

The problem definition stage



" The problem definition stage is perhaps more critical in the research process than the problem solution stage". Discuss this statement. Answer:

- Finding the right solution to an incorrectly identified problem helps no one because the original concerns will still continue to exist. Hence, pinpointing where exactly the gap lies, for which a solution is needed, is critical. (5 marks)

b. In your company's management development program, there was a heated discussion between some people who claimed, " Theory is impractical and thus no good," and others who claimed, " Good theory is the most practical approach to problems. What position would you take and why? Answer

- The statement that " theory is impractical and thus no good" illustrates a misconception of the true meaning of theory.
- The second quotation is more to the point: there is nothing so practical as a good theory (Kurt Lewin) because of the power it gives us to explain and predict the target phenomenon.
- We use theory constantly as we explain why certain events occur or why one procedure succeeds and another does not.
- Theory represents an identification of key causal relationships, which explain outcomes in a variety of situations.

It is an effort to extract the essence of relationships, ignoring less important contextual factors.

- The adequacy of a theory comes from its capacity to explain phenomenon in a variety of contexts and situations and this is referred to as its capacity to " travel. "
- Often, theories are too simplistic, and therefore lack explanatory power across situations.
- The solution lies in improving the theory, possibly introducing more variables, rather than rejecting the central concept. . (10 marks)

c. Sometimes business research may be unnecessary. Explain when this could occur.

Answer: Business research may be unnecessary in several situations. • If the value of addressing the problem is less than the cost of the research, research is unnecessary. • If the organization suffers from constraints of time, money, or skill, the research may not be appropriate. • If the necessary information cannot be collected in a manner that is applicable to the research, it may not be necessary. • Finally, if the decision is of low-risk anyway, research is unnecessary. (5 marks) d. Explain the meaning of deduction and induction. Provide an argument that exemplifies each form.

Answer: • Deduction is a form of argument that suggests a conclusion from the reasons given. The reasons imply the conclusion. A deduction is valid if it is impossible for the conclusion to be false if the premises are true. Consider the following example. o AXY employees receive a discount on all clothing purchases made at any AXY store. Sarah is an employee at the AXY store in city X. Sarah will receive a discount at any AXY store. • Induction is different from deduction in that it draws a conclusion from one or more facts. However, other conclusions could be drawn from the facts.

For example, Burger King was featured on an episode of the Apprentice. Sales figures increased in the two weeks immediately following the episode. The conclusion is that the brand placement resulted in the increase in sales. While this conclusion is possible, other explanations have not been eliminated. (10 marks) Question 2 A teacher observes that the performance of students in the class varies depending on the workload, the complexity of the tests, the extent of ambiguity in the assignments, and the stress experienced by them. She assigns to you the task of doing a research project on this and wants you to do the following: a.

Give the project a suitable title; To investigate factors that affect students' performance. b. Briefly establish why it is important to research the topic; It is important to research this topic since we would like to know how workload, complexity of the test, extent of ambiguity in the assignment and the stress experience do affect students' level of understanding and thus affects their performance. c. Clearly and precisely write the problem statement; To what extent the factors such as workload, complexity of the test, extent of ambiguity in the assignment and the stress experience influence performance. . Develop a theoretical framework using the variables mentioned above, clearly delineating the network of associations among the variables Workload complexity of the test extent of ambiguity stress experience Performance ind. Var intervening var. dep. Var e. Introduce a moderating and an intervening variable in the framework, explaining how they moderate and intervene. Intervening variable = stress experience f. Develop three hypotheses Hypotheses 1

The more workload given, higher complexity of the test and higher level of ambiguity will reduce students' performance. Hypotheses 2 The more workload given, higher complexity of the test and higher level of ambiguity will increase more stress to the students Hypotheses 3 The higher the level of stress will lead to lower performance of students (20marks) Question 3 The new president of an old, established company is facing a problem. The company is currently unprofitable and is, in the president's opinion, operating inefficiently.

The company sells a wide line of equipment and supplies to the dairy industry. Some items it manufactures, and many it wholesales to dairies,

creameries, and similar plants. Because the industry is changing in several ways, survival will be more difficult in the future. In particular, many equipment companies are bypassing the wholesalers and selling directly to dairies. In addition, many of the independent dairies are being taken over by large food chains. How might business research help the new president make the right decisions? Sample answer: Many different studies might be helpful in this situation.

The most likely lines of investigation should be on: 1. the firm's operating inefficiencies, and 2. its future prospects in the changing dairy industry. In the first case, the president might want to determine whether the inefficiency is caused by internal production problems, poor organization, ineffective cost controls, weak sales management, and so on. This might take the form of a company audit of internal processes. The examination of the industry and the firm's future in it would likely be directed at discovering possible trends in consumption patterns and distribution systems.

It might also entail polling the end user of the products to see if anything other than price is prompting them to buy directly from manufacturers. Having this information would allow the researcher to either support the president's contention that inefficiency is the root problem, or rule it out. Further, it would allow him to determine such things as whether any overlooked opportunities (markets) exist, if his company is the only one experiencing problems, if the trend is likely to reverse, and so on. (20 marks)

Question 4 Evaluate the statement of the business problem in the following situations: a.

A manufacturer of fishing boats: The problem is to determine sales trends over the past five years by product category and to determine the seasonality of unit boat sales by quarters by regions of the country. Answer: This is a relatively straight forward set of descriptive objectives for a secondary data study. The time period is indicated. Sales volume in units is indicated to be the variable of interest. By indicating unit boat sales, quarters as the time periods, regions of the country as the geographical units, the definition is specific. b. The marketer of a new spreadsheet software package: The purpose of this research is (1).

To identify the market potential for the product, (2). To identify what desirable features the product should possess, and (3) To determine possible advertising strategies/channel strategies for the product. Answer: Although this is not a poor statement of the problem, it is too ambitious and it could be more specific. A major disadvantage of this problem statement is that it is too much for a single research study. Determining advertising and channel strategies, product features, and market potential indicate several distinct problems for a program strategy rather than a single project strategy. (10 marks)