

Scoping a VET Research Project

Most of us start researching because of an issue in our field of practice stands out, irritates us, and forces us to ask – there must be a better way or why is it like this?

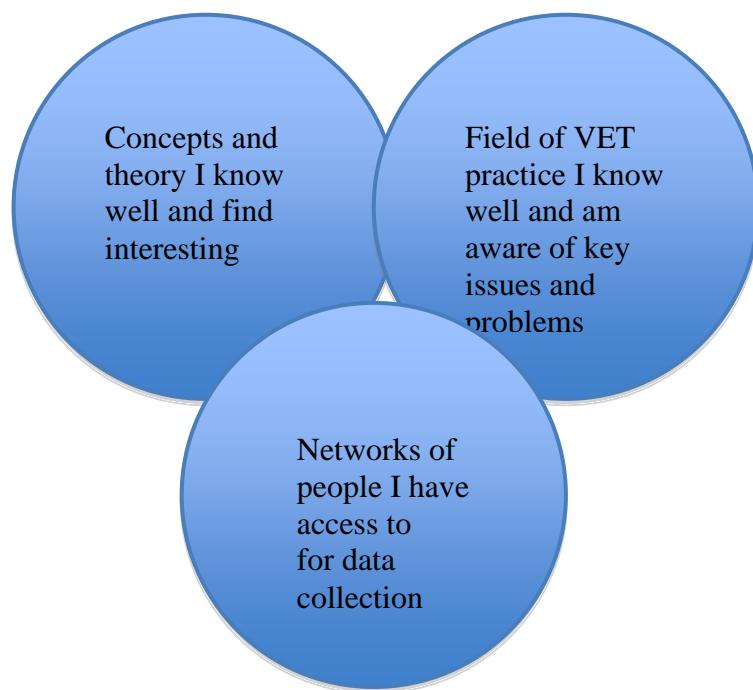
Research is not quick – we need an issue of passion to see us through the journey.

However we also need an issue that is important to others – as shared concern – for our findings to be valued.

So how do we pick an issue?

Initial Planning

- ❖ Start by reading some completed NCVER research reports.
- ❖ Scan the Journal of International Training Research.
- ❖ Think about your expertise, your interests and your network.



- ❖ **Remember :**

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- If you go wide you cannot go deep – focus your search.
 - Start from your sources of data access -who can you collect data from?
 - This will be the most complex and hardest task ever.

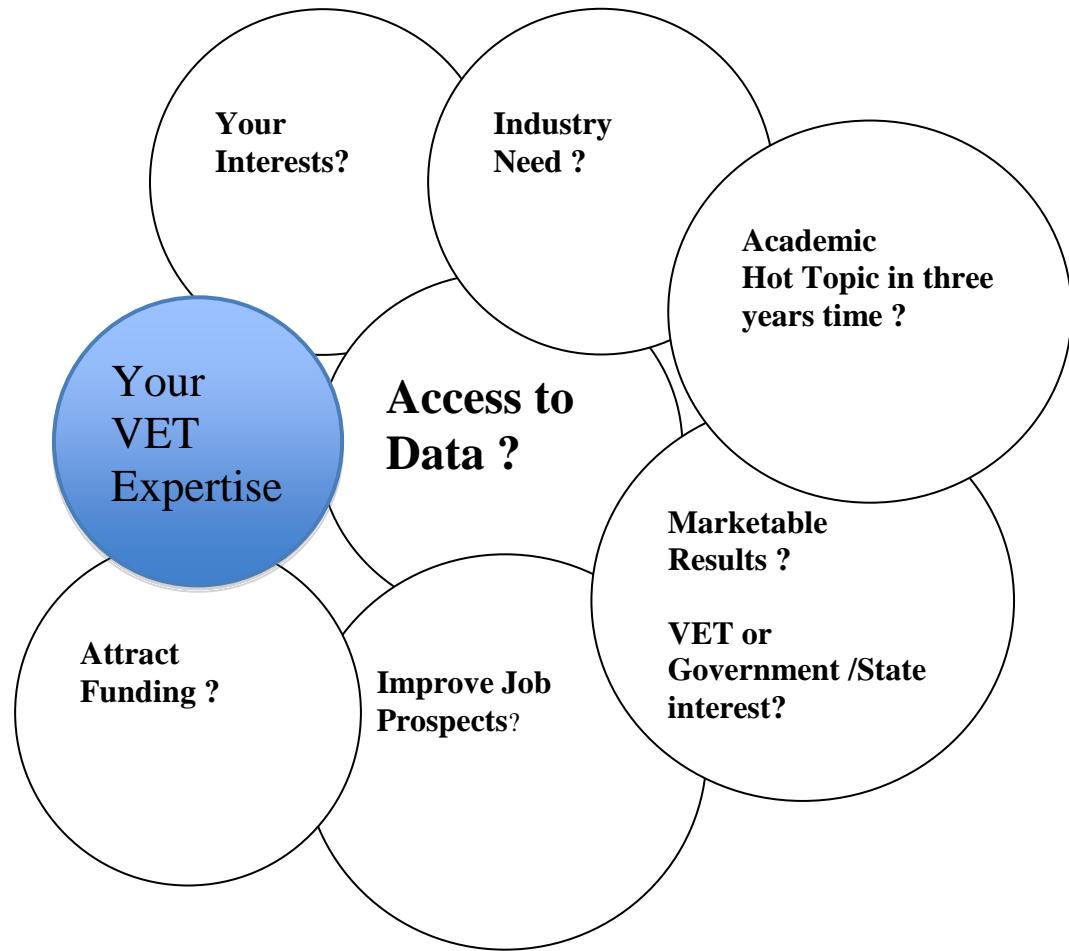
❖ Ask yourself ?

- Why bother doing it?
- What is the purpose of research?
- Can you get access to collect data?
- Will anyone help or fund this research?

Choosing from your Options

Criteria for Topic Selection –

Brainstorm the options for your project and then rate them against a set of criteria. You might want to weight the criteria, and give each topic a score against each criteria in a table. Which topic for a project is the high scorer for you?



Mapping out your idea

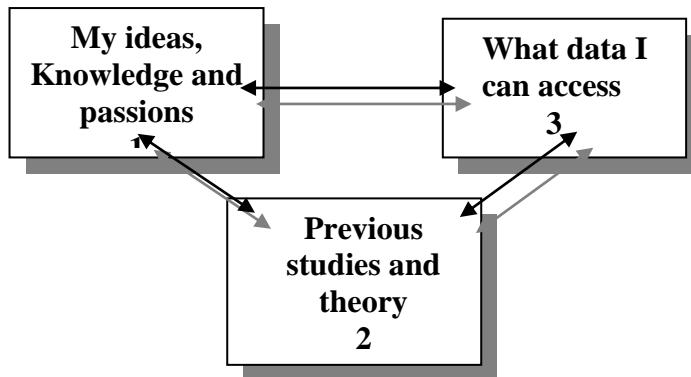
So, you have an idea about what you are interested exploring. Great, without a passion you will not sustain the long haul.

You need to convince people with the logic of what you have done, and made a practical contribution to knowledge.

So, where does your plan start? It starts with finding out what has been done before, so you don't duplicate, but can explore new territory. What is known and where can you take it?

However a great plan needs a reality check – can you get the data and who will give it to you?

Perhaps you should continue exploring to find out where - *what you are going to explore* meets *what you are able to explore*.



1 – What is the direction?

You have the broad idea but are you exploring what happened, is happening or will happen – in which places, industries, sizes of organisation – and with whom?

2 - What are you building from?

Search for studies on VOCED and find out what theories or conceptual frames they are using. It surprising how much comment there is out there and how little evidence based research!

3 - How will you get access

What networks will help get to best practice - find them and open them and locate strategic sponsors at work, in academia, in the business world.

Focusing your direction

When you have decided on your best option – start exploring the area:

- Read a Sample Report in the area - NCVER VOCED
- Scan relevant Journals in the VET area.
- Review new VET publications especially
- Set a time line for Major activity
- • Justify the Doability of your study:
 - Purpose of the research?
 - What workplace problems does it build from?
 - Why bother doing it?
 - What might it produce?
 - What existing research does it link to?
 - What will be the key questions and why?
 - Who and where are the data sources?
- Indicate how you have - Access to Data Sites
- Map out relevant and related fields of existing research and knowledge
- Map out method - Who what where when how and why
- Pilot broad questions or concepts – ask VET practitioners
- Register the study title and publicise it so people know your task and may discuss it with you – set up a web site – use your local organisational newsletters.
- Read your institute or organisational ethics guidelines.

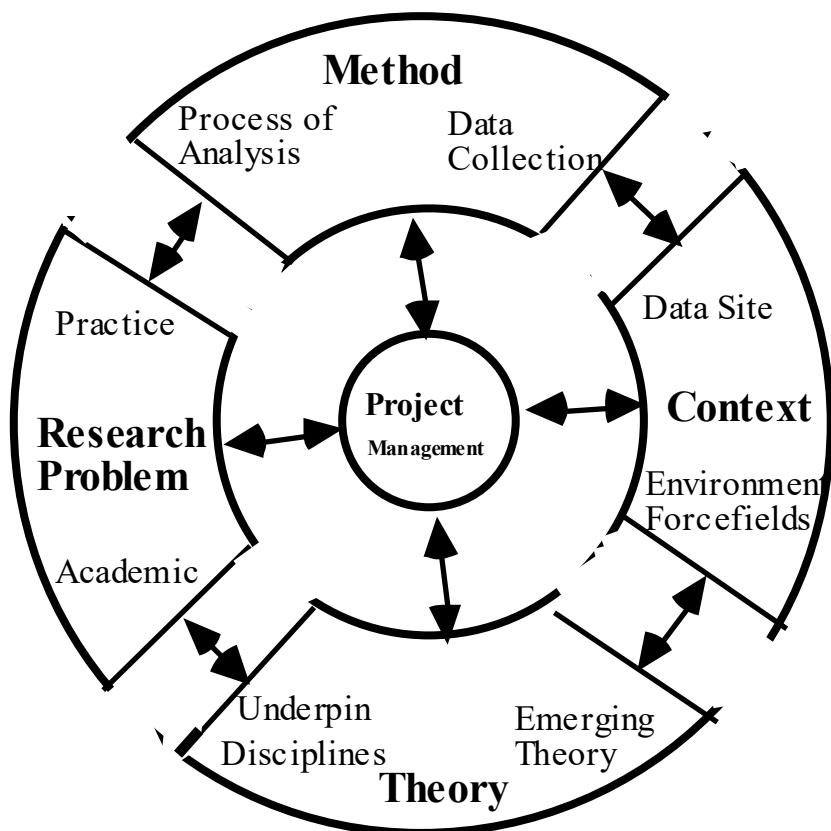
Study development

Developing your research design

Use the framework below to develop the design you are using for your study.

Which areas are still unclear?

Use the framework as a basis for discussion with an experienced researcher.



Letting people know what happening

It is important to make sure you get help from all those around you with your study. Don't make it a secret. Somebody else may be able to help you. Register the title as soon as you have a clear direction and try and publish your proposal – make it public! Use the following format to let the rest of your organisation. Make sure you are on the mail lists to find out when other research seminars and proposals are advertised at local colleges and universities.

One Page Start

Title <i>An exploration of the.....</i>	
Purpose of Study <i>This study will.....do what and produce what</i>	
Justification <i>Why spend the time – what is the need and value?</i>	
VET Objective <i>This study will explore the..</i> <i>What relations?</i>	
Practical Objective <i>This study will contribute to.....</i> <i>What problem?</i>	
Research Questions <i>What are the components.....</i> <i>What is the impact of....</i> <i>What are the outcomes of ...</i>	
Research Design <i>Try to do what, and why because?</i>	
Research Method <i>Collect what from who how when and where?</i>	

Building your research proposal

Each research study is unique. While you should develop your understanding of your study to answer the key questions about the method being used, you should also adapt the proposal framework so that it suits the particular shape of your study.

The proposal framework that follows provides a draft framework for your initial study proposal project.

Read current University regulations before developing your format – 10-20 pages is a great start.....

Introduction

At the start you put down the basic reasons for doing this study – defend your time and actions ! This is the introduction to your study.

- What is the broad problem and local problem – the background.
- What is the purpose of research?
- Why bother doing it - justify the need?
- Justify the potential outcomes?
- Insert some of the main issues/ variables that affect this problem.
- You may link in broad references to theory here or other studies.
- **Define your key terms – the words in the title or the question.**
- Define also the limitations – what you are not going to do and why.
- Indicate why you have made this choice and your capability and networks.

Literature review

You need to find out who has been here before and what they found so you can use it as a base. Add anything else you have come across during the study to your proposal literature review.

- You should try and review 4/5 studies or theories and say how they are shaping your own investigation.
- What research studies have been done that are close to your study – dissertation abstracts may help.
- What theory is there that may help you see relations in the organisation?
Learning / Change theories are most relevant.
- What are new ideas being thrown about in the literature and professional journals about your focus area?
- Be critical about these sources and their relevance. Say what they tell you and how relevant you feel they are. They form your platform for analysis.
- If you can indicating how these sources fit together or relate to your study.
- Then summarise each one indicating the relevance to your study.
- Finally, at the end summarise what they tell you/us and how your study will explore further. You may need to draw a model of how they all relate.

Conceptual framework

Jot down the main relations that are related to the approach you are taking in your investigation.

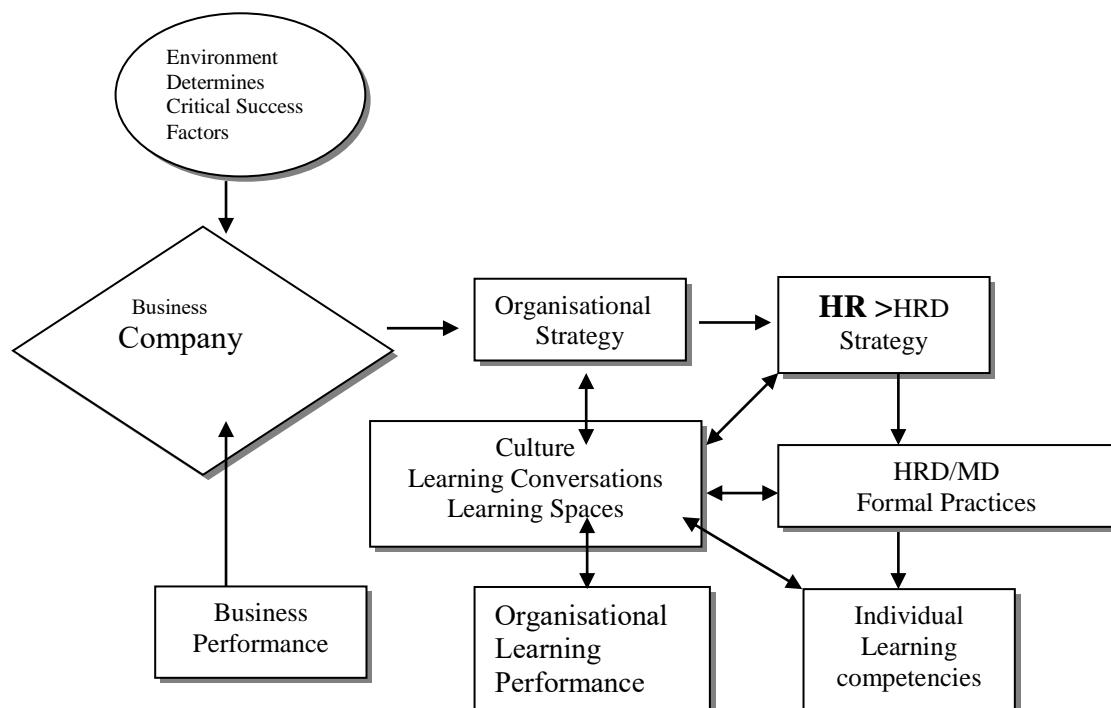
Make a diagram of these relations so the reader can see how you are going to tackle your research process. Modify the relations in the standard diagram below – develop your own. It will always change as you understand the situation more !

What the **variables** that you are exploring and what are their possible **relations**?

You might wish to make a model of how you ‘see’ the variables and relations in this situation. You are declaring here your assumptions about how you are approaching your study study.

- What are the inputs to the area you are looking at ?
- What are the outcomes ?
- What are the driving forces ?
- What are the moderating forces ?
- What are the mediating forces ?
- How do they connect ?

Strategic HRD.





Research questions

You already have a broad title or research focus. Recheck your questions against the way your study developed – can you simplify or clarify them?

- Try and do a table that shows the clear link between the focus/purpose of your study – the research questions for your study and the questions you asked participants.

'This study is exploring the effectiveness of the relations between mentoring and staff development and direction at Boldmore TAFE.'

Research Questions

- 1 – What development activity exists?
- 2 – What impact does the activity have?
- 3 –How could the activity be improved?
- 4 –What changes would have the greatest impact on effectiveness?

Interview Questions

- What development have you been involved in ?
- How has it changed your practice?
- What have been the greatest influences upon your own development?
- What are the main thrusts of development strategy?
- How is the culture changing?
- What three changes would you make to the activity?
- What would most change the organisation?

Research Design

Your design is a statement about the direction that frames your study. The following issues will make it clear to the reader what you were attempting to do.

- Repeat the need for this study in broad terms.
- Who and what does this study focus on – the organisation and the individuals?
- How will the design of the study produce evidence to answer the research questions?
- What will you be measuring and how will you measure it?
- How will you ensure you collect diverse perspectives?
- Where will you collect your data?
- How will you collect your data?
- What assumptions underpin the design of your study?
- Will you collect data over time or just once?
- Will you be the sole researcher where the interaction is designed to be minimal?
- Will you introduce an intervention or try and change practice?
- Are you searching for the important influences on practice?
- Repeat your research purpose and research questions.
- Will you use clusters of interviewees.
- Will you triangulate the data collected.
- Will you give a narrative summary of the data?
- Will you give a thematic analysis of the data?
- What do you intend the analysis to provide?
- What will stakeholders learn?
- Is the intention to provide a range of possible actions and specific recommendations for this case?
- What the **ethical** considerations and **limitations** of your design?
- How will you behave as a researcher?

Method

This section is about how you intend to **sample data** and what **instruments** you will use.

The job is to indicate what you will collect from whom, how, when and where. You should plan this as a table perhaps.

- Consider the **stratification** of your data collection ie the Industry type/ size/location and participant gender/ level and age.
- Justify your choice of organisation and the **cluster** of interviewees you are targeting. – be clear about your limitations.
- Will you use focus groups, questionnaires, interviews, observation and record scanning?
- List the interview questions and how they link to your research questions
- Remember that you can collect information that is tapping different perspectives of the organisation – what people believe, what they intend. Their:
 - Assumptions
 - Values
 - Behaviours
- Be clear to have a format to take notes that distinguishes between what people say, what you see, and what impressions you have.
- How are the participants related within the organisation – can you cross check (triangulate) responses between them? Do they see things the same or differently.
- How will you collect hard copy data on the culture – or supposed culture?
- What consideration for the participants will you put into practice and how, so they are not disturbed by your questioning?
- You might express your data collection in a table – Who – What questions – When and where and how, or maybe as a time line.
- How will you know that your data that is valid and reliable ? How will you be able to check?
- *Make sure you copy your data and keep it in two places – it is irreplaceable*

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- *Keep a record of your trials and tribulations of the data collection so you can then say what you intended and what happened.*
 - *Get in the habit of writing down your questions about your study and then your responses to your own questions – it will be very handy for assignment three.*

Make it an enjoyable challenge – it is your study !

L B-P 2011