

Instructions for the project plan

Overview

Your “project plan” consists of answers to the following questions (no more and no less). This means that your answers to these questions need to provide a comprehensive and accurate overview of what you intend to do and how and why this will help solve the company’s business problem. Be clear in your formulations and, for all your answers, think about why what you state is appropriate.

You first submit a draft plan, and based on the feedback you get you then submit a final plan. Remember, your project plan is a tool for you to conduct successfully the fieldwork project.

Contents and format

Your project plan should provide an answer to the questions below. It should list all the following questions together with your answers.

For the draft plan it is ok to write bullet points or short formulations. But make sure that what you write is understandable and your instructor gets a good overview of what you plan to do and why.

The final plan should be formulated using full sentences. It should be thought through, be internally consistent, provide a comprehensive overview of what you plan to do, and be clear about why you believe this is the best way to set up and execute your study.

Write the name of the company and your group number on the top of the first page. Do not write your names or students’ numbers.

Use Times New Roman 12pt font 1.5 spacing. There is no specific page limit, but ideally your plan strikes a good balance between being brief (focus on what is essential) and being comprehensive (everything that is important needs to be addressed). As a rough orientation, the draft will probably be about 2 pages and the final plan around 5-10 pages.

You will get feedback on your draft plan, which you then need to use to prepare the final plan. Remember that the final project plan will be evaluated (both by your instructor and an opponent group) and that you will get points for it.

Note that the numbering of the questions below corresponds to where they belong in your report. So you can build the report from these answers.

Questions to be addressed

Your plan should address all of the following questions. Please use the content of the second session to think about these questions (see the slides of the second session for details; the topics and the order in the slides is the same as the questions).

1.A: What is the business problem?

Describe the business problem as briefly as possible without leaving out anything that is essential. Here you should also provide a short background of the company and the business or product/service in question (as applicable). Really think about what the business problem is and don't simply accept or repeat what the company is stating! If you are not sure, ask again.

1.B: What is your research question?

The research question should be concrete and clearly relate to the business problem. It should address issues that need to be studied (what the company doesn't know) in order to come up with a solution to the business problem. Briefly address how answering your research question helps solve the business problem.

Your research question can be formulated as one question only, as one question that has 2 or 3 subquestions, or as 2 or 3 separate research questions. If you formulate more than one question or subquestion it must be obvious how the different questions relate to each other. You may want to explain this in the text.

1.C: What is the scope of your study?

Be clear about what is included and what is excluded in the study. The research question gives some indication on the scope, but there are other issues related to the overall design of the study (e.g., one- vs two-stage design) and data collection (e.g., number of countries or products). You can also leave some issues open at this point, if you have a two-stage design where the focus of the second stage is only determined after completing the first stage. In this case you need to be clear about what is left open and what are the criteria for deciding on the scope later (you can state this in more detail below in the section on the overall design).

2.A: What is the overall design of your study?

Here you provide a summary, a brief overview of the whole process of your study. This means a view on the process that includes the steps as well as intended outcomes of each step. Generally, a two-stage design is preferable, where the outcome of one stage informs the second stage (e.g., doing a few interviews or a systematic study of publicly available data as a first stage, which you then use as a basis for a survey or more detailed interviews in a second stage), or a second stage follows up on and provides more detail based on the insights from the first stage (e.g., after having done a survey with a large number of respondents you follow up with interviews to verify your conclusions and get more detailed insights).

If you have a two-stage design where the focus of the second stage is only determined after completing the first stage, then here you should clearly formulate the criteria for how to proceed in the second phase.

Open up the whole process and include a timeline, including stages and milestones. Often a picture or graph that shows your research process is helpful. Here you can also include a brief overview of the sources of information (including sampling of informants) and the type of data collection (e.g., interviews, surveys). This is a summary here, the next questions will open these up in a bit more detail.

2.B: What information sources do you plan to use, how do you collect data and how do you avoid biases and overcome limitations?

Provide a brief but exhaustive overview of the types of information and data you plan to utilize. This involves both primary data (which you collect) and secondary data (which already exist), both from the company and external informants. Open up which external informants you use and why they are likely to provide useful information. Consider what potential biases from the information sources (e.g., based on how you select them and/or the way you collect data) and limitations (e.g., some informants might be difficult to reach, or there is only a small number of potential informants) there are and address how you plan to account for and minimize the impact of these biases and limitations.

2.C: How do you analyze the data and draw conclusions?

Briefly describe your plan for analyzing the data and drawing conclusions. The analysis methods have to be suitable for the type of data.

2.D: Which frameworks and theories (literature) are applicable and do you plan to use?

Think about and briefly summarize what frameworks or theories you consider to be applicable and useful for your study. In some cases, even a brief review of the academic literature on a topic could be useful. There is no need to use frameworks or theories if you think that they are not useful.

If you intend to use frameworks or theories please be clear on why you consider them useful for your study and how you intend to use them. There are several ways in which frameworks or theories could be valuable. They could help you get a better grasp on the topic, by identifying what is already known in general. They could help you in the overall design of your study – such as the content of your data collection (e.g., pointing you to aspects you want to include in survey or ask in an interview) – or they could help in analysis and drawing conclusions – such as how you structure the information you gathered (e.g., by providing you with categories or concepts) or in building an argument that links the results of your analysis to your conclusions (e.g., using a theory to provide a rationale why your recommendation is likely helpful).

3: What are the expected results?

Briefly write about what you expect as an outcome of your study. Here you can link back to the business problem, so the question is how the insight you generate through collecting and analyzing information will really help to solve the business problem.

X: What are potential risks and how do you address them?

List the most important risks and your strategy to deal with them or prevent them in the first place.