbol. Coding is used for converting data or responses to numerical numbers so that they can be tabulated and appropriate statistics can be applied.

Descriptive statistics uses measures of central tendency:
  - Mean [average score]
  - Median [the midpoint]
  - Mode [value that occurs most often]

Inferential statistics is used for making inferences or judgments about a population on the bases of a sample. It is used for hypothesis testing.

12. Conclusion
In the initial stage of research, a researcher develops a statement of the problem. He selects the research approach according to the nature of the problem and then proceeds to prepare his proposal after intensive reading around the problem under investigation in accordance with the above guidelines.

13. Final Comments:

Some tips to help you in your writing include:
- Always structure your work in advance.
- Know what you want to say before writing it.
- Every sentence must contain ONE IDEA ONLY.
- Each sentence must FLOW LOGICALLY from the one BEFORE.
- While writing, keep your reader’s needs in mind. This means providing a ‘verbal map’ of your document so that your reader knows what to expect.
- Place ‘verbal signposts’ in your text to explain what is coming next.
- Hence the importance of introductions, conclusions, overviews etc.

13.1 Structure and Style

ALWAYS:
- Produce a professional looking proposal
- Be interesting
- Be informative
- Write in a way that is easy to understand
- Include a contents page
- Include a bibliography
- Use clear headings and sub-headings
- Be concise and precise- managers make crisp decisions
- Use simple and appropriate language
- Construct clear arguments pertaining to management
- Check your spelling and grammar
- Reference your work fully using an acceptable, standardised format.
- Proof read your work before submitting

The Mancosa Research Department wishes you every success in your academic endeavours.