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## **Preface**

Knowledgeable people know facts. Successful and prosperous people know people. I can only talk more about “facts” that so often flow from my research findings. Others refer to such wealth of knowledge as the power of networking. After having written so many research articles and accumulated vast experiences in private and public sector organisations, and in my continuous search for knowledge, I decided to share with you, the reader some basic aspects of social research.

The publication serves as a point of departure for those who may one day wish to write research articles and other researched documents or reports. Presented in simple and non-technical language, each chapter can be conveniently read independent of the others, without robbing the publication of its primary aim: to present the reader with a practical handbook to writing academic research papers.

In a way, therefore, the publication offers a step-by-step methodology for writing informatively about the subject the author presents in this publication. To this end, the reader is strongly advised to also consult other sources, particularly when the reader has an appetite for writing and publishing research papers. Good and academic writing only flow from extensive reading and through practising to write and write well. In this regard, the reader is encouraged to also read published articles of social research.

One last warning to the reader: the author has no intention of flying a banner for any particular approach to academic research. At best, it is the author's intention to provide the reader with a mentally stimulating and thought provoking practical handbook on academic research.

## Introduction

In everyday speech "research" is a term loosely used to describe a multitude of activities such as collecting masses of information, delving into esoteric theories and producing wonderful new products (Walliman, 2007). In short, research may also be used to find solutions to complex problems or enable researchers to take informed and rational decisions. In this publication the author distinguishes scientific research from other types of research.

Walliman goes on to describe research as the systematic investigation into the study of materials, sources, etc. in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions; an endeavour to discover new or collate old facts etc. by the scientific study of a subject or by a course of critical investigation. Leedy (1989) defines research as a procedure by which the researcher attempts to find systematically, and with the support of demonstrable fact, the answer to a question or the resolution of a problem. Walliman (2011) states that a more academic interpretation of research is that it involves finding out about things that no one else knew. To this end, research is about advancing the frontiers of knowledge

The chapter on decision-making and problem-solving has been deliberately included to assist student researcher that may find decision-making and problem-solving processes a challenge. The fact of the matter is that researchers quite often have to take decisions as they so frequently have to grapple with complex socio-economic challenges. Other related chapters are those on meetings and procedure at meetings, as well as the chapter on report writing. Social researchers, in the courses of their work, hold meetings with a variety of people. From some of these meetings they may have to prepare, produce and publish reports.

Writing a research paper, it must be emphasised, is not like writing a novel. The researcher cannot just sit down and start writing. He or she needs to first do some thorough planning: decide on the subject of investigation and researchability of the topic; determine the problem to be solved; do some background reading, to get information and explore aspects of the subject; outline the purpose of the study and methods and procedures to be followed in conducting the research. Research methods, in particular, are the techniques the researcher uses to do research. Walliman (2011) states that the following four important questions underpin the framework of any research project:

- ✓ What are you going to do? The subject of your research
- ✓ Why are you going to do it? The reason for this research being necessary or interesting
- ✓ How are you going to do it? The research methods that you will use to carry out the project
- ✓ When are you going to do it? The programme of the work

The chapter on report writing was included to assist research students that might not have had any experience of designing, writing and producing a professional report, be it a general or a research report. The author believes it is better to expose inexperienced (novice) research students to training rather than punish them for doing something wrongly simply because they might not have seen, shown or taught to do it the right way. In this regard, published research articles can go a long way in also assisting needy students.

At the end of the publication, the example of structuring a thesis and/or dissertation document is published. This has been done to assist research students that may not have been familiar with writing a research documents and/or research articles. Furthermore, an example of evaluation criteria sheet is provided to provide research students with some ideas of how their produced research reports will be evaluated. This information is provided to broaden the student's scope of understanding the essence of scientific research.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Conceptual Framework

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Approach your academic research project with confidence
- Appreciate the value of research
- Distinguish between concepts of knowledge, theory and social science
- Formulate a clear problem statement for your research project
- Plan your research project properly

#### 1.1 Introduction

For practical purposes the whole research procedure can be divided into the following steps:

- ✓ Planning of the research project
- ✓ Preparation of a research proposal which has to be submitted for approval
- ✓ Documentation of the research in a research report, article, dissertation or thesis

#### 1.2 Aim

The aim of research is to produce scientifically based knowledge which is critical; methodically obtained; factually and conceptually verifiable. Such scientifically based knowledge can, therefore, be described as the result of a search for new insights and new understanding

#### 1.3 Knowledge

When knowledge is scientifically based, it satisfies the objectives of science which are:

- (A) To describe phenomena accurately and precisely: This implies determining whether or not certain phenomena exist. If they do, what is the degree or intensity of their occurrence? A researcher can, for example, describe the following:
  - The sexual behaviour of young adults
  - The rate of HIV infection
  - The attitude of municipal labourers towards work
  - The environmental condition of a particular suburb.

It is not enough to describe these issues and document them. The researcher should then address the mutual, systematically, co-varying relationship between

those variables. Such argumentation is of greater value than mere description of the variables themselves.

(B) To predict behaviour: If any pair of the phenomena stated above vary in a reliable and systematic manner, it would be possible to make a prediction about the phenomena on the basis of the other. This facilitates the making of predictions and the exercising of choices. If, for example, performance in an aptitude test is directly linked to achieving success in a particular job, prediction can be made as to which candidates/applicants have the potential for success in that particular job.

(C) To determine the reasons for behaviour: Although the occurrence of a certain form of behaviour can probably be correctly predicted, this does not imply that the reason for the behaviour has been correctly identified. In other words, success in a particular job is not necessarily determined by successful performance in an aptitude test. Other factors may be involved, which can be identified by research. For example, it has been empirically established that the manifestation of aggressive behaviour in a child is associated with violence depicted in television programmes. Since we do not know whether merely watching television programmes is the cause of certain forms of behaviour, it cannot be argued that less violence in television programmes would lead to a decrease in aggressive behaviour. Therefore, to be able to change a form of behaviour, its cause has not been established.

(D) To explain behaviour: The ultimate objective of science is to explain the behaviour that has been described. Science, therefore, tries to determine the relationship between co-varying phenomena. Description, prediction, determination of causality and explanation are closely connected. The identification of the causes of a certain behavioural phenomenon and its explanation are closely linked. Identifying the cause or causes of certain behavioural phenomenon is a prerequisite for being able to explain the phenomenon. A phenomenon can obviously not be explained if its cause is not known.

## **1.4 Theory**

This word is roughly synonymous with idea or opinion. A theory can be defined as a set of principles that are used for explaining a certain phenomenon or phenomena. A theory has two important functions in science:

- It gives direction to the research. The assumption is that one of the objectives of science is to explain behavioural phenomena. It is, therefore, justifiable to begin explaining by means of a tentative explanation of the behavioural phenomenon. Explanations are mostly generated by two conflicting theories. The explanations are then tested for reliability. In this manner, unsatisfactory explanations are rejected; the entire behavioural phenomenon is progressively evaluated and a theory is put forward.

- A theory organises facts into a systematic source of knowledge. In this way a theory plays an important role in elucidating (to make clear) knowledge because it provides a systematised and structured base.

## 1.4 Scientific Research

Scientific research can be defined as a critical and purposeful action aimed at collecting data and new facts, and thereby to provide and correct and lasting interpretation of such data and facts. It has the further aim of re-evaluating and re-interpreting existing points of reference or theories in the light of new insights.

Research, therefore, involves a continuous search for new knowledge and new insights by means of scientifically planned and executed endeavours. The two main components of scientific research are **observation** and **argumentation**, which establish the relationship between new and existing knowledge.

Scientific research can be of the following types:

- ❖ **Basic Research** – can be defined as a systematic and creative investigation with the primary aim of enlarging scientific knowledge and technology. It has no predetermined plans for implementing such new knowledge. Basic research, therefore, asks fundamental questions about the complexities of behaviour. It aims at analysing, understanding and explaining the environment on the basis of existing and newly discovered knowledge.

The purpose of basic research is not so much the solution or explanation of a single event, but rather to serve science in general. Research studies are designed to address theoretical problems surrounding phenomena, for example, the relationship between sexual activity and HIV infection.

- ❖ **Applied Research** – is generated by practical considerations. It is systematic research aimed at expanding knowledge with the emphasis on its practical values and/or application. Applied research is aimed at solving problems, and as such, usually has a narrow application. It entails the practical implementation of research findings.

It is important to note that both basic and applied research are essential for the development of a science. While basic research is more exploratory and experimental, applied research aims at developing and exploiting existing knowledge in order to gain new knowledge.

It is also important to note that research which has an immediate, practical application value is important and motivating. It must be borne in mind however, that basic theory-oriented research is a prerequisite for applied research.

- ❖ ***Programme-Evaluation Research:*** This type of research is also known as development research (HSRC) by the Human Sciences Research Council. This type of research is aimed at evaluating programmes, for example, social reforms in poor or disadvantaged communities; innovations, that is introducing something that is new; new methods of doing things as different from old methods; new practices that have not been tried previously. This type of research is based on the basis of acquired knowledge, that is, from basic and applied research.

According to the HSRC, programme evaluation research entails “the systematic activities that are involved whenever existing knowledge, which has been gained through research or practical experience, is used to design or significantly improve services, systems, methods, materials, products or appliances, with a view to implementing or manufacturing them, (the TV advertisement of using an unserviceable truck for obtaining a supply of water).impact

Programme evaluation research is therefore aimed at the new application of recently acquired knowledge. Four stages involved in programme evaluation research are:

- ✚ Planning the programme: At this stage the researcher identifies the features of the phenomenon in question and design a suitable programme.
- ✚ Monitoring the programme: At this stage the researcher evaluates the implementation of the programme, that is, the implementation should be perfectly executed.
- ✚ Evaluating the impact of the programme: At this stage the researcher evaluates the results of implementing the programme



- ✚ Determining the economy and effectiveness of the programme:  
At this stage, the researcher evaluates the costs and benefits of the programme.

**“One of the most important things an organisation can do is to determine what business it is in”**

## CHAPTER TWO

### **The Nature of Research Planning**

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Define research planning
- Follow logical steps in a research process
- Identify a problem in your research project

#### **2.1 Research Planning**

Research planning determines the planning structure and strategy of the investigation and techniques to be used to limit variance. Planning creates a general plan for the research. It encompasses a description of everything to be done during the research, from the postulation of the hypothesis and its implications, to the final analysis of the data. The structure of the research involves the description, scheme and paradigm of the variables, while strategy relates to the method used for obtaining and analysing the data.

In the planning of a research project, an attempt is made to create a practical operational framework which exactly sets out every step of the research process. Research planning aims at the implementation of measures for guaranteeing meaningful research results. Planning implies the naming, description and argumentation of every step in the research process. It therefore provides a guide according to which the research activities are performed. Planning is therefore the first, but undoubtedly the most important step after identifying the theme of the research.

In the planning of any research project, it is possible to distinguish steps which logically follow one another. However, it should always be borne in mind that, although a distinction can be made between the steps, they are so interdependent that they cannot be separated. The specific succession of steps, as well as sequence, will be determined by the objective of the research, the field of research and the strategy that is implemented.

#### **2.2 Steps in the Planning of a Research Project**

There are generally identifiable steps or stages which can be discerned in the planning phase of most research projects:

- a. Identification of the research problem or theme

- b. Study of the literature
- c. Problem formulation and demarcation
- d. Research method: that is:
  - Research strategy
  - Target population and sample
  - Method(s) of data collection
  - Method(s) of data systematisation and analysis
  - Planning of deadlines
  - Estimation costs.

It should be noted that the same sequence of stages, and even the presence of all the stages by no means occur in all research projects. These are merely guidelines for empirically oriented research.

### **2.3 Identification of the research problem/theme**

This is the starting point. The theme is the basis and guideline of the research process. It is therefore essential to gain proper insight into the nature, extent and intensity of the research problem/theme.

The selection of a suitable research theme is usually a very difficult and sometimes painful process. Once a researcher knows what he/she is going to do, it is usually easy to plan how to do the research.

The selection of a broad, general field of interest for research remains relatively easier than its specific demarcation; it is easier to choose whether or not to study further at a University, compared to choosing which specific field of study to follow. The task of demarcating and narrowing down a general field of interest for the selection of a stimulating research theme is therefore not a simple matter.

The crux of the matter is that the person must generate ideas within this field of interests that are meaningful and can be researched in practice. In this regard, there are five (5) potential sources of ideas for research theme, namely,

- Common sense: this refers to concepts that are taken to be true, but have never been empirically proven. The validation of such common sense ideas can sometimes be extremely valuable because these ideas are then proven to be empirically sound.
- Theory: a great deal of research, that is, in the behavioural sciences, has been and is being generated by theories (functions of theories). (a) A theory organises and explains facts. The facts about a certain phenomenon are not always particularly meaningful, but within the framework of a theory, they make more sense. This framework/system of reference then makes the perceptible elements of the phenomenon more comprehensible. A number of

abstract concepts and constructs are provided by a theory and can be used to explain a certain phenomenon.

- (b) A theory generates new knowledge by focusing thinking on new aspects of behaviour or phenomenon. New knowledge is often brought to light through research aimed at testing theories. A theory can elicit certain hypotheses from a researcher, which the researcher can then validate empirically. Should the researcher confirm the hypotheses, it will support and strengthen the theory. According to Cosby (1985:19), "A theory is never proven though: research can provide support for the correctness of the theory, but research also reveals weaknesses in a theory and forces researchers to modify the theory and develop a better one.
- Previous research: previously published research often stimulates further research, which may result from criticism of the methodology, or further possible implications of its influence, or an attempt to generalise the results.
- Research as a result of practical problems: research is also generated by practical problems that demand immediate solution.

**"The only real measure of business success is a satisfied customer, all else is a distraction"**

## CHAPTER THREE

### **Study of the literature**

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Manage literature review
- Relate literature to your study theme
- Avoid handling your research project like a furniture shop catalogue where you put any available item on sale
- Appreciate previous research around your topic and, where required, make some correlation

#### **3.1 Point of departure**

Before any research project is conducted, the researcher (investigator) must have a thorough knowledge of earlier research findings. Even if the basic idea has been formulated, a review of past study will aid the researcher to clarify his/her idea and to design the study.

Study of the literature forms a fundamental and integral part of the planning and undertaking of a research project. A meticulous identification and an incisive scientific study and interpretation of the relevant sources of information are essential for scientifically valid research.

#### **3.2 Interpretation of the literature**

The role of the literature and function of a comprehensive and in-depth interpretation of the literature in the planning and undertaking of a research project can be summed up in the following points:

- ✓ It is essential for the identification of a research theme
- ✓ It identifies previous research that has contributed to increased knowledge of the research theme
- ✓ It is indispensable for meaningful and scientifically based problem formulation and demarcation
- ✓ It provides an introduction to empirical situations in which the research theme manifests itself
- ✓ It also serves as an introduction to purposeful and effective research methods and procedures and a scientific orientation in respect of the research theme

- ✓ It gives an indication of the method suitable for data collection and analysis
- ✓ It familiarises the researcher with, definitions and theoretical argumentation concerning the problem theme
- ✓ It provides a scientific basis for planning the research
- ✓ It helps the researcher to postulate the hypotheses of his/her research theme more precisely
- ✓ It enables the researcher to adapt to his/her findings to the overall framework of existing knowledge about the problem area.

### **3.3 Practical suggestions for a study of literature**

The following are practical suggestions for a study of the literature:

- Start by reading a few general works on the research theme
- Next, read more specifically about the subject, especially research articles in scientific journals. Consult publications, as far as possible, in their original language
- Read selectively
- Use only the latest editions of publications, since they contain the most up-to-date research data
- Use the bibliographies of the work consulted as sources for further reference
- All the articles that have been read should be critically evaluated
- The material that has been studied is useful in writing a research report only if it has been gathered and compiled into a complete and meaningful whole
- A complete and usable record of the sources of all relevant information must therefore be kept
- Make a summary (on cards) of all the basic information relevant to the research them Ensure, however, that these summaries contain the following information:
  - ✚ The author's surname and initials
  - ✚ The title of the publication
  - ✚ The place of publication; year; volume and number of the edition
  - ✚ Page numbers

**“The best vision is within sight but just out of reach”**

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **Problem Formulation and Demarcation**

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Formulate your research problem
- Investigate your research problem
- Demarcate your research problem
- Delimit your research problem
- Document and analyse postulated hypotheses

#### **4.1 Problem formulation and documentation**

Problem formulation in a research project involves far more than the mere specification of the problem area to be investigated or researched. The following important steps can be distinguished in this regard:

- Explaining the background to the research project
- Formulating and demarcating the problem/theme to be researched
- Postulating a possible hypothesis

#### **4.2 Background to the research project**

Information about the background to the research project is very important because it indicates the significance of meaning of the problem being researched. The viability of a research project, and therefore its justification, is largely determined by the contribution it will make towards increased knowledge of the theme and the practical application of such knowledge.

#### **4.3 Demarcation and formulation of the research problem**

From knowledge gained in a scientifically based study of the future, the researcher can formulate and demarcate the research problem in a scientifically valid way. Problem formulation and demarcation is the most critical step in the whole research process because it determines the planning of subsequent research steps.

The delimitation and/or demarcation of the problem being researched refer to various aspects of research:

- ✚ Geographical delimitation
- ✚ Social and cultural delimitation

- ✚ Time delimitation
- ✚ Population delimitation

By clearly demarcating the research theme, it is possible to determine:

- Which further literature should be consulted
- The size of the representative sample to be used in the research
- The nature and extent of the research methods and procedures to be implemented

Once the research project has been identified and demarcated as a research theme, it is essential for the problem to be formulated in terms that can be clearly understood. This precise and unambiguous formulation has implications for the strategy, method and direction of the specific research project. In other words, "a problem well put is a problem half solved" (Ackoff, 1954:14).

The formulation of the problem takes place against the background of the researcher's theoretical knowledge of the research theme and his/her own theoretical view of it. Precise and meticulous problem formulation makes the research theme more specific, which in turn facilitates the postulation of hypotheses and associated aspects. Problem formulation, therefore, clearly outlines the objective of the research project and directs the course of the intended research.

Kerlinger (1970) sets the following three criteria as guidelines for sound problem formulation:

- The problem must involve the relationship between two or more variables
- The problem must be formulated clearly and unambiguously in the form of a question, for example, "What is the effect of.....? It is sometimes advisable for the research problem to be reduced to a number of specific or concrete questions, so that the main problem can be divided into a number of sub=problems. This serves to avoid generality and to concretise the research problem to a large extent.
- Empirical testing of the problem that has been formulated must be possible. A problem can only qualify as a subject for scientifically based research if it offers a solution. The more precise and accurate the formulation of the problem, the easier it is for the researcher to postulate clearly and accurately worded hypotheses.

#### **4.4 The postulation of hypotheses**



The objective of many research projects is to test hypotheses that have already been postulated. It should be emphasised that it is not always necessary to postulate a hypothesis. A hypothesis in a research project need only be postulated when it is relevant and necessary. The postulation of a hypothesis is only necessary in experimental research. In other research strategies, the preference and skill of the researcher, as well as the data, determine whether a hypothesis will be postulated.

Tentative answers to questions arising from the research problem are implicit in the formulation of the problem. Hypotheses can therefore be postulated as possible answers to the problem formulation. Any hypothesis can therefore be defined as a tentative answer to the problem as formulated. Cohen and Nagel (1934) point out the following implications of hypotheses with regard to problem formulation:

- ✚ Hypotheses emanate from a thorough knowledge of the future, intensity and extent of the problem
- ✚ Hypotheses are essential throughout the duration of the research process for structuring purposes
- ✚ Hypotheses must be regarded as tentative solutions/explanations of the problem as formulated
- ✚ Hypotheses must be precisely worded. If they are general and vague, they are of little value
- ✚ The number of hypotheses that can be postulated in a certain problem area is almost infinite.

Hypotheses have not only an exploratory function, but also an organising function, in that they guide and structure the research. A hypothesis can be regarded as the link between the theory and the research which leads to the expansion of knowledge. When a hypothesis is confirmed by scientific testing, it acquires the status of a law of nature.

Smit (1983) points out a common error made in research, namely, that hypotheses are confused with facts. The result is that one hypothesis serves as the point of departure for another hypothesis. According to Smit one could put it like this: the less factual value the researcher attaches to the hypothesis, the more scientific is his/her approach. Remember, no matter how many empirical observations there are to substantiate the hypothesis, the hypothesis remains an hypothesis which has to be proven before one can rely on the facts the hypothesis purports to formulate. Hypotheses: a distinction can be drawn between a research hypothesis and a statistical hypothesis.

A research hypothesis, also known as a working or operational hypothesis is usually derived from a theory and sets out the presumed relationship between two variables. This relationship is given in the form of an explanation, and is the

premise that demarcates the field of research and indicates the direction of the research. The research hypothesis is directional if it points to the expected findings, for example, "Men react quicker to visual stimuli than women"," or "Mjondolo environments produce more delinquents than suburbs". If the hypothesis only refers to the similarity/connection or difference, it is non-directional. However, before a research hypothesis can be empirically tested, by means of statistical methods, it must first be converted into a statistical hypothesis.

A statistical hypothesis, also called the null hypothesis (H)) postulates an insignificant difference or a similarity between two variables. The perceived difference is therefore not a real one, but can be ascribed to incidental factors. The postulation of a null hypothesis makes it possible to implement statistical techniques.

The null hypothesis usually postulates the exact opposite of what the researcher expects. It is therefore always advisable to postulate both hypotheses, namely:

- The research hypothesis which reflects what the researcher expects to find
- The null hypothesis which makes statistical verification possible.

**“Good service is giving people a little more than they expect. Excellent service is enjoying giving people a little more than they expect”**

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Variables

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Define and understand the concept of variables in your research project
- Distinguish among types of variables
- Identify variables in your research project

#### **5.1 Identification of variables**

Once the problem has been demarcated and formulated, and appropriate research hypotheses have been postulated, the variables in the research must be identified. The following variables can be distinguished in a research project:

- ✓ The independent variable: This is the variable that forms the subject of the research scheme. Gous et al (1979) define the dependent variable as follows: "The hypothesis (es) being tested correlates the values of the dependent variable (s) with the independent variables which are manipulated during the research.
- ✓ The independent variable: The independent variable is the variable that is systematically varied or manipulated by the researcher (Smit, 1983). Control in research implies that all factors (independent variables) which may have a differential effect on the results must be kept constant, except for one which is deliberately varied or manipulated by the researcher. Among independent variables, a distinction can be drawn between manipulation variables and classification variables: (i) a manipulation variable is any variable that is the direct cause of a change in behaviour and that the researcher is able to control. (ii) a classification variable divides experimental subjects into groups or categories, based on sex, age, language, ethnicity, etc. The influence of this variable can be directly controlled by the design of the experiment or by the selection of the sample for testing.
- ✓ Interference variables: An interference variable is any variable that has an influence on the dependent variable during the research process, but is not mentioned in the hypotheses being tested by the research. In other words, it is a variable that may have a differential effect on the results, but that cannot be controlled by the researcher. The researcher, therefore, has to try to identify such interference variables as far as he/she is able to do so, and to make provision for their possible control.

## **5.2 Definition of concepts and variables**

Once the research theme has been demarcated and formulated, and the hypotheses postulated, the concepts contained in the demarcation, formulation and postulation have to be clearly defined.

**“If you are not serving a customer, you will be serving somebody who is”**

## CHAPTER SIX

### **The Research Method**

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Design plan, and structure a research project
- Understand different types of research designs and techniques
- Understand the concepts sample and sampling
- Follow scientific methods of collecting data
- Understand planning methods of data analysis
- Document your research project

#### **6.1 The Research Method**

Research design or strategy: According to Kerlinger (1970), the concept "research design" includes the plan, structure and strategy of the research. The following objectives of a research design can be distinguished: (i) to control the answers to the research questions/variance. (ii) to eliminate or balance out variance that may have a differential effect on the research results.

The research design as such does not, however, provide answers to the research question, but it does enable the researcher to obtain scientifically valid answers which have not been affected by interference variables. The design, therefore, ensures an unambiguous interpretation of the results.

Research methods can be divided into two broad types, that is, experimental designs, where the researcher manipulates the situation, and correlation designs in which the researcher collects naturally occurring data.

#### **6.2 Experimental Designs**

- a. **Laboratory Experiments:** Such designs allow the experimenter to draw more specific and precise conclusions. These designs are generally used when a researcher wants to investigate whether or not one event or component influences another, that is, variables. The researcher systematically varies one of the variables, the independent variable and observes whether this variation has any effect on the other variable, the dependent variable. While doing this, the researcher tries to hold constant all other confounding variables, that is, variables which might systematically influence the dependent variable. By exercising this control, the researcher is able to say that if the dependent variable changed when the independent variable was

varied, then the independent variable must have caused the change in the dependent variable. In order to control confounding variables, various ways can be used, namely, (i) use of standardised setting; the experimenter ensures the general situation is the same for all subjects. This means that:

- All subjects would receive exactly the same instructions and would be tested at the same time of day
- The laboratory would be set up in exactly the same way for all the subjects
- If a confederate is used, that confederate would be used for all subjects.

(ii) Randomisation: basically, this means that each person has an equal chance of being assigned to any group. By doing this, the researcher hopes that any individual differences will be balanced out and if the groups of subjects are reasonably large, this is usually the case.

(iii) Deception: in addition to controlling the situational factors and individual differences, the experimenter may also try to control the knowledge subjects might have about the aims of the experiment. This is because knowing what the experiment is about, may actually affect the subject's behaviour. Most subjects might try to present themselves in a favourable light. This is the reason for using deception.

(iv) Post-experimental Interview: this includes debriefing. The experimenter must talk to the subjects to see how the subject perceived the experimental manipulation, and hence whether the manipulation was successful, for example, it has been found that if the experimental hypothesis is obvious, many subjects will try to be helpful give responses which they think are wanted rather than their true responses.

Subjects who correctly guessed the hypothesis can then either be excluded from the analysis or "knowledge of the hypothesis" can be treated as another independent variable and an appropriate statistical analysis performed.

Debriefing is concerned with telling subjects what the experiment was actually about, and assessing whether they have suffered any negative consequences as a result of participation. True experiments, therefore, have three main features:

- Experimenter manipulates one or more independent variable
- The experimenter randomly assigns subjects to the various groups or experimental conditions
- The experimenter uses control groups and other methods in order to eliminate possible effects of confounding variable. These three criteria can be adequately met in a laboratory.

b. Field Experiments: the main distinction between field experiments and laboratory experiments is that the former are carried out in natural settings. In a field experiment, the experimenter also manipulates the independent variable; tries to control as many of the confounding variables as is possible, and attempts to assign subjects in a random fashion. However, because of the naturalness of the situation, there is obviously less control, and it is not possible to achieve complete randomisation.

### **6.3 Quasi-Experimental Designs**

It often happens that a researcher wants to investigate a causal relationship, but is unable to assign subjects randomly, and has to work with existing groups. In such cases the researcher can use a quasi-experimental design. Such designs also allow the experimenter to use naturally occurring variations as independent variables in situations where independent variables cannot be manipulated, for example, a big manufacturing company has numerous factories with a large multi-racial force. Because of many incidents of inter-group conflicts, the management wants to find ways of reducing conflict and thinks that heat (temperature) in the factories is a factor contributing to incidents of intergroup conflicts.

To address this problem, one would choose a factory which appears to be typical and install air-conditioning. Then, using company records, one would compare the number of incidents of intergroup conflict for three summer months prior to installation, with the number of incidents during the same months after installation. We would also need to check for any changes in intragroup conflict/aggression.

Assuming that there were no changes in intragroup aggression, but there was a decrease in the number of intergroup incidents after the installation of air-conditioning, would that lead to accepting the hypothesis that "increased ambient temperature leads to increased intergroup aggression"? No! It would not, as there are other possible explanations for this result.

The difference may reflect the effect of time, that is, during the period of the study. Other factors which could influence intergroup conflict could have changed, for example, the political climate in the country had improved over that time and this led to an improvement in race relations or the racial factor had been eliminated in the payment of wages by the company.

Given the way the study was carried out, there is no way in which we could eliminate alternative explanations. In order to control for the effect of time, we need to have a control group, that is, select another factory we would also compare the number of intergroup incidents for the two periods. If we found that there was a decrease in intergroup incidents in the factory in which air-conditioning had been installed, but not in the control factory, then we could reasonably conclude that

increased ambient temperature did cause intergroup conflicts/aggression. If there was a decrease in intergroup incidents at both factories, we would have to reject the hypothesis that "increased ambient temperature leads to increased intergroup conflict".

#### **6.4 Correlational Research**

This is research where the researcher does not become actively involved in manipulating the situation. Instead, the researcher simply observes how two or more variables co-vary. This is often so because the researcher is unable to manipulate variables. Hence, whenever classificatory variables such as age, sex, ethnic group, religious affiliation are studied, correlational designs are used. Generally, these designs should only be used to establish the degree of relationship between variables, and not to examine causal relationships, that is collect data for two or more variables and then compare how these variables co-vary, for example, a study of "attitudes towards affirmative action in filling vacant posts" would entail using a large sample of subjects comprising different age groups, sexes, ethnic groups, education levels, and rural and urban dwellers, etc. The problem is that in correlational studies, the cause-effect relationship is indefinite, vague, unclear and ambiguous in two ways, namely:

- a. The direction of causation: We cannot be absolutely certain that variable caused variable XY, for example, the relationship between watching violent television programmes and aggressive behaviour in young children has been empirically found (Huesman, 1982). The question is: Does watching violent programmes cause children to behave violently? Or do violent children enjoy watching violent programmes?
- (b) the problem of third variables: It is quite possible that neither of the two variables directly influences the other, but that both variables are related to a third variable, for example, violent parents which has not been included in the hypothesis being tested (confounding or nuisance variable).

In the field experiment of ambient temperature and aggression for instance an obvious third variable is the overall level of aggression and this in turn would be related to intergroup conflict/aggression. To control for this factor, we could calculate the correlation between temperature and all incidents of conflict, but this would still not permit us to draw a causal conclusion. The "third variable" problem is often very subtle and difficult to detect. This is because plausible explanations that is, those which are seemingly true acceptable and trustworthy, are easy to accept if they fit our pre-conceptions.

For this reason, one has to avoid the temptation of drawing causal conclusions even when the results seem very clear cut, for example, let us assume that we did find a significant relationship between temperature and aggression only in intergroup data.



One possible explanation for that result may be that when the weather is cooler, people of different race groups tend to stay at home whereas when it is warmer they go out to beaches. When they are at home, the opportunity for intergroup conflict/aggression is considerably reduced, compared with when they are in public places. Consequently, it is possible that the significant relationship simply reflects opportunity for intergroup conflict/aggression rather than a causal relationship between temperature and intergroup conflict/aggression.

Despite the difficulty of drawing causal conclusions from correlation data, correlation designs are still very important. Kerlinger (1986) argues that correlation research, including quasi-experimental designs, is more important than pure experimental research in that many of the problems which we research do not lend themselves to experimentation, for instance:

- There is no way in which the influence of child-rearing practices or racial prejudice could be studied in a laboratory. Only through the use of well-designed correlational studies can we attempt to answer such questions.
- Likewise, for ethical reasons, there is no way in which the link between smoking and lung cancer could ever have been studied through experimentation on human beings. It is only through correlational types of research that this link has been established, for example, broken homes and anti-social behaviour; malnutrition and mental retardation; stimulating environment and high levels of scholastic performance.

## **6.5 Sampling**

Research can be regarded as a method of:

- ✓ Obtaining insight and knowledge
- ✓ Describing, classifying and understanding observed phenomena
- ✓ Trying to explain phenomena.

From a thorough review of literature on the theme, the researcher postulates certain hypotheses which provide tentative answers to the research question. To test the validity of the postulated hypotheses, a representative sample of the population is subjected to the research. If the operational hypothesis is phrased as: "men are significantly more conservative than women", then conservatism (dependent variable) will be investigated according to a certain theoretical demarcation in a representative sample of men and representative sample of women. When selecting test subjects (sampling) it is important to consider the following:

- ❖ The population: this must be precisely defined and demarcated so that it can be clearly identified. The population is defined in terms of content, for example, first year university students; extent, for

example, all the universities in the RSA, and time, for example, during the period January 1996 to December 1996.

- ❖ The goal is to obtain valid answers to the research problem in the form of knowledge and insight. It is therefore essential that the sample be fully representative of the population. According to Smit (1983), if the sample is chosen in a thoroughly scientific manner, it will portray an accurate and representative mirror image of the population. Every element member or unit of the population must, according to the theory of randomness, have an equal chance of being selected in random sampling.
- ❖ The objectives of sampling are :
  - . To make certain deductions and generalisations about the population
  - . To accept or reject statistical hypotheses about the population.

In order to attain these objectives, the researcher should ensure that he/she has an unambiguous definition of the population in terms of content, extent and time; an adequate sample; a truly representative sample and an adequate method of sampling.

## **6.6 Method of Data Collection**

The process of data collection is preceded by:

- Arranging venues where the data will be collected
- Choosing auxiliary staff
- Deciding on the way in which test subjects will be approached and involved
- Choosing the appropriate apparatus or aids necessary for data collection
- Cost accounting with regard to time and financial aspects.

Data collection should be done with great circumspection, that is, carefully considering all related circumstances before acting or deciding. Basically, data collection, which may mean measurement, is the assigning of numerals to objects or events according to specified rules (Kerlinger, 1986). In this way, a measurement scale is created, the scores of which represent differing degrees of the dependent variable (construct). A good measure must thus be reliable (consistent), that is, it should give the same result when it measures some characteristic or events on two occasions. In addition, it must be valid, that is, it must actually measure what it is supposed to measure and not something else. There are generally the following types of methods:

- **Observational Measures:** There are a number of observational methods and they vary according to how formalised the procedures are:
  - A. **Experimental Observation:** This observation can be very precise with the assistance of equipment. The use of electronic media for recording data

directly has the advantage of increasing the reliability of the measure and reducing errors which can occur when humans are responsible for the recording. Not all observations in experiments can be precise enough to permit the data to be collected via electronic media.

Quite frequently, the observers are required to make judgements about the experiment in which observers had to make decisions about the aggressiveness of the response, and then assign a number to represent that degree of aggressiveness.

- B. Naturalistic Observation: This means the observation of behaviour in a natural situation where no manipulation has occurred. While trying to avoid interfering with those being observed, the observer measures behaviour or other observable phenomenon, using rating scales or check lists, for example, develop a scale, for measuring aggressiveness; train observers to use it and have them observe groups of children at play for 30 minutes on three days when temperature is low, and three days when it is high. The use of a one-way mirror may be appropriate.
- C. Participant Observation: Means that the observer joins the group to be observed and acts as a bona fide member. While participating as a member, in the group's activities, the observer will simultaneously gather data about the people in the group. Such procedures are widely used by the Police, for example, Craig Williams as Vice President of an S R C (Students Representative Council).

Evaluation of Observation Procedures: Since observers "judge" the subject's behaviour, the scope for error increases, that is, reliability and validity of the method, for example, an aggressive and unaggressive observer could judge acts of shaking a fist towards another person differently. This introduces personality differences among observers.

Another problem is that when people become aware that they are being observed, their behaviour tends to change (Hawthorne effect). They are then less likely to act as they normally do.

Observation has one big advantage: It permits one to measure behaviour in a natural situation without influencing the situation. Furthermore, if subjects are engrossed in a task, they may well forget that they are being observed. On the other hand, filling in a questionnaire or undergoing an interview, as is the case in self-report measures, subjects are likely to be very self-conscious of the impression they are making to the investigator.

## **6.7 Self-Report Measures**

Research may involve the investigation of phenomena which cannot be directly observed. Consequently, it becomes necessary to question the people themselves concerning such phenomena. When data are obtained this way, the researcher is using self-report measures. These are of two types:

- A. Questionnaires: these are most widely used measures when a number of questions relating to a single issue are included in a questionnaire. This is regarded as a scale. The answers to each of these questions are assigned numerical values. These scores are then combined to give a total score. In this way, the researcher can obtain a measure which indicates whether a person is, for example, racially prejudiced or has a poor self-image or is against affirmative action.

The advantages of questionnaires are:

- They are cheap to use
- They are easy to distribute, for example, in a hall or by post
- They enable the researcher to use large samples cheaply
- Since individuals fill them themselves, they are not influenced by the researcher
- Anonymity encourages subjects to answer truthfully.

The disadvantages are:

- If posted, only a small proportion is returned
- Of those returned, the researcher has no information about the respondent's motivation or circumstances under which the information was provided
- Only relatively superficial information can be obtained
- They are frequently used when other methods may be more appropriate. They are thus abused because many people think that designing a questionnaire is a simple matter.

## **6.8 Interviews**

The difference between a questionnaire and an interview is that in an interview the researcher asks the questions and records the answers. Interviews may be of the following types:

- Unstructured Interview: In this type, very few questions are asked. Instead, the researcher simply encourages the interviewee to talk about a particular phenomenon and records the conversation.
- Structured Interview: In this type, a questionnaire is used. The researcher reads out the question and records the answer.

The advantages of interviews over questionnaires are that:

- ✓ The quality of data obtained carries greater validity because the researcher clarifies the questions which confuse the subject. He or She can also ask the subject to elaborate on answers that are not clear.
- ✓ Because rapport (relationship/harmony) can be established, it is more likely that information relating to sensitive issues can be obtained by means of an interview than through a questionnaire
- ✓ Responses can also be obtained from people who would not be able to respond to a questionnaire, for example, young children, illiterates, disabled, etc.

The Disadvantages of Interviews are:

- Interviews can influence the responses of subjects, for example, an interviewer's personal characteristics, such as sex, age, race, etc. or the interviewer's expectations transmitted through non-verbal cues, such as tone of voice, nodding, frowning, etc. Interviewers should thus be trained and matched to the sample
- Interviews are costly through involving training, paying interviewers and travelling costs. Telephone interviews may or may not reduce these costs.

Evaluation: Since subjects are continually aware of what is happening, it is possible that their responses may reflect social desirability, thereby reducing the validity of the study. Subjects may also be aware of their own true feelings and attitudes with regard to very personal issues. Anonymity may help reduce this difficulty.

## **6.9 Archival Research**

In this method, the researcher uses data which has been collected previously for some other reason. The sources of such data are very varies and can range from statistical records, for example, census data to old newspapers and personal diaries, judicial records, weather bureau records, university records, etc. Where empirical records exist, the data is relatively easy to analyse. However, if the archival data is qualitative and not quantitative, as in the case of mass media or personal documents, the researcher may simply do a descriptive analysis or carry out a content analysis. This is a systematic analysis of the content of communications relating to the research problem. Essentially, the procedures used in a content

analysis are very similar to those used in naturalistic observation except that in a content analysis the observer is observing content rather than behaviour. Categories of observations have thus to be determined prior to conducting the study.

Evaluation: The advantages of archival methods are that:

- ❖ They allow the researcher to investigate phenomena which occurred in the past
- ❖ They allow research to be carried out on large populations (and not sample) of people
- ❖ They permit the researcher to investigate events which cannot always be anticipated, for example, riots.

The biggest advantage of archival data is that the researcher had no control over the way in which data was collected. This can influence the reliability and validity of the data. In many cases, there is no way of establishing whether the data was collected haphazardly or whether some sort of systematic bias existed, for example, records representing some issues like rape, child abuse, family abuse, which are frequently not reported.

### **6.10 Selecting a Data Collecting Technique**

It should be emphasised that no one technique is better than any other. All techniques have advantages and disadvantages. Hence it is necessary to evaluate which data collection technique is best suited to the question being investigated. The use of more than one technique is highly desirable as this tends to increase validity of the construct (dependent variable) of any study (Foster and Low – Potgieter, 1992).

**“The quality of service that reaches the customer begins with the quality of service that staff give each other”**

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Decide on an appropriate method of data collection
- Document and justify your data collection method

### **Planning Methods of Data Analysis**

Smit (1983) defines statistics as the science of the development and application of the most effective methods of collecting, classifying, analysis and interpreting quantitative data so that the reliability of the findings can be determined by means of inductive reasoning based on mathematical methods of determining probability.

Statistical methods are tools which enable the researcher to interpret research data accurately and reliably, which would otherwise not be possible. Statistical methods sort vast amounts of collected information; enable the drawing of conclusions from it and show relationships between variable in order to make meaningful predictions. Research findings can then be put to practical use. Statistics is an aid to research and not a substitute for sound logical reasoning.

Since statistical procedures play an important part in research, statistics should be considered during the planning stage. The data to be collected should be such that it can be processed by means of available methods. For behavioural sciences, for instance, see SIEGEL, S. Nonparametric Statistics for the behavioural sciences (1995).

Statistical considerations can:

- Bring certain research designs to light, and this facilitates better control over factors that may have differential effects on the results
- Allow various hypotheses to be checked with the same data.

Therefore, statistical considerations should be built into the research process right from the start of the planning stage.

At the planning stage, it should also be decided on: the techniques to be used for analysis and processing; which predictions are imposed by these techniques on the information and which data should be collected to make processing possible.

The researcher should not however be obsessed with statistical techniques. The collected data determine the statistical technique to be used in order to ensure valid and significant results. This is different from implementing a number of processing

procedures that do not facilitate the making of deductions and the revealing of natural laws (Smit, 1995).

**“When you dance with your customer, who takes the lead?”**



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### **Documentation of the Research**

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- ✓ Structure and document your research report
- ✓ Provide a summary of your research report
- ✓ Argue and defend your research report

#### **8.1 Introduction**

Documentation is meant to convey the research findings in a meaningful, intelligible way that will lead to an increase in knowledge. According to Verster and Plug (1987): "Writing a publishable article is a major task requiring many hours of concentrated effort..... there are however, good reasons for publishing your research. Research can be considered completed only when its results have been published..... unpublished research does not contribute to available scientific knowledge".

The broad general criterion for publication is that the research must, in the opinion of a panel of experts, make a significant contribution to knowledge about the phenomenon that was investigated. The criterion is the single and most decisive factor for acceptance or non-acceptance of empirical, theoretical or review articles (Smit, 1995).

Other important criteria for evaluating articles are: the research design; choice of subjects; unsuitable data processing techniques and over interpretation of data. The most general guidelines are summarised by the Human Sciences Research Council in Project Planning and Administration.

#### **8.2 Structure/Format of the Research Report**

- The Title: must be short and easily comprehensible; every word must convey information; introductory phrases like: "A study of..." or "A Psycho/Social investigation into..." Are superfluous, that is, unnecessary. Further, the title must be self-explanatory and capable of arousing the interest of prospective readers.
- The Summary/Precis: is a short and concise summary of the contents of the document without any interpretation. This enables prospective readers to establish quickly and accurately whether the content is relevant to the research they are doing. The summary/precis covers the following:
  - ✓ The goal and nature of the problem being investigated

- ✓ Sufficient information about the method of research
- ✓ Only statistically significant findings must be mentioned
- ✓ These must be integrated into the researcher's own conclusions
- ✓ Relationships between the conclusions and the goal of research must be clearly shown. The summary/precis is therefore descriptive rather than informative.

The summary must therefore be an accurate and precise representation of the goal and content of the research report; be self-explanatory, concise and specific; is not a commentary or evaluation of the report, and is written in a logical and intelligible style.

- The Research Report: It is virtually impossible to lay down a single, specific structure/format according to which a research report must be set out. It must, however, be divided into an introductory argument and a research argument.

A. The Introductory Argument: is made out of:

- Opening remarks aimed at defining the problem area with special emphasis on the identification and formulation of the problem
- Relevant theoretical views and arguments
- The most important relevant and recent research into the problem area
- A detailed discussion and integration of existing knowledge about the subject being researched.

The American Public Administration (APA) Publication Manual (1983), states that before writing the introduction, one must consider:

- ✚ What is the point of the study?
- ✚ How do hypotheses and experimental designs relate to the problem?
- ✚ What are the theoretical implications of the study?

In the discussion of relevant literature, only important findings, conclusions and methodological issues should be examined and unravelled. The Manual further states: "Show the logical continuity between previous and present work. Develop the problem with enough breath and clarity so that it will be generally understood by as wide an audience as possible. Do not let the goal of brevity mislead you into writing a statement intelligible only to a specialist".

A scientifically based study of the literature provides the relationship between various research findings and the problem area, therefore making the relationship immediately obvious.

B. Research Argument: In this section, the research elaborates on methods/strategies that were employed to arrive at answers to the research question. This section must contain sufficient information to enable later researchers to replicate the research, or evaluate the suitability of the techniques that were used. The data from which conclusions were drawn and upon which the arguments rest, must be included. The nature of this data and the research method will then determine the form that the report will take. The research argument thus addresses:

- ✓ (a) The Method of Research: This either validates or invalidates the findings through addressing:
  - The Research Design
  - Description of the test sample
  - Method of data collection, that is, apparatus, instruments, reliability and validity
  - Procedure, that is, step-by-step exposition of the whole process of research: How was the independent variable implemented, that is, what did the researcher do? How was the independent variable recorded? That is, how did the researcher record the actions/reactions of the test subjects?
- ✓ (b) Results: In reporting data, conclusions and arguments, a medium must be used that is clearly descriptive and succinct. Results may be presented in tabular form. The APA Publication Manual (1983) states as follows:

*Figures and tables supplement the text; don't expect them to do the entire communication job. Always refer the reader to figures and tables with sufficient explanation to make figures and tables readily intelligible.*

When reporting statistical findings, assume that the reader has a professional knowledge of statistics. The sequence of presenting results must correspond with that of hypotheses and the language should be plain but accurate, for example, "The experimental group was significantly more aggressive than the control group:  $F(1,18) = 16.21; p < 0.01$  (i.e. less than). The average aggression count for the experimental group was 5.20 and that of the control group 3.10 (Smit, 1995).

### **A Few Tips:**

- ❖ Do not discuss the results or their importance under (b), that is, results above. Save the discussion for the next section of the report.
- ❖ Report only meaningful/significant results. Do not mention group average if these do not differ to a statistically significant degree. A numerical difference between group averages (for example A – 70 and B – 65) cannot be treated as a difference if this difference is not statistically significant.

- ❖ Do not confuse “not significant” with “insignificant”. The phrase “not significant” is a statistical concept while “insignificant” represents a value judgement.
- ✓ (c) Discussion: The objectives of this section are:
  - The statistical breakdown given the results section is discussed, that is, the researcher demonstrates whether or not the results obtained support the postulated hypotheses. These results, on the basis of hypotheses, are not proven correct or incorrect, but, it is proven whether the postulated hypotheses should be accepted or rejected on the basis of the results obtained.
  - Discussing and arguing the implications of findings: The findings are compared with the results of previous research. The results are first argued and discussed in terms of existing findings and theory, in other words, which theoretical point of view is supported by these results or with which theories are they in conflict. Bear in mind that a single conflicting finding does not make or break a theory but it is essential that the researcher’s own theory be placed in the correct theoretical perspective.
  - Recommendations for further research: These must be made on the basis of the present research about possible modifications to the research programme, that is, which aspect should be focused upon? The discussion section, therefore, consists of arguing, interpreting and qualifying the results and then drawing conclusions.

If the findings in a carefully undertaken research are negative (not significant), this does not mean that the results are insignificant or unimportant. Findings that are not significant often provide important information about the problem area. Since they do not support postulated hypotheses, they must be treated or implemented in the same way as positive findings that do support hypotheses. Do not make excuses for significant negative findings, for example, by attributing these discrepancies to the possible invalidity and unreliability of data collection methods.

Further, do not end up discussing findings that were statistically not significant as though they are significant. If the statistical findings are not significant, it must be assumed that any discrepancies in the data can be attributed to incidental factors (Smit, 1995).

The discussion section shows the real value of the research by relating findings to other relevant research. It also attempts to explain similarities

and differences. It achieves this by concentrating on directive questions, namely:

- What contribution does the research make?
- What contribution does the research make to the solution of the problem formulation?
- What conclusions and theoretical deductions can be drawn from the research?

**“Good service is not just smiling at your customer, but getting your customer to smile at you”**

## CHAPTER NINE

### **DECISION-MAKING AND PROBLEM-SOLVING**

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Define decision-making.
- Take informed decisions.
- Solve problems in a fair and rational manner.
- Handle conflict situations.
- Understand some causes of conflict.

Local authorities, like other organisations, have problems. In the course of performing their duties, local government officials take decisions and solve problems. This exercise requires of the officials to be not only knowledgeable about local government affairs, but to also be good at taking decisions and solving problems of local authorities.

This chapter indicates how decision-making and problem-solving processes take place. First, the concepts of decision-making and problem-solving are defined. Second, an indication is given of how the two concepts manifest themselves in organisations. Third, the nature of conflict at South African local government level is exposed.

According to Gillies (1994:418), decision-making is a deliberative, cognitive process consisting of sequential steps that can be analysed and refined. Improvement of decision-making produces greater precision in initiating action and solving problems.

In this regard, a decision is the last step in the process by which an individual chooses one alternative from several, to pursue a desired objective. In selecting a preferred alternative, the decision maker carefully weighs probable consequences of several courses of action.

From the above definition, which is by no means the only definition, it is clear that decision-making involves making a choice from two or more alternatives. Each of the available alternatives is carefully considered before deciding on the most appropriate decision, given a set of circumstances.

In short, the pros and cons of each of the available alternatives have to come into the decision-making process. In this process, the quality of decisions taken is likely to be enhanced.

In some instances, according to Allcock (1994:159), managers find themselves incapable of taking decisions because of one or more of the following:

- ❑ worrying about what others think;
- ❑ letting others decide;
- ❑ fear of failure;
- ❑ thinking there is a perfect solution;
- ❑ trying to please everyone; and
- ❑ not recognising there is a problem.
- ❑ Botes (1994:84) warns managers, when taking decisions, to bear the following in mind:
  1. Emotions should not be allowed to influence decision-making processes;
  2. Decisions made by sectional units may not be in conflict with those of the organisation or higher authorities.
  3. Decisions taken should be guided by how, where and in what way will others be affected.
  4. When there is doubt about the "best" decision, it is advisable to consult others.
  5. Stick to a correct decision, no matter what.

As a process, decision making, according to Fox, Schwella and Wissink (1991:136), involves the following six steps:

***Ascertain the need for a decision:*** This step requires recognition of the need for a decision, and, according to Drucker (1994:347), the process involves defining the problem or determining if there is a problem warranting a decision to be taken. Management may see a clash of personalities; the real problem may well be poor organisation structure.

Management may see an organisation problem; the real problem may well be lack of clear objectives.

Such recognition is brought about by the existence of a problem or, primarily, by an inconsistency between some desired state and the actual condition. According to Starling (1993:245), effective decision makers know that very few problems or events are unique. Most are manifestations of underlying problems.

Providing a solution to a problem, without diagnosing the problem, therefore, is like prescribing medicine for a patient, without knowing the cause of the patient's sickness.

In the process, cost considerations must also be taken into account. Starling (1993:252), also supports this view in his cost-benefit analysis, as part of a decision-making process.

**Identify the decision criteria:** Once the need for a decision has been determined, the criteria that will be important in making the decision have to be identified. Criteria are all factors relevant to a decision, such as annual cost, availability of financial aid, consequences of a wrong decision or no decision at all.

**Allocate weights to the criteria:** The criteria listed in the previous step are not equally important. Therefore, it is necessary to weigh the factors listed in order to place their importance in order of priority, for example, criterion 1, 2, 3 and so on. All the criteria are important, but some are more important than others, to use George Orwell's expression in his famous novel: ANIMAL FARM. "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others".

**Develop alternatives:** The fourth step requires the decision maker to list the viable alternatives that may succeed in solving the problem at hand. The requirement is merely to list the alternatives, and not to assess them.

**Evaluate alternatives:** Once the alternatives have been identified, the decision maker must make a critical evaluation of each of them. The strengths and weaknesses of each alternative will become evident when they are compared against the criteria and weights established in steps followed.

**Select the best alternative:** The final step is the selection of the best alternative from among those selected and evaluated. As "best" is defined in terms of the highest total score, the selection is simple. The decision maker merely chooses the alternative that produced the largest total score in step five (5).

In the context of a local authority, according to Newell (1993:21), the following types of decisions are normally taken:

**Mission decisions:** These decisions involve determining the basic purposes and role of government within a community, and clearly have high stakes, because of their long-term implications. Establishing the mission defines the scope of programmes and services in a local authority, and determines the direction the local authority will take for some time to come. Local authority managers should understand the need for political representatives to resolve such policy issues, and, more often than not, managers are instrumental in framing the issues, through their research and analysis of community conditions.

**Policy decisions:** Policy decisions in the middle range involve deciding how to spend money, design a programme, or develop the details of an action plan. Whereas mission decisions deal with broad and often abstract concepts, policy decisions deal with concrete policy proposals. The range of participants expands as the decisions to be made become more specific. Staff members play a large role in designing programmes and developing the details of service delivery, and how citizen groups may become involved.



**Administrative decisions:** These are decisions usually made by administrative staff, according to criteria appropriate to a specific activity – for example, delivering a service, implementing a policy, or undertaking a project. They have a direct impact on citizens who will receive services or are affected by a policy or project. Under the guidance of the manager, the staff in the department involved in the decision must determine what kind of citizen involvement is needed to ensure its acceptance and effectiveness.

**Management decisions:** These decisions involve the control and co-ordination of the resources of the organisation. They are guided by systems and procedures that regulate personnel practices and purchasing, for example, engineering standards for street construction. Normally, management decisions are made by staff and handled internally.

One definition of a problem, according to Allcock (1994:160), is “the gap between what we have now and what is desirable”. Often one does not want to admit that there is a problem, because of one or more of the following reasons:

- ❑ It may reflect badly on one’s social status or position.
- ❑ It might go away if one ignores it.
- ❑ It is not one’s fault that there is a problem.
- ❑ Someone else should sort it out.
- ❑ One may not know what to do with the problem.

Be that as it may, what is important is to face problems, confront them head-on, and make some attempt to sort them out, regardless of one’s level of operation within one’s organisation. In confronting the problems, the questions that must first come to mind are the following:

- ❑ Is it a crisis or a problem?
- ❑ What is the problem?
- ❑ When does it need to be sorted out?
- ❑ Who is involved?
- ❑ What are the consequences of not dealing with the problem?
- ❑ What are the consequences of dealing with it?
- ❑ Who can help?
- ❑ What is the desired result?
- ❑ What is the cause of the problem?

Answering the above questions helps one to clear one's mind, and think logically about what to do. In grappling with the problem, it is important to deal with issues at stake, and not with personalities. The issues must be separated from personalities. Quite often the logical approach, in this regard, is to define the problem in such a way that numerous solution possibilities become available.

To find solutions that close the gap between current and ideal conditions, an identification of the organisation's highest priority goals must be found. These, quite often restrict time, money and personnel available for some intervention that may be required. The goal during the solution-generating phase is to imagine many possible solutions, to maximise probability that the best possible solution is among those considered.

The following guidelines can also be found useful in a search of solutions to a problem:

- ❑ Do not wait for subordinates to bring problems to your notice. Prevention is better than cure, so goes the saying. Identify a potential problem situation before it may develop into a real problem.
- ❑ Develop the habit of dealing with major or complex problems, and allow subordinates to solve minor problems, and consult you only when they fail to do so.
- ❑ Communicate regularly with subordinates, to understand them and familiarise yourself with their needs.
- ❑ Do regular inspection or supervision of work performed by subordinates. This responsibility may not be neglected, for whatever reason.
- ❑ Investigate work procedures regularly, and change procedures when they may no longer be required.
- ❑ Make sure the people in your section/department or organisation know what is expected of them.
- ❑ Pay special attention to continuous training and development of your human resources.
- ❑ Prevent problems by effective supervision: poor supervision, more often than not, causes problems in an organisation.

The following are sequential steps that may be followed in the process of finding a solution to a problem:

#### Step 1

*Correct identification:* It is important that a problem be identified correctly before a decision is made. As already indicated, decision-making without identifying the

problem is like a doctor who prescribes medicine without diagnosing the nature of the disease.

## Step 2

*Determine the cause of the problem:* A problem situation is usually the symptom of an underlying problem. To solve the problem, the actual cause must be determined. Since each problem can be caused by more than one factor, the possibility of multiple causes must be considered. A lack of clearly defined goals, for instance, may create organisational problems in a section.

## Step 3

*Analyse the problem:* This step involves the collection and analysis of all relevant facts. Why is this step so important? Fact-finding involves the following:

- ❑ To establish exactly what happened.
- ❑ To establish who were involved.
- ❑ Reporting by eye-witnesses and all concerned.

To make fact-finding more complete, a closer look must be taken at those concerned, particularly with regard to the following:

- ❑ Background, experience and personality.
- ❑ Attitude towards the work, supervisor, co-workers, the organisation or section/department.

On the strengths of the findings, resulting from the analysis of facts, the supervisor can now consider possible solutions to the problem.

## Step 4

*Possible solutions:* Generally speaking, most problems have several alternative solutions. What is important is to consider all possible solutions to a problem. A decision can only be effective if those who must carry it out are given the opportunity to air their views, as far as practically possible. During the stage of fact-finding, subordinates may play a limited role, but those who must carry out the decisions must be consulted when alternatives are considered. They might reveal aspects overlooked by the manager, to facilitate the process of decision-making.

## Step 5

*Arrange possible solutions in order of preference:* That is from the most desirable to the least desirable. Arranging possible solutions in order of preference is no mean task.

## Step 6

*Choose the best solution:* It stands to reason that the best solution will be the one that tops the preference list.

#### Step 7

*Inform subordinates about decisions made:* The successful application of the decision depends on the willingness of those concerned to react positively. This is why it is important that those concerned must know exactly how they are affected by the decision, and what they are expected to do.

#### Step 8

*Implement the decision and evaluate:* In the event of the first choice not coming up to expectation, the next best solution must be implemented.

*Negotiation:* According to Anstey (1991:91), negotiation is a form of decision making in which two or more parties talk with one another in an effort to resolve their opposing interests..... a process by which a joint decision is made by two or more parties. This, however, is not the only definition of what negotiation is about.

Other authors on negotiation, for example, Pienaar and Spoelstra (1991:3), define negotiation as a process of interaction between parties, the aim of which is to reach some form of agreement that will hold and that is based upon common interest, with the purpose of resolving conflict, despite widely dividing differences.

This is achieved basically through establishment of common ground and the creation of alternatives. The common ground is not just what people have in common, but what they could become, together.

*Conflict:* Where there is no conflict, negotiation does not take place. Negotiation, therefore, can only take place to resolve a conflict. What is conflict? Gillies (1994:472) defines conflict as a clash between hostile or opposing parties. Extreme forms of conflict include war, violence, murder, damage to property, disruption of social services, disruption of economic activities, and loss of human lives. In a climate characterised by such conditions, all forms of development, and investment aimed at fighting social evils of unemployment, crime and social instability suffer.

Conflict, therefore, by its very nature, serves as a requirement to stimulate a need to negotiate. In this sense, negotiation normally precedes a resolution of a problem.

With reference to South Africa, conflict may assume various forms, such as the following:

- ❑ Conflict between and among various race groups.
- ❑ Conflict between men and women.
- ❑ Conflict between urban and rural communities.
- ❑ Conflict between the uneducated, half-educated and the educated.

- ❑ Cultural conflict.
- ❑ Conflict among and between various ethnic groups.
- ❑ Conflict between husbands and wives.
- ❑ Conflict between boyfriends and girlfriends.
- ❑ Political conflict.
- ❑ Inter-regional and inter-tribal conflict.
- ❑ Conflict between employers and employees.
- ❑ Conflict between supervisors and subordinates.
- ❑ Historical conflict caused by Apartheid policies.
- ❑ Conflict between the haves and the have-nots.
- ❑ Lack of political tolerance, particularly failure to admit and recognise that all political parties have a right to exist, or oppose one's preferred party, if they so wish.
- ❑ Lack of skills to approach decision making and problem solving processes.
- ❑ Absence of a school system to prepare and socialise learners into a culture of negotiation, consultation, compromise or bargaining.
- ❑ Poor management and administrative systems, resulting in poor service delivery that upsets service consumers.
- ❑ Poor communication that leaves some people in doubt as to what is expected of them.
- ❑ Incompetent managers, administrators and/or law enforcement agents.
- ❑ Inflammatory language.
- ❑ Inability to apply merit principles in recruitment and promotion of employees, such as offering jobs to friends, relatives, former school mates or political appointments – the so-called patronage system.
- ❑ Inability to reward good performers, and punish poor performers (i.e. treating good and poor performers as if they were the same).

All over the world, labour and management are coming to appreciate that if they fail to work together, they may not work at all. The ability to co-operate with adversaries is the key to survival, and this view is also supported by Ury (1993:ix). Equally, a family's ability to deal constructively with interpersonal conflicts determines whether it stays together or breaks apart. In a society at large,

individuals and organisations are realising that going to court is always costly, and often futile, and they are turning increasingly to alternative methods of dispute resolution.

On a global scale, co-operation is becoming the key to human survival. Challenges such as safeguarding the environment and building a prosperous economy can be tackled only through co-operation among competitive nations of the world. War is becoming increasingly expensive, and an inconclusive way of handling acute conflicts. The road from confrontation to co-operation is, therefore, negotiation.

*Joint problem solving.* This, according to Ury (1993:5), is a negotiation strategy which is neither exclusively soft nor hard, but a combination of each. Instead of attacking each other, the parties to a dispute jointly attack the problem. Instead of glowering across the negotiation table, the parties **sit next to each other**, facing their common problem. In short, the parties turn face-to-face confrontation into side-by-side problem-solving.

It is a strategy most likely to generate better results for both sides. Above all, it is a strategy that saves time and energy by cutting out the posturing, in order to, according to Thorn (1991:27), ensure that both parties gain some benefit from the process leading to a mutually negotiated and agreed settlement of a common problem. In a sense, therefore, joint-problem-solving is a win-win style of negotiating conflict. Parties to the negotiation process take into account each other's need, and agree to change something or do something differently, in order to arrive at a mutually agreed upon settlement of the dispute.

This is one of the best ways in which parties to a process of negotiation may reach a compromise. Each party gets at least part of what it wants, in some kind of collaborative strategy. Such strategy is considered far better than deciding to withdraw from or turn one's back on a problem when it may be clear that one is not gaining anything from the discussion, or when one sees no chance of getting what one wants.

*Some natural reactions to problems.* According to Ury (1993:32), human beings are reaction machines. In reacting, human beings need to be careful. We may lose our interests or objectives. When we react, often the other side may be trying to make us react, sometimes angrily, just to throw us off balance, and prevent us from thinking straight. They may try to bait us like a fish so that they can control us. When we react, we may be hooked.

Much of our opponents' power derives from the ability to make us react. The action-reaction process requires a carefully thought out style of management. If not properly managed, it may create serious problems for parties to a process of negotiation. At times it may be good strategy to react by not reacting at all. You may be attacked in a public meeting, but may decide not to hit back.

On the other hand, when the other side attacks you, your instinctive reaction is to attack right back, to "fight fire with fire", "fight violent attack with more violence," and "give them a taste of their own medicine". If they take a rigid and extreme

position, you do the same. This, according to Lewicki, Hiam and Olander (1996:57), is an example of a lose-lose management style of negotiating conflict. Such strategy demonstrates to the parties that they all can play the same "game".

When the parties come to realise that they can all play this game, they immediately stop the game, and revert to a process of resolving their different viewpoints through negotiation. However, more often than not, this strategy lends you in a futile and costly confrontation. Such strategy, according to Ury (1993:33), provides an individual with justification for the reactionary behaviour, and this rarely advances the individual's interests.

The opposite of striking back is giving in. What happens is: the other side may succeed in making you feel so uncomfortable with the negotiation process that you give in, just to be done with it. They may exert pressure on you, implying that you are the one who is blocking agreement. "Do you really want to be the one responsible for dragging out the negotiations, disrupting the relationship, missing the opportunity of a lifetime? Wouldn't it just be better to say YES?" Quite often we may enter into agreements, only to wake up the next morning slapping our foreheads and exclaiming, "How could I have been so stupid! What did I agree to?"

Giving in usually results in an unsatisfactory outcome. It rewards the other side for bad behaviour, and gives you a reputation for weakness that they and others may try to exploit in the future. This negotiation strategy, according to Ury (1993:34), is an example of a win-lose management style to deal with different conflicting viewpoints. Thorn (1991:27) considers the giving in strategy competitive, in terms of its design to maximise only one side's advantage, at a specific cost to the other.

This is what normally happens in a court of law. One party to a dispute is declared guilty, whilst the other party is not declared guilty. This negotiation strategy is used when one party wants to win at all costs, and has no concern about the future state of the relationship. This view is also supported by Lewicki, Hiam and Olander (1996:58).

Another common reaction to conflict situations is to break relations with difficult persons or organisations. If it's a marriage, we get a divorce. If it's a job, we resign. If we are involved in a joint venture, we dissolve it. According to Lewicki, Hiam and Olander (1996:57), breaking off, as a negotiation strategy, is about avoiding and, in a sense, is an example of a lose-lose management style of negotiating conflict.

At times, avoidance is a perfectly appropriate strategy. Sometimes it is better to end a personal or business relationship if continuing means taken advantage of or getting into fights again and again. Sometimes, breaking off reminds the other side of their stake in the relationship, and leads them to act more reasonably.

*Use power to educate:* The common mistake most negotiators make, when they get frustrated, is to abandon the problem-solving "game", and return to the "power game" instead. This view is supported by Ury (1993:132). The strategy in negotiating conflict should be to use power to bring the other side to the negotiating

table, or to exercise power as an integral part of the problem-solving negotiation. Instead of seeking victory, the aim should be to find mutual satisfaction. Use power to bring them to their senses, and not to their knees.

In other words, use power to educate the other side that the only way for them to win is for both of you to win together. Do not coerce, threaten or intimidate the other side to buy into your way of thinking. If your negotiating counterpart seems to be missing part of the picture, bring it up in the form of a question: "Have you considered the possibility that a prolonged strike will put this organisation into bankruptcy, and that we will all lose our jobs?" or "Are you aware how serious the consequences will be for both of us if we don't settle this issue?"

If the other side had not focused on this problem previously, or had underestimated the consequences, they may now begin to appreciate just how attractive your "golden bridge" (suggestion) really is.

**"There is no such thing as an insignificant improvement"**



## CHAPTER TEN

### **Report Writing**

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Write and produce professional reports
- Structure, write and produce various types of reports
- Understand important points in writing reports
- Advise other about report writing

Slide 1

## Writing Reports

### INTRODUCTION TO THE WORLD OF WORK



Slide 2

Excuse Me Folks!

What must my Written Report have?



## Easy as ABC!

This is our special baby to get all our ladies oohing and aahing and gentlemen listening... No, it's not an advert for Huggies.....

We will be coming back to the baby's ABC rule a few times this morning. It's a very important rule.

### Slide 3

What is a written report?

- Basically it is a formal written description of something. Something connected with our work or our private life. But we will concentrate on our work needs here.
- Or written information about something done to someone. Again someone connected to our work, a poor performing employee, a suggestion for work quality improvement, an associate (Talking about that whether a "a" or a "an" Forget the old school rule..."a" before consonants and "an" before vowels...the correct rule is the article "a" before words that start with a consonant sound and "an" before words that start with a vowel sound. For example, *He has a unique point of view on the subject and talked about it for an hour.* The "u" in "unique" makes the "Y" sound—a consonant sound—therefore you use "a" as your article, while the "h" in "hour" sounds like it starts with "ow"—a vowel sound. But where the H in the word is pronounced it follows the main rule...a horse.

- The something can be anything, and the someone can be anyone. That anything can really be anything that impacts on our work or private lives and the anyone anybody having a bearing on them
- And as our baby told us, it must be ACCURATE, BRIEF and CLEAR and of course OBJECTIVE and EASY TO UNDERSTAND. As I said we will hear about this rule several times...these are the adjectives of Accuracy, Brevity and Clarity. Objective in that it is driven by facts and not opinions. Easy to Understand because simple, straightforward and correct language is used.
- Who wants to suggest a suitable definition of a written report for us?

A Written Report is:

Some I found on the web are:

- A written report is ... considered to be important in the workplace. They then need to be precise, accurate, objective and difficult to misinterpret.
- Report writing in the work situation is a specialised form of written communication. Many of the rules which must be observed when writing a report are therefore, equally applicable to any other written communications
- DEFINITION: A Report may be defined as a document in which a given problem is examined for the purpose of conveying information, reporting findings, putting forward ideas and, sometimes making recommendations.

And then back to our dictionaries....

- *A written account of something that one has observed, heard, done or investigated.* (Oxford English Dictionary)
- *Gives a (written) description of something or information about it to someone.* (Cambridge Dictionary On Line)
- *It has been said that "WRITERS DON'T SOLVE PROBLEMS; THEY ALLOW THEM TO EMBERGE..."*

#### Slide 4

So why do we write reports...? What is our purpose or Objective? There is nothing worse than reading a report with no clear purpose. If you're not sure of your report's purpose your readers will not be either.....

There are too many reasons to mention here but some important ones are:

- To give information, present findings and results. This I think is the most common purpose.
- To allow for a permanent written record on any matter. Remember the famous work cry... If it's not written down it never happened... The job's not done until the paper work is done and also that story about soup, a fan and an umbrella.....
- To recommend a course of action or forward ideas in the full knowledge of the facts. To get support for an action that you believe will improve the work situation. For example a worker's proposal to improve the quality of a product which in turn will enhance the reputation of their company.....
- To seek authority for a proposed action. Few things get underway at work without the support of your manager and colleagues and you must try to get these.... and a budget of course....
- To record successes and...failures. Who wants to talk about Failures...we all must...if we don't know how a failure happened we will repeat it! And for a similar reason with successes...if we write about how they happened we will have a blueprint to repeat them... blueprint? Something that can be copied for success....

Note: In the work situation you write most reports on the request of a senior colleague. However, you can often write a report on your own initiative if you see something is a problem and you want to formally draw attention to it.... And also as a way of protecting your own position.... even as an umbrella raising exercise.... remember the soup, the fan and the umbrella! So if something is wrong and you have a valid suggestion to help cure it.... put pen to paper.... but be kind and don't apportion blame... that's someone else's job.

And always protect yourself by being careful what you commit to paper. Nothing is confidential or secret in a work situation. If you have to write on a delicate matter and which it is your duty to do, mark each page top with the words "Strictly Private and Confidential" to give the recipient the responsibility to protect the document's contents. Again remember the soup, fan and the umbrella....

**SLIDE 5**

What are the differences between a written report and an essay?

Some of the differences are:

Just to take us back to our happy school days of endless essays, these differences are:

A REPORT	AN ESSAY
----------	----------

Presents information	Presents an argument
Intended to be scanned quickly by various, but specific, readers who take from it what they need. Don't forget that a busy Manager may only read your Executive Summary/Abstract whereas other colleagues may need to study the appendices and so on. Personnel and Finance where it affects them and so on....	Is meant to be studied and read carefully by a wide audience
Usually prepared in a standard report format	No standard structure apart from introduction, main body and conclusion
May conclude with recommendations and appendices	Rarely has recommendations or appendices

An essay looks different because its writing just flows from start to finish without the use of titled paragraphs and sub paragraphs, underlining, bullet points. These are used in written reports for quick and easy reference and to assist understanding. Without these the essay writer has to rely on linking words and phrases. Written reports normally rely on facts and are thus objective while essays can give opinions and can thus be subjective.

## Slide 6

### WE are back to Our Baby's Cardinal Rule for Writing Reports... The ABC Rule:

- **ACCURACY** = Confirming facts, Correct, Precise, Truthful...One fib or one blue lie or one unchecked fact will destroy your report
- **BREVITY** = To the point, Brief, Concise use of language, Lack of verbosity...Don't waffle or...and er...something about a bull...or padding, or beating about the bush, or prattling on, or your report will be out the window...Get straight to the point...
- **CLARITY** = Say what you mean, Easily understood (by reader), Logical, Simple, Systematic...That's says it all...simply say what you mean but always be polite and consider your reader's feelings...Be diplomatic. Remember the street definition of a diplomat. A diplomat...is someone who can tell you to go to hell in such a way that you look forward to the trip...

Note 1: Adjectives of these Nouns are: ACCURATE, BRIEF and CLEAR

Note 2: Brief can also be a noun = an instruction to a lawyer! And we all know what briefs are...and they are not only more than one lawyer's instruction!

- Other writers talk of the 4Cs Rule: CLEAR, CONCISE, CORRECT, COMPLETE
- And the KISS Principle for writers: Keep It Short and Simple (or Keep It Simple & Stupid)

Winston Churchill on the importance of conciseness, *"This report, by its very length, defends itself against the risk of being read"*.

## Slide 7

How many different types of reports have you met with...?

Sorry, but it's like asking, "How long is a piece of string?"

Written reports can vary from short memos to lengthy and complex documents,

Yes there are many, many types of written reports. What can change is their format, but all the other skills needed are the same. Be ever mindful of what type of report you are writing as different formats will be needed. But don't be afraid. You will start with the easier ones and graduate to more difficult one. Some examples are:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Progress Reports</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Investigation Reports</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Feasibility Studies</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Budget Bids. If no compelling argument is made on a budget need, there will be no budget allocation, far less a budget increase...</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Instruction Manuals</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Business Proposals</li></ul>
Emails. In emails you can also use the greetings: Regards, Kind regards, Best wishes,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Business Letters. If you use name in salutation greet with yours sincerely. No name ...yours faithfully. If a comma after salutation then a comma after greeting.</li></ul>

Who can give us a few more examples? Case Study Reports, Staff Performance Reports, ...and so on But remember that report writing skills are also used in , Memoranda (Memorandums also OK) (Memos, Memorandum, Memo)...all that is needed is a format change...

Once you have found a format that works for you in each of the different written report types that you use at work make sure that you keep a hard or flash drive copy for future use. Why reinvent the wheel? Why suffer twice?... Or even if you come across a well-crafted written report by someone else make a hard copy of it for your future use

Who can give us some reasons why professionals and business people should be proficient in writing reports in English?

What is all the fuss about writing well in English?

It's about writing that is easy to read and understand.

There are many reasons why this is needed and some examples are:

- It's the language of Business and Commerce in South Africa
- It improves prospects of Employment and Promotion
- It's a Global Language
- It's the international language of Science, Aviation, Computers, Diplomacy, Media, Commerce etc.

Note: The English language is forever changing. New words appear; old ones fall out of use or change their meanings. English is never shy to borrow and adopt words from another language. From IsiZulu...Donga, Muti, Indaba, Ubuntu and others. From West, East and Central Africa, Banana, Banjo, Chimpanzee, Safari and many others. Many of these adopted and borrowed words are now in common use in English and more are being added every day. So it is important you read widely to keep up with these changes. The beauty of English is that there is always a word, sometimes more than one, to say exactly what you mean...even in the most technical of terms.

## Slide 8

So to revise a little bit...What will the report be used for? Who will read it?

You must never have these questions far from your mind when writing...!

- Is it for conveying information, persuading, helping in decision making...?
- Who is it for, who might read it, are they knowledgeable in my field of expertise or are they lay persons...? Don't show off by using so called fancy English ...your readers will not understand it fully or become confused ...
- How much detail will I need to give my readers ...?enough so that they can fully understand what you say and propose. ...? How much time will they have to read it...? Don't waste your reader's time by padding your report with trivia...



With these questions answered don't forget to:

- Use a reputable Dictionary. This is your lifeline. If you are in any doubt about the spelling or exact meaning of a word look it up. See [www.dictionary.reference.com](http://www.dictionary.reference.com)
- Use a reputable Thesaurus. It is also useful for checking the spelling of a word. More importantly it gives words with the same, or "near to the same" meanings. Its use can stop the constant repetition of a key word causing your reader to become bored. Some give Synonyms ...words with same meaning (report...account, story, disclose) and some also Antonyms ...words with opposite meaning (conceal...suppress, bury,). See [www.thesaurus.com](http://www.thesaurus.com)
- Use your Computer's Spell and Grammar Checker. But be careful as it will miss a wrong word if that word itself is a word. Also it will not help if the misspelt word is too far removed from the correct spelling of the word

Again don't forget...your readers are always the persons you must satisfy.

Bad spelling and the incorrect use of words and grammar are distractions that annoy and confuse readers. If a written report is peppered with these they will detract from your report and damage your professional standing.

## Slide 9

Now for some Grammar and Language Usage

1...The part that you will

all enjoy...!

We are not going to go into grammar and language usage rules in great depth, as our time does not allow this. However, the use of good grammar and clear language in your written reports are important as without them your readers will be distracted and possibly lose the points you are making. English second language users should take courage from the fact that many English first language users have difficulty understanding many of the nuances of even Basic English grammar rules. Let's have a look at some grammar and language usage problem areas...

- Subject-Verb Agreement: The Basic Rule is that a singular subject must take a singular verb and a plural subject must take a plural verb... The skill needed is knowing if the subject is singular or plural and then picking a singular or plural verb to match. There are many Sub Rules to this Basic Rule but normally your ear will tell you if the right subject and verb have been used. Take care when using collective nouns which can be both singular and plural, words such as "team" and "staff".

Basic Rule example: Zanele is at the shop. And. Her friends are at the shop.

When two or more singular nouns or pronouns are connected by “or” or “nor”, use a singular verb.

The book or the pen is in the drawer. But, the book and the pen are in the drawer.

When a compound subject contains both a singular and a plural noun or pronoun joined by or nor, the verb should agree with the part of the subject that is nearer the verb.

The boy or his friends run every day.

His friends or the boy runs every day. See [www.grammarbook.com](http://www.grammarbook.com)

- **Verb Tense Consistency**: Not only must you know which correct verb tense to use, you must use it consistently... For example, when something is being described that happened at that time the present tense is used, for example, “Sihle is riding his bicycle to school”. When describing something that happened in the past the past tense must be used, for example, “Sihle rode his bicycle to school yesterday”. When describing something that will happen in the future the future tense is used, for example “Sihle will ride his bicycle to school tomorrow”.

If you are writing about past events or if you are discussing completed investigations, enquiries, studies or findings, your basic tense throughout your work should be the past tense. Listen to the following paragraph and you will hear that the basic tense is past and that it inappropriately shifts to future and present tense.

I watched the small children with their mother as they threw bread to the chickens. The chickens catch (X present tense) the bread in their beaks. The children cheered loudly. This made me happy and I smiled. I will go (X future tense) home happy. When I arrived home I wrote a simple story about my day.

This is an example of verb tense inconsistency which, as you can hear causes, confusion:

**Preposition Use**: A preposition is a part of speech just like nouns and verbs...They link nouns, pronouns and phrases to other words in a sentence. There are several rules relating to the use of prepositions which we can now talk about... The word or phrase that the preposition introduces is called the object of the preposition.

It is very common to see incorrect prepositions being used in written work. Care has to be taken to ensure this does not happen as it is jarring to the reader.

A preposition can end a sentence but should not if the meaning is clear without it. For example, "Where did you get this at?" The preposition "at" is superfluous. But the sentence, "That is the park we are going to" is correct. A more grammatically correct sentence would be, "That is the park to which we are going". This sentence is wordy, awkward and does not flow whereas the first sentence sounds more natural and is acceptable. But generally try and avoid ending a sentence with a Preposition...For example...What are you staring at? Would be better if said, "At what are you staring?"

The most common prepositions are:

- Those that indicate the location (Spatial) of the object of the sentence such as over, under, on, in, among and between
- Those that show when something happens (Temporal) to the object of the sentence such as, after, during, often, until, before, since and past."

Compound prepositions: On top of/ next to/ in lieu of/ Instead of/ in front of

Note: When comparing two items use the preposition "Between" and 3 or more "Among" ...Divide the apples between the two of you. Divide the apples among the three of you.

Examples of wrong use: We had a surprise to/for them. We ate the food for/by ourselves. Our cousins were coming in/at full speed on their cycles. The book is different to/from the film.

## Slide 10

Now for some more Grammar and Language Usage

2

Are you enjoying it so far?

Grammar and language usage rules were made to allow for the free flow of words in a sentence and the full understanding of what is being written. So listen to the flow of your written words in your mind. If this flow is not running freely double check your grammar and language use. Of course if the words do not properly convey what you are communicating they also need changing. Now let's talk about...

- Active and Passive Verbs (Voice): Opinions vary as to whether active or passive voice should be used in report writing. In the past the passive voice was used more but today the active voice is favoured. The active voice is more short and direct, while the passive voice is often wordy and distant, less engaging and even in certain circumstances appears evasive...

When the subject of the sentence is the person or thing doing the acting, then the verb is in active voice. For example, “The committee (subject) will review all applications (object) in early April (9 words).” “The boy (subject) kicked (verb) the ball (object) (5 words)”

When the subject of the sentence is the person or thing receiving the action, then the verb is in passive voice. For example, “In early April, all applications (object) will be reviewed by the committee (subject) (11)””; “The ball (object) was kicked by (verb) the boy (subject) (7). More examples:

Sihle changed the flat tyre (Active)                      The flat tyre was changed by Sihle (passive)

Mr. Cele painted the house (Active)                      The house was painted by Mr. Cele (passive)

### ➤ Splitting Infinitives

An infinitive will almost always begin with “to” followed by the “simple form of a verb”, for example, *to walk, to go, to jump, to drive*....The rule is that in formal writing no word should come between the “to” and the simple form of the verb that follows it...The infinitive cannot stand alone. It must be preceded by a finite verb for example, She wants to discuss... They start to argue... We tried to study...

The infinitive should not be split in formal writing, for example, She wants to quickly discuss...They start to loudly argue... We tried to often study...

Exceptions do occur, however. An infinitive will lose its “to” when it follows certain verbs. These verbs are *feel, hear, help, let, make, see, and watch*. For example, “Sihle felt the rain splatter on his warm skin”. “Felt” is from the verb “feel” and “splatter” is the infinitive without the “to”.

So to conclude: “Jabulani intends to quickly run to buy milk from the shop” is incorrect. The sentence should read, “Jabulani” intends to run quickly to buy milk from the shop”. This is what is called “Splitting Infinitives”.

Note: The best known example of a split infinitive is from the introduction to the Star Trek series, “To boldly go where no man has gone before”

➤ Gender Fair Language, Sex Bias in Writing: The use of words such as he, she, him, and her when both sexes are intended is unfair and demeaning...Let’s discuss.

In writing a report you should make sure that the language you use is not biased against either sex. A writer must be inventive to avoid this. One sure way to get your report ignored would be to address your lady boss as “Dear Sir”, or talk in the report about “he,he,he” and “him,him,him” when you mean both sexes” The most common ways to stay out of this minefield are:

1. By changing the structure of the sentence. For example, change a sentence such as “The average student is worried about his grades” to “The average student is

worried about grades”. “A good lawyer uses his analytical ability to...” to “A good lawyer uses analytical ability to...”

2. By moving from the singular to the plural. For example, “If a student studies hard, he will succeed” to “Students who study hard will succeed”. “Although a doctor is busy, he should always answer his patient's questions” ...change to ...”Although doctors are busy, they should always answer their patients' questions”.
3. By using combinations of “he/she”, or “him/her” or “he or she” or “him or her” or variations of them such as “s/he”. Use these sparingly as they are cumbersome and contrived and as you can see the male is still put before the female!
4. Avoid exclusionary words and phrases such as: chairman, policeman, fireman, postman, stewardess, lady lawyer and woman doctor and so on, and choose inclusionary alternatives. Chair, Chairperson, Police officer, Fire Person, Postal official, Flight attendant, lawyer, doctor....

Slide 11

Now for even more on Grammar and language Usage 3

Everyone awake?

**Homonyms:** Strictly speaking these are words that share the same spelling and pronunciation, but today are also taken to mean two or more words that sound the same but are spelled differently. True homonyms are words such as “left” (Left the room, left wing politician), “skate” (flat fish and move or glide) and “stalk” (fish, stem of plant, move silently). Now let’s look at some words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings...

These words can cause problems for writers. In addition to this, in verbal communication words are often shortened or slurred making it difficult to spell such words when writing. Examples of homonyms (strictly speaking they are Homophones –sound the same but differ in spelling) that are frequently confused are as follows. Let’s look at their meanings:

There	Their	They’re
To	Too	Two
Your	You’re	
Lose (beaten, suffer loss, temper, way)	Loose (not tight, immoral)	Loos (multiple toilets)
It’s (Contract of “it is” or “it has”)	Its (possessive form of neuter pronoun “it”. If you	

	can replace with him or her no apostrophe. Every dog has its day	
Principal (Headmaster, the leader)	Principle (Ground or basic rule to live by)	

And many more! Who can give an example of a pure Homonym...Spell (spell a word, magic spell, short spell of time) ...but Homophones cause more problems...DEAR/DEER, DYE/DIE, STEAL/STEEL, PRAY/PREY. Making up your own mnemonic (memory prodder) to select the correct word is helpful. For example, “the Principal was my pal and taught me valid principles to live by”.

**Double Negatives:** This occurs when two negatives are used in a sentence. These negatives then in effect cancel out each other and make the statement positive. Double negatives must be avoided as they confuse readers...let’s look at some examples...

A Double Negative is usually produced by combining the negative form of verb (e.g., cannot, did not, have not) with a negative pronoun (e.g., nothing, nobody), a negative adverb (e.g., never, hardly) or a negative conjunction (e.g., neither/nor).

[www.grammar-monster.com](http://www.grammar-monster.com)

Examples of double negative use are: (Final meaning is given in brackets)

- I don’t want no sympathy from you (I want sympathy from you)
- I didn’t see nothing (I saw something)
- It wasn’t uninteresting (It was interesting)
- He don’t know nothing (He knows something)
- She hasn’t spoken to nobody yet (She has spoken to someone)

What can we make of a recent headline in the Mail and Guardian which read, “Prasa’s maladministration is off the rails”? However, their article clearly showed that “Prasa’s administration is off the rails”.

The use of double negatives in these sentences cancels out each other and makes the meaning positive and this is not what the writer intended. Sometimes this is done for effect or emphasis in verbal communication but their use in written reports causes confusion and disturbs the flow of the sentence. Don’t forget that written conversation doesn’t have the help of facial and hand expressions and body language generally to assist in a full understanding as verbal communication has. In other words a wink or a nod or even a smile in verbal communication can change the meanings of spoken words.

Latin Abbreviations: The common ones in use are “e.g.”, “etc.”, “et al.” “i.e.” and we love to use them...let’s look at their meanings and how they should be used...What about [sic]?

Abbreviation	Latin	In English	How used	Remarks
e.g.	<i>exempli gratia</i>	for example	To introduce examples	Don’t confuse with etc. Replace with “for example”
etc.	<i>et cetera</i>	and other things	To advise more <u>things</u> follow	Don’t confuse with e.g... Replace with “and so on”
et al.	<i>et alii</i>	and others	To advise more <u>names</u> follow	Replace with “and others”
i.e.	<i>Id est</i>	that is	To introduce explanatory phrase	Replace with “that is”

Note: *Sic*, which is usually enclosed in square brackets [sic] behind a word or phrase? This is used to indicate that this is the exact way that the original was written, usually something that seems strange or incorrect. It is often done to mock the writing style of someone who is believed to be pompous or arrogant. It is not an abbreviation but a word from Latin meaning “so” or “thus”.

## Slide 12

Now for the last words on Grammar and Language Usage. 4

Keep the faith...we are nearly finished with Grammar

Acronyms, Abbreviations and Jargon: Only use if you know that your readers will understand them (and of course that you yourself know their meanings!). We can now discuss what each one means, and look at a few examples of each...These are the new plague of good writing practice, especially carried and spread by young people...! I have recently read the annual report of a well known NGO and I could not fully understand it because most of the Acronyms, Abbreviations and Jargon used were unknown to me.

- Acronyms have only come into general use since the 1940s but their use has exploded with the advent of Email and SMS (Short Messages Service) use.
- Acronyms are normally made up with the first letters in the subject’s full name.

- Well known Acronyms like USA, UN and SADC (SA Development Community) can be used, but obscure ones like NLDTF (National Lottery Distribution Trust Fund) should not. When first used in a report write such subjects in full with Acronym in brackets, and then use the Acronym alone thereafter.
- Use of Redundant Words after Acronyms and Abbreviations should be avoided. For example, ATM Machine, PIN Number, HIV Virus. (Human Immunodeficiency Virus)
- Abbreviations: Words or expressions shortened in some way: Lab, Vet, Prof. Dr. what are LOL, FYI, ASAP etc.
- Jargon: Specialised language of a profession, occupation or other group often meaningless to outsiders. COOKIES (Computer speak for a small file relating to a website), DUCKS IN A ROW (Organised plan), SHOTGUN APPROACH (Unfocused), RIFLE APPROACH (Focused) (All Business speak), SWOT ANALYSIS (SWOT {Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats} is an acronym but both together is Jargon). Sharp! Sharp...what is that jargon or slang?

So please, only use these if you know that your readers will understand them, especially a reader outside your field of expertise. And as I said if you have to use the source of an acronym many times in your report spell it out the first time with the acronym in brackets. Then use the acronym thereafter.

Writing Numbers and Numerals: Numerals (1, 2, 3...) or (One, Two, Three...) or (I, II, III, IV...) are the symbols that make up numbers and a number represents a quantity. Let's look at ways to represent numbers in our written work...

- Spell out whole numbers smaller than ten.
- Don't start a sentence with a numeral. Not, "47 000 fans were in the stadium when the game got underway", but "When the game got underway there were 47 000 fans in the stadium"
- Thousands' Separators. Convention varies between countries as some use a space, some a comma, some a period and some no spaces. In South Africa the convention seems to be the use of a space. For example, the size of South Africa is expressed as "1 219 912 square kilometers".
- Denoting Decimals. Again convention varies between the use of a comma and a period. In South Africa use also varies but a period seems to be the most common. For example: "R 12 326.00" and "4.75 meters".
- Decimal fractions and percentages - these should be expressed in numerals, not in words. For example: "5.67 cc" and "57 percent" (use % only in graphs and tables).



- Plurals of numbers. When writing decades or plurals of numbers, add “s”, not “’s”. For example: 1980s, not 1980’s; fours, not four’s.

**Tautology:** Tautology is when a writer (or speaker) says the same thing twice, rendering some of the information redundant. This should be avoided as it can cause confusion and can even make the writer appear pompous or worse...can we have a few examples...

### Examples

I also like it, too.	In my opinion, I think that...
Joint cooperation	One after the other in succession
Close proximity	Today's modern technology

Any other common ones? ...To reiterate again, it’s a new innovation.

### Slide 13 Done in another lecture so shorten..

Who knows about Kipling’s “six honest serving men”? Have you ever hired them? Well I know that you know about these six men as we discussed them at length when planning for a job interview last week. Remember them with the Mnemonic (*ne-mon ic ...* to assist memory): “5ws and 1h” or :”5 wives and 1 husband” ... and perhaps you even know of one husband with five wives. Please remember to use them for anything where planning is needed...

(Rudyard Kipling the famous poet and author and Nobel Prize winner for literature wrote in his poem, “The Elephant’s child” about his six honest serving men. They were WHO, WHY, WHERE, WHAT, WHEN and HOW. (Mnemonic=Five Wives and one Husband)

Rudyard Kipling was born in Bombay, India of British parents in 1865. Kipling visited South Africa many times up to 1908. He spoke of his, “six honest serving-men” that he used in writing and named them “WHAT, WHY, WHEN, HOW, WHERE AND WHO”. Mnemonic (To assist memory): “5ws and 1h” or “5 wives and 1 husband”. First M in Mnemonic is silent so it is pronounced “ne mon ic”.

Journalists and media people generally like employing these “six honest serving-men” when interviewing people, because they can’t be answered by a non committal yes or no!

The opening lines of his poem, "The Elephant's Child" reads:

I keep six honest serving-men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who.

Who knows the names of any of the books that Kipling wrote? The Jungle Book, Kim...

- You should also employ these six honest serving men when writing as they are invaluable in working for a searching but tired mind!

### Email writing...

Perhaps most business writing today is done by the use of Emails. Can we touch on some guides to use when emailing...

The writing skills learned for other forms of written reports are used in Email writing. Some of the more important guides for Email writing are:

- Make the subject line clear, concise and informative. If you introduce a new topic make this clear in the subject line, or better still send another Email
- Start with an appropriate salutation as we saw earlier
- Be succinct as possible and if lengthy information has to be sent use an attachment
- Headings and subheadings can be used in long or complex Emails
- Sign off with an appropriate greeting/closing such as "Regards", "Best Regards", "Yours sincerely", "Yours faithfully" and add your name
- "Spell Check" Email content before sending
- Use the "Request Read Receipt" under Tools if proof of delivery is needed

Slide 14

NOW FOR THE ACTUAL REPORT!

Will structured steps in my report writing help me achieve success? Steps such as:

1. Clarifying fully in your mind the objective of the report
  2. Planning the report
  3. Collecting all the necessary information
  4. Organising and structuring this information
  5. Writing the report
  6. Checking the report
- In all of these steps our (now yours hopefully!) six honest serving-men's help will be needed.
  - In all of these steps constantly question yourself why you are writing the report and what are your readers' needs and expectations!

We will now look at these six steps one at a time.....

## Slide 15

### Step 1: Clarifying The Objective Of The Report

You must make sure that your report, when complete, meets all the requirements given in the instructions, request or terms of reference initiating the report. If you do not fully understand these you must ask questions to clarify them. Don't even attempt to get the report work underway until you are completely clear in your mind what is its purpose, reason or objective. Some questions to be answered at this stage might be:

- What is the problem or matter that needs addressing?
- Why is the report needed?
- Who will read the report?
- What knowledge will readers, both actual and potential, already have? Are they in the same field as you? Have they got prior knowledge of the problem / matter to be addressed?
- What decision making or other activities might flow from the report?
- What information, data, expertise will be needed to answer these questions?

Answers to these questions will decide the content and scope of the report

## Slide 16

### STEP 2: Planning the Report

Once the objective of the report is clearly understood a brief plan can be made on how the reporting task should be managed.

This plan will give detail on matters such as:

- What information, data and other inputs will be needed and from where?
- In what sequence should the gathered information, data and other inputs be used in the report?
- What parts of the report can be segmented into manageable parts?
- Suitable titles and subtitles for the report's sections and subsections
- Graphs of detailed information

This plan must give an outline structure of the report with time frames for the completion of its individual parts.

## Slide 17

### STEP 3: Collecting the Necessary Information

The Objective of the report is now known and a Plan has been made to achieve it. Information, data and inputs to add to your knowledge and that of your readers must now be collected.

All the necessary information, data and inputs are collected by:

- Searching your company's internal records such as financial, planning and personnel, with the sole focus being the report's objective. There may even be past reports on a same or similar problem. What information was gathered for these? What conclusions were reached? What recommendations were made? Were they acted on? Was success achieved? Any confidential information found must be treated as such.
- Drawing from your own work experience, expertise, insights and observations. Your own experiences and knowledge are often invaluable and you should not be afraid or shy to draw on them but they must be supported by facts.
- Searching for published information from libraries, internet data bases or other public sources. Google searches on the web are invaluable to assist with information

if you search with purpose. If you find an interesting piece of information don't forget to flag it for future reference.

- Interviewing work colleagues, fellow professionals, customers, suppliers and competitors to give you insight beyond that available from public sources. Now is the time to network with a vengeance. Call in past favours. Have other establishments dealt with the same problem that you are now faced with. What have they tried? Did they have success or failure?

Record all the sources of your information for the Bibliography and to back up your findings and assertions.

## Slide18

### Step 4: Organising and Structuring the Information Collected

Disorganised information, data and inputs are of little value to you. These have to be studied and listed so that their use can be evaluated and then used to realise the report's objective. And then in their order of occurrence and importance. Those which are of no value should be discarded.

The inputs can be arranged in an organised manner allowing for their interrelationships to be easily appreciated and understood by:

- Mind Mapping: A mind map is a graphical way for representing connections between ideas, concepts and pieces of information... Each idea or fact is written down and then linked by lines to its major or minor idea or facts, thus creating an easily understood web of relationships.
- Brainstorming: Brainstorming is a spontaneous group discussion used to generate ideas and develop creative solutions to problems...
- Free Writing: Free Writing is a process used to bring out useful ideas and solutions to problems. It is done by writing anything that comes to mind while focusing on a task or problem. Nothing should be done to disturb this free flow of creative thinking...It is done by opening a new document and writing anything that comes to mind while focusing on a task or problem. Time should not be spent in correcting poor layout, punctuation, grammar and editing. Nothing should be done to impede the desired free flow of creative thinking

## Slide 19

## Step 5: Writing the Report PART 1

The work spent in clarifying the objective of the report, the planning, the collecting and organising of relevant information and other inputs must now all be drawn together in the writing of the report. There are now several important aspects you must consider when writing the report. These are:

- The Writing Process: You must seek out and use a quiet place where the writing work can be done free from all distractions...
- Presentation: The final written report must have a strong visual impact on readers. To achieve this care must be taken in using a layout that will allow this...
- Writing Style: A written report that has little intellectual impact on its readers is a failed report. The writing style used in the report must help achieve this...
- Format/Template: There are many formats a writer can use for the report to communicate effectively and easily. Care will be needed to choose one which will serve the report's objective.

If the final written report fails to supply additional knowledge and compelling arguments for improvements or change all else will have been for nothing.

### Slide 20

## Step 5: Writing the Report PART 2

The writing process. How can the inputs you gathered and your ideas be combined into a flow of thoughts and ideas that will make sense to the reader? Always focus on why you are writing and focus on your reader's needs. Focus firmly on your writing task by:

- Working in a quiet place free from interruptions and distractions. Make it clear to work colleagues that you need peace and quiet...
- Turning off Email and cell phone connections. This is important as a break for a phone call can cost you hours to get back into your train of thought...
- Creating a formal work position at a desk in front of a computer. Clear your desk of distractions and get down to the job in hand...
- If at home working away from TV and other family diversions. Better still get your significant other to take the kids for a visit to their Gogo...

- Don't be daunted by big tasks. Break them down to manageable sizes. If faced with writers block start with the parts of the report that are clear in your mind and then get back to the "road blocks" later

Remember the old South African saying, "How do you eat an elephant?" with the answer, "one spoonful at a time". Or as some say, "start with the soft bits..."

## Slide 21

Step 5:

Writing the Report

PART 3

PRESENTATION: How can your written report create the best possible visual impact?

- **Typing Standards:** Written reports should be word processed with a portrait orientation and printed on a laser or inkjet printer in an 11-12 point Arial or Calibri font...Let's talk about these details... Larger font sizes in bold to be used for section headings. All pages to be numbered at top right. If report is to be bound a 4.5cm left margin should be allowed with 2.5 cm margins at right side, top and bottom. Single line spacing should be used except between paragraphs where a blank line should be left. Size of spaces between punctuation marks can be left at writer's discretion.
- **Format:** Changing fonts and using other formatting features such a bold, italics and underline should be kept to a minimum. If used too often their impact is lost...
- **Arrangement:** In short reports assist reader by numbering paragraphs and in longer reports use a numbered and named heading for each section with appropriately numbered and named subheadings. A new page should be started with each main section where possible. Have you used white space cleverly and creatively to make the report pleasing to the eye? There is nothing worse with cramped writing with no space between paragraphs etc making it difficult for a reader to follow the flow of the words... Or even intimidating him...Show samples of the two report pages to illustrate the correct use of "white" space. Make your report "eye candy" that cannot be resisted by your readers.

*In "The Selling Houses Business" the slogan is always "Location, Location, Location!" Many believe that in Report Writing the slogan should be "Presentation, Presentation, Presentation!"*

## Slide 22

### Step 5: Writing the Report PART 4

WRITING STYLE: Will your writing style allow your report to deliver on its purpose? Will it help achieve maximum intellectual impact?

You must lead your readers through the report without them being frustrated, jarred or confused. Use the third person (he/she/it/they) avoiding 1st (I and We) and 2nd (You and You) in the past tense. Points that will help in this task are:

- Write in a clear and formal professional style bringing out events in a chronological sequence. Don't use unsubstantiated facts, jokes, humour, jargon and clichés.
- Don't fill report with unnecessary detail. When such detail might be needed for some readers include it in appendices. Complex graphs and long data lists in the body of your report will chase away most readers...!
- Don't use long complex or padded sentences. Avoid excessive use of commas and conjunctions (and, but, or). Split such sentences to make them easily read. I have seen sentences eight lines long in a report. By the end of the sentence I had forgotten what the beginning was about. So for each new thought use a new sentence.
- Check your punctuation, full stops, commas, semi-colons, colons, hyphens and dashes
- Be tactful...Is your tone right? May be it is critical, intimidating, irritating, sarcastic, condescending. One word can damn an otherwise good report. For example, Your failure to reply...You neglected to...We take issue...You should know...
- Have a clear thought in each sentence and don't waffle. Obey the ABC rule! Do you remember it?

## Slide 23

### Step 5: Writing the Report PART 5

TEMPLATE/FORMAT 1: Will the template you use help your report deliver on its purpose?

Remember that when you write a report there are many template/formats that you can use. If in your work situation there is already a set format you can



use it, or use your own favourite format. You must use the format that you believe will best make your report readable and is best suited for that purpose.

Following are report components of a typical formal written report format and you can use all these, or combinations of them, to construct your report: (At this point it should be emphasised that there are very many written reports that will never need such a complex template / format. Many just consist of a series of numbered Introduction, Body and Recommendation...Some report writing authorities recommend: *Tell them what you're going to tell them, Tell them. Then tell them what you have told them*).

1. Title Page	2. Table of Contents
3. Abstract or Executive Summary	4. Introduction
5. Body or Findings	6. Conclusion/s
7. Recommendation/s	8. Appendices or Annexures
9. Bibliography or References	10. Glossary

- ✓ We will now discuss these components of the Template/Format and the order in which they can be written

Slide 24 Miss out?

Step 5: Writing the Report PART 6

TEMPLATE/FORMAT 2: Components: 1-5

1. TITLE PAGE which gives:
  - Full title of the report in capitals and date of submission
  - Name, title and organisation of the receiver and author
2. TABLE OF CONTENTS which gives:
  - The names of each section and subsection in report
  - The order and page numbers in which they appear in report
3. ABSTRACT OR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY which:

- Gives a clear and concise overview of report for Management or those with little time to grasp the main points
- Highlights and summaries purpose, scope, methodology, conclusions and recommendations of report...but only those in the report

Note: Take care. This is the part that senior staff read. Make it short...No more than a page long. It is often useful to write the Abstract component after the Introduction, Body, Conclusions and Recommendations. This will ensure that the Abstract will be well written, accurate and persuasive as by then all inputs will be clear in the writer's mind.

#### 4. INTRODUCTION which gives:

- A brief explanation on purpose and scope of the report. (Who are ex UniZul students? Don't you remember that famous word "scope"? Just before exams, "What's the scope?" And the lecturer's usual reply, "Everything I have taught you" which was followed by a loud groan. The dictionary defines scope as "The area covered by a given activity or subject". In our report writing we shall take it as meaning the area within which we will be operating. For example, when writing up a budget bid for a new computer we cannot start writing about something not connected to that subject.
- Background information on "the problem" and any other matter which will allow for a full understanding of the main part of the report

#### 5. BODY OR FINDINGS is where:

- The heart of the report is, the facts are found
- The writer describes, discusses, analyses and interprets all the information and data collected and organised prior to writing
- The writer's findings are arranged in logical segments and are identified with clear and descriptive headings
- The information and data that will support the writer's later conclusions and recommendations are described

TEMPLATE/FORMAT 3: Components 6-10:

1. CONCLUSIONS is where:

- Findings are explained in relation to the original problem while drawing on evidence from the main body of the report
- Writers present their concluding ideas and arguments while not introducing new ones
- The conclusions drawn are the logical results of the evidence presented in the report

2. RECOMMENDATIONS: is where:

- The writer says clearly what he believes should be done to right or mitigate “the problem”.
- The writer recommends specific actions to be taken as the result of information and argument presented in the main body of the report

3. APPENDICES/ANNEXURES: is where:

- Additional material is included. This material is relevant but extensive and would disrupt the writing and flow of the body of the report
- Bulky items only of interest to some of the readers are placed.

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY/REFERENCES: lists:

- Of sources of information, for example, books, that were consulted during preparation of the report
- Of references used in researching the report

5. GLOSSARY: Gives

- An alphabetical list of difficult, technical or foreign terms used in the report, along with their definitions or translations.

## Step 6: Checking the Report Part 1

Proof Reading, Revising and Re-Drafting of report where necessary

You have worked hard now is the time to take a break...not a Kit Kat break as the advert goes...but overnight one if possible...then proof read, revise and re-draft if necessary the next day. The danger is that when we write a report and then later read it we see things that are not in it and don't see things that are.

The checking of a report is an important step in the report writing process. It is a common misconception that this work simply involves the proof reading of the report for "typos", spelling mistakes, and the misuse of grammar and language. (Typos=Typographical errors)

Don't take the attitude, "I have worked long enough on this report. Let me get it off my desk". This is fatal. Most reports, even simple one, need to be checked over five times...and even then after it is on the boss's desk you will still find mistakes...Is the tone and voice right, have you used a word or expression too much? Do a "find" search on "Word" and if this is true find new words and expressions to replace these. In fact watch out for all of the problem areas we have covered this morning.

Such routine steps must indeed be taken but more important than that is the need for a full revision of the report. This is done to ensure that all relevant information has been included in an easy to understand way and that the arguments made in the report are valid and supported with solid evidence.

If this information is found to be wanting or argument used is weak the report must be re-drafted to include and strengthen these. This process must continue with further revisions and further re-drafting until the writer is fully satisfied that the report is:

**OBJECTIVE, COMPLETE AND WELL WRITTEN**

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STEP 6 Checking the Report

Part 2

Proof reading, Revising and Re-Drafting of report where necessary

Important Note: When you are fully satisfied that your proof reading, revising and redrafting tasks have been completed to your complete satisfaction print out a hard copy of the report. Then ask a friend or colleague with good writing skills to read it. Invariably they will find matters that require changing, mending or massaging. This is almost inevitable as most writers have blind spots when checking their own written reports.

A media report highlighting a badly written report...

*Some years ago the Mail & Guardian newspaper reported that “a poorly written six-page memorandum littered with contradictions, inaccuracies, poor spelling and bad grammar informed the decision to end the probe into the R42 billion “Strategic Defence Package” (SDP) arms deal signed in 2000”.*

Slide 28

Our baby is off for walk but is still thinking about the ABC rule...Accuracy, Brevity and Clarity...

Slide 29

You will agree that having good report writing skills will be very useful in your work careers and also in your private lives. Please keep the hand out from this lecture for your future reference. I am sure that the writers of the report referred to above now wish that they had spent more time, effort and energy when writing and checking it.

**THANK YOU ALL**

ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS?

**“Knowledge is a treasure but practice is the key to it”**

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### **MEETINGS AND PROCEDURE AT MEETINGS**

*After reading this chapter, you should be able to:*

- Organise meetings
- Understand the need for meetings
- Manage meetings
- Understand responsibilities of attendees
- Understand responsibilities of Chairperson
- Protect attendees in a meeting
- Understand the nature of meetings

In a majority of books on management and administration, the subject of meetings or procedure at meetings is usually included. For an organisation, meetings may serve one or many purposes: brainstorming meetings, decision-making and problem-solving meetings, strategic planning meetings, information gathering meetings, negotiation meetings, or research meetings.

There is hardly any doubt that meetings are necessary in an organisation. To a large extent, the success or failure of a meeting may be ascribed to its “manager” the chairperson. What one is not sure of is whether or not all meetings are necessary or not a waste of time. The fact of the matter is that if a meeting is properly managed, or had been properly convened, it would hardly be a waste of time.

Formal meetings, for example, are run under strict rules, like the rules of parliamentary procedure. Motions must be introduced formally and seconded before a topic can be debated or discussed. Each point is settled by a vote, and minutes are recorded of each motion. This procedure helps meetings to be run smoothly, particularly when the group is very large or when the agenda is very long.

Informal meetings are run more loosely. Votes may not be taken if most people seem to agree. Minutes may not be kept. These types of meetings are better for team-building and problem-solving sessions.

Planning the agenda for a meeting is the foundation of a good meeting. A good agenda would normally indicate the following:

- ❑ Whether each item is presented for information, for discussion, or for a decision
- ❑ Who is sponsoring or introducing each item

- How much time is allotted for each item

Bruitzius (1982:99) discusses meetings as part of a communication process and remarks as follows:

*Meetings represent one of the most important occasions for oral communication in business at which information can be effectively transmitted, issues ventilated and discussed, instructions issued, and possibly decisions taken.*

So, while meetings improve communication, they also serve many other purposes, such as to improve decision-making processes. The need for meetings may be predicated by the management function of coordination. The chairperson, director, manager, supervisor, or leader cannot always act or spin alone. He/she needs information from others in the process of decision-making. At some point, the plans and problems of these leaders must be discussed with other stakeholders: subordinates, and others within or outside the organisation.

An interesting list of reasons for business meetings is suggested by Deverell (1985:103).

There seem to be any number of reasons for calling a meeting. For instance, some of the following reasons may be needed to run an organization professionally and efficiently:

- Top management meetings at regular intervals, for example, weekly fortnightly, attended by senior functional executives.
- Meetings for the coordination of policy and operation in the main functions of the organization.
- Joint productivity meetings.
- Meetings of supervisors either in a particular function, such as production or throughout the organization.
- Joint consultative meetings for the passing of information and opinions up and down the organization, and for recommendations to management on matters within the scope of the consultative meeting.
- Meetings to administer a suggestion scheme where one is operated.
- Safety and accident prevention meetings.
- Cost reduction or value analysis and engineering sessions.
- A development, design and technical committee.
- Progress meetings of particular projects or contracts on hand.
- Command meetings, largely taken up with the issue and explanation of instructions to members of staff.
- Departmental or sectional staff meetings to solve common problems
- Negotiation meetings

On a more personal and psychological level, Anthony Jay (1972:217) suggests that the corporate man, in his struggle for survival, needs the companionship of a committee:

*...the species we belong to, and from which we descended, survived by keeping together, and irrespective of the demands of the job. Corporation Man needs to come together regularly with other members of the species – operational objectives can always be found to justify this deeper need. I suspect that meetings are most frequent and most enjoyed by men and women whose work keeps them solitary or in very small groups for most of the week.... There is need to feel the security of the group around you, even if you do not belong to a real or effective one.*

Since meetings can involve hundreds of people, it is sometimes necessary to spell out clearly, the rights, privileges and obligations of participants in a meeting. These rights and obligations can best be defined by the operation of the law. Questions, which occasionally arise and are liable to cause grievances, are the following:

- ❑ Is the meeting properly constituted?
- ❑ Is the speaker entitled to speak to a motion? Can a motion be discussed when it is not seconded?
- ❑ Is the manner of voting adopted valid?
- ❑ Is the chairperson acting within the scope of his/her rights? What are his/her rights, anyway?
- ❑ Can any individual member call a meeting?

The law is capable of dealing with these, and many similar questions. This statement is subject to the assumption that the law can be ascertained. The law, as we are given to understand, is divided into two broad categories – statutory law which is enacted through a legislative body, such as parliament, and common law, which is more idiomatically referred to as unwritten law.

On closer examination, there is nothing unwritten about unwritten law. What is meant here is that in its origin, it was not written into the statute book. Common law derives from usage and natural justice. For instance, without reference to the statutes, stealing is a crime in almost all known societies.

To this end, theft is a common law crime. Part of the common law developed from the writings of eminent jurists, whereas another portion of common law developed from court judgments, where the judges tended to create the law by giving a more detailed interpretation.

Relevant statutes govern statutory meetings of companies incorporated in terms of the Companies Act or similar legislation. For instance, the Companies Act, 1973 (Act 61 of 1973) devotes a number of sections to the running of meetings contemplated by the Act, namely, Sections 179 to 207. Sections 242 to 246 govern meetings of directors, in terms of this Act.

Statutory bodies, such as ESKOM, SABC and others, which were established in terms of a specific Act of Parliament, run their meetings in accordance with those Acts or Regulations framed under those Acts. In respect of ordinary companies, it must be



borne in mind that they are also governed by articles of association, which provided a detailed set of rules of procedures for their meetings. This then constitutes the law for their meetings.

Many voluntary bodies, such as sports clubs, have constitutions, which normally provide a set of rules for meetings. In such cases, those bodies create the law of meetings. Such law is enforceable, and binding on the members of those bodies.

Natural justice would govern meetings falling outside the last two categories. There would be no difficulty for judges to settle a dispute arising from such meetings. *What may be of paramount importance for participants of such a meeting is not whether the procedure followed in a meeting fits the paradigm of natural justice, but whether the procedure is acceptable to members, and is conducive to better results.* With the results in mind, it is more appropriate to examine the purpose that meetings are supposed to serve.

In the broadest sense, meetings can be divided into general meetings, and committee meetings. By common understanding, general meetings are those, which are attended by the general membership. Whilst they accord a sense of democracy and belonging, they are not suitable for detailed discussions from which practical decisions can emanate. They do, however, serve a useful purpose in so far as laid down general authority or formulating broad policy.

Committee meetings, on the other hand, are capable of dealing with complex issues, and coming up with feasible recommendations. Unless specifically authorized, committees do not have the same power as the general membership.

One of the most compelling reasons for calling a committee meeting is to engage in brainstorming. It goes without saying that the creativity of several individuals is superior to that of a single one in the team. Of course, as Torrington and Weightman (1985:140) point out, "This method is not always successful as individuals can often produce better ideas working alone..."

Meetings of a brainstorming type are useful in providing a pool of ideas, which can later be sifted, and pursued more vigorously. However, brainstorming, as a special exercise, requires a slightly different setting from that of an ordinary meeting. One writer summarises brainstorming as follows:

*...groups attempt to create a freewheeling atmosphere where any ideas, however absurd, are recorded. Evaluation of the quality of ideas is strictly excluded and is carried out after the idea-generation phase is complete.... (The) view is that the flow of ideas in the group will trigger off further ideas, whereas the usual evaluative framework will tend to stifle imagination. This may be because group members are concerned not to appear ridiculous in the eyes of others (Smith, 1973:69).*

Torrington and Weightman (1985:141) say that the most obvious reason for using committee meetings is to make decisions for which the group can take collective

responsibility. The group is assumed to possess a wide range of experience and expertise. Also, there will be more commitment to the decision because the people in the meeting view the decision as their decision. In many ways the management committee may be referred to as "The Plural Executive" (Torrington and Weightman, op cit).

As noted before, meetings enhance required communication and coordination in an organisation. They are, so to speak, the life-blood of an organization, in so far as they also promote required cooperation among organization members. In short, all meetings are likely to improve communication in one-way or the other.

The actual value of this communication, of course, depends on the quality of preparations, the knowledge and experiences of involved parties and the effectiveness with which they are conducted.

Committee meetings, for example, can play a useful advisory role to the chief executive. When these committees make a recommendation to the chief executive, he/she gets the benefit of studying various alternative courses of action, which have been examined by the committee before he/she selects one course of action for implementation.

Above all, meetings can, and do, contribute to improved morale among employees who otherwise would feel excluded from participation on matters of common interest. To this extent, meetings engender a sense of belonging and introduce a democratic culture within the organization. Naturally, there are limits to this form of involvement. It would be untenable to suggest that all decisions be subjected to a meeting of all, or even a portion of the entire staff.

President T. Mbeki puts it as follows: "managers must manage, teachers must teach, and students must learn".

It would be naïve to believe that all meetings can achieve all or any of the objectives mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs. The success of meetings depends on a variety of factors, not the least of which is the composition of membership of that of meetings.

Membership may consist of like-minded people who will not easily challenge each other's viewpoints. This may result in the taking of decisions that might not have been thoroughly examined in many facets.

On the other extreme, membership may include mediocre or people of such divergent personalities that they seldom could ever reach consensus: a mosaic of strong and weak personalities. In this case, the meeting would lack coherence, and considerable time is spent on reconciling conflicting viewpoints.

Ideally, the membership of a committee must consist of a strong core of people with a common purpose, balanced by a significant minority with different views.

*The behaviour of members in a meeting is crucial in determining the relative success of the meeting.* Torrington and Weightman (1985:143) observe that the typical behaviour of members may be classified into *competition* and *cooperation*. Both competition and cooperation can have deleterious effect on the progress of the meetings. For instance, when certain members are committed to cooperate with each other, they will support each other even when this may not be desirable. Torrington and Weightman (op cit) quote examples of such behaviour as follows:

*Other members of the committee will also be thinking from their own point of view and there is a tendency to grouping and coalition between members, often involving behind-the-scenes deals, and ("If you support me on this, I will support you on that").*

Competition among members is healthy, as long as it is not adopted as a matter of course or detracts the members from their common purpose. To this end, Torrington and Weightman (1985:144) put it as follows:

*There is obviously a need for a balance, and the main art of chairing a meeting is in ensuring that there is a stimulus of competition so that committee members are on their mettle, but in a reasonably secure and open atmosphere so that competition does not become destructive of the appropriate degree of cooperation in reaching agreement and making progress.*

When conflict arises in the proceedings, it requires a great deal of experience and mental maturity on the part of the chairperson and members to manage and reduce it. The incidence, which is so common in meetings, points to the inherent weakness of meetings as a method of decisions. The quality of decisions reached by a committee is quite often affected by the need to settle for the lowest amount of conflict and a tendency to compromise.

Conflict may be reduced if the membership of a committee is fairly homogeneous, namely, the various members have a common interest or are of approximately equal status (Britzius, 1982:101). Heterogeneous membership such as that involving people from different strata in the employment hierarchy is a source of constant conflict in meetings. Britzius (op cit) suggests that such conflict can be minimized if "both management and labour" recognize their common interest in the prosperity of the undertaking.

#### General Principles for Structuring a Committee and Meetings

It would be intellectually dishonest to claim there are any hard and fast rules to be followed to ensure committees and meetings are correctly structured. A few guidelines, however, would not be out of order.

#### *Size of Committees*

The type of expertise that must be provided for in the committee may influence the exact number of members of a committee. Other members may be appointed

purely for political reasons rather than for required administrative effectiveness and efficiency. Certain interests must be represented or be seen to be fairly represented. These considerations tend to set the minimum number of members. "At the upper hand", points out Deverell (1985:107) "the number should not be so large as to preclude anybody from contributing to the deliberations of the committee anything that ought to be said". Deverell (op cit) contends that "large numbers become unwieldy, risks of incompatibility grow, and the likelihood of absences and lack of continuity becomes more probable".

### *Rules of Procedure*

For a permanent committee, rules in regard to the conduct of meetings should be preferably enshrined in a constitution. These rules must provide, at least, for the following:

- ❑ Method of calling meetings
- ❑ Quorum
- ❑ Members' right to speak
- ❑ Manner of voting
- ❑ Chairperson's rights, if any
- ❑ Method of handling motions and resolutions

For an ad hoc committee, a constitution may not be appropriate. Instead terms of reference must make provision for the conduct of meetings. If this is not done, it is most advisable for the chairperson to suggest some working rules to be adopted when the ad hoc committee commences its work.

The order of business in a meeting can be laid down in the rules suggested above. It must be remembered that all meetings provide a forum for an exchange of ideas and information, followed by working on hypotheses. On each item on the agenda, members must first seek out the facts, even if those facts do not necessarily support their personal viewpoints. As more and more information is digested, members build up a shared information base, and hopefully gravitate towards consensus.

### *The Crucial Role of Chairperson*

A meeting without a chairperson is no more than a disorderly group of persons, regardless of how disciplined the involved people might be, as individuals. Only under the guidance of an astute chairperson can a meeting hope to prosper, and not get hijacked and turned into a meeting of demagogues, or slide into some kind of chaos.

Derevell (1985:107) summarises the chairperson's key role as follows:

*The chairperson is the central figure. He/she has a duty to preserve order, to take care that proceedings are conducted in a proper manner, and to see that the sense of the meeting is properly ascertained on any question. To carry this out effectively, he/she needs tact and patience, and should be impartial,*

*calm, alert and resourceful. Order should flow from the force of his/her personality rather than from conscious effort. And although he/she should have the ability to speak concisely, he/she should resist the temptation to intervene persistently in debates.*

It follows that the chairperson must, as far as possible, possess certain characteristics if he/she is to perform his/her job as chairperson with some degree of success. The following characteristics would seem most desirable:

- ❑ General or natural intelligence
- ❑ Knowledge relevant to the task at hand
- ❑ Objectivity
- ❑ Excellent oral and written communication skills
- ❑ Ability to summarise and decide when a point has been sufficiently debated

Above all, the chairperson should have the ability to listen attentively and quickly grasp the meaning of a speaker's arguments. In order to keep the meeting on track, he/she must have the ability to analyse and synthesise various arguments that various speakers bring forward. Not all of us are endowed these talents. We have to learn all the time, and try to treat people in a meeting courteously and equally.

During your lifetime, if this is not already happening, you will belong to many organisations, and you will participate in many meetings. If you are to give your very best to these organizations and their meetings, and if you want to be respected and your opinions to be heard, you need to remain fully conversant with the principles of group discussions and chairpersonship.

### *The Importance of an Agenda*

It is imperative for all members intending to attend a meeting to prepare adequately for the meeting. The basis for this preparation is the agenda. An agenda should list topics for discussion at the meeting, provide venue for the meeting, and, where possible, give the starting and ending times for the meeting. Basically, an agenda serves the following two functions:

- ❑ It gives members an opportunity to prepare for the meeting, well in advance
- ❑ By implication, it excludes all subjects other than those appearing in it. This is important if the meeting is to devote its energies to matters scheduled for discussion.

Occasionally, an agenda can help a person decide whether or not to attend a meeting, if there could be such an option. The format of an agenda varies widely. At its simplest, it could be presented as follows:

- ❑ Opening and Welcome
- ❑ Attendance Register
- ❑ Apologies

- Reading of previous minutes
- Matters arising from the minutes
- Business of the meeting
  1. Salary reviews
  2. Budget
  3. Performance Evaluation
  4. Closure

The agenda may also be a comprehensive bulky document, which gives a history of each item to be discussed, and indicating which points from the given history are scheduled for discussion. This type of agenda is typical of bureaucratic organisations where the committee system is used extensively.

### *Preparation of Minutes*

The English Oxford Dictionary defines minutes as "a brief summary of proceedings at a meeting". Some other well-educated people have a mistaken concept of what the minutes are supposed to entail. It is not unusual to hear a person complain that what he/she said at the previous meeting has not been reflected in the minutes.

The minutes cannot record trivia, although the speaker may have difficulty seeing his/her contribution as trivial. The omission in the record of decisions taken at the meeting, or substantial arguments against a proposal submitted at a meeting may constitute enough ground to complain that minutes are incomplete. According to Britzius (1982:100):

*... minutes are normally confined to a record of decisions taken at meetings, with a minimum of explanation included. When a full record of the discussions taking place at the meeting is required, the secretary must prepare a separate report, setting out, in appropriate detail, the various points made by different speakers, and giving a fair reflection of the different points of views expressed.*

In recording minutes, no attempt is made to record everything that might have been said at the meeting. However, great care must be taken, first, to formulate motions and resolutions with some precise wording, and, secondly, to record the exact wording. Other discussions are merely summarized.

In modern times extensive use is made of tape recorders, and special recording equipment during meetings. When this is done, it is not intended to transcribe onto minutes the entire proceedings *verbatim*. Instead, the recording is used to compile a summary in the form of minutes.

As a method of decision-making, the use of committee meetings has certain distinct disadvantages. Matters requiring prompt decisions are unduly delayed because meetings cannot be convened instantly. To obviate this problem, many issues are not supposed to be decided by a committee. A somewhat more risky practice is to allow certain executives the latitude to take actions, which must be ratified by the committee at a later stage.

The running of meetings is a costly exercise, both in terms of time and money. The bigger the committee, the greater the expense, since the total time given up for meetings increases proportionally with the number of members serving on the committee. The time spent on a single meeting includes preparation (which may take several hours, or even days), travelling times, the time of the actual proceedings, as well as the time taken to travel back.

Then, there are direct travelling costs. Depending on the venue of the meeting, there may be costs for meals, and for accommodation. Deverell (1985:105) sums up the question of costs by observing that the committee .... "can be an expensive form of administrative technique".

In practice, it is not possible to avoid the intrusion of organisational politics in committees. As if the distraction of internal politics was not enough, some members even engage in national politics. Any form of politics detracts from the quality of committee discussions. Closely related to this problem is one of personalities. Derevell (1985:105) argues that a dominant character seriously undermines effectiveness of committees, be it a chairperson, ordinary member or secretary:

*One member, more especially the chairperson, or secretary, may dominate a committee, or it may delegate to its permanent officers executive action between meetings. The committee will cease to be decisive where there is a lack of cohesion and harmony, divided opinion and personal antagonisms. In the face of unresolved differences among its members it may be completely inhibited from action.*

In serious and properly focused business life and, indeed, elsewhere, meetings play an important role in the smooth running of organisations. Many traditions have been entrenched in the manner and style of conducting meetings. Where there is a blatant departure from these traditions, some members may feel aggrieved, and seek redress from the due process of the law.

From business and administrative viewpoints, properly planned and conducted meetings can be used with maximum effect in enhancing the quality of decisions, and ensuring successful implementation of those decisions. There are, however, several problems associated with meetings and committees. Officials who organize meetings must constantly grapple with these problems, and make a concerted effort to minimize their effect.

**"You don't have to be ill to get better"**

## ***Examples of Thesis and/or Dissertation***

- Title Page
- Preface and Acknowledgement
- Table of Contents
- List of Tables
- List of Figures

## **Body of the Paper**

### ***Chapter 1:*** Introduction

- Review of previous research
- Pertinent opinion
- Summary of the state of the art

### ***Chapter 2:*** Method

- Description of subjects
- Research design and procedures
- Description of measures employed

### ***Chapter 3:*** Findings

- Analytic technique
- Description of findings pertinent to each hypothesis, objective or question
- Other findings

### ***Chapter 4:*** Summary and discussion

- Summary of research problem, method and findings
- Conclusions
- Implications

## Reference Material

- Bibliography
- Appendix
- Index

## ***Research and research article evaluation criteria sheet***

### Problem

- Is there a statement of the problem?
- Is the problem researchable?



- Is background information on the problem discussed?
- Is the educational significance of the problem discussed?
- Does the problem statement indicate the variables of interest and the specific relationship between those variables which were investigated?
- When necessary, are variables directly or indirectly operationally defined?

#### Review of related literature

- Is the review comprehensive?
- Are all references cited relevant to the problem under investigation?
- Are the sources mostly primary or were a number of secondary sources cited?
- Have references been critically analysed and the result of various studies compared and contrasted or is the review basically a series of abstracts or annotations?
- Is the review well organised? Does it logically flow in such a way that the references least related to the problem are discussed first and the most related references are discussed last?
- Does the review conclude with a brief summary of the literature and its implications for the problem investigated?
- Do the implications discussed form an imperial or theoretical rationale for the hypotheses which follow?

#### Hypothesis

- ❖ Are specific questions to be answered listed or specific hypotheses to be tested stated?
- ❖ Does each hypothesis state an expected relationship or difference between two variables?
- ❖ If necessary, are variables directly or operationally defined?
- ❖ Is each hypothesis testable?

#### Instruments

- Are the size and major characteristics of the population studied described?
- Was the entire population studied?
- Was a sample selected?
- Is the method of selecting a sample clearly described?
- Is the method of sample selection described one that is likely to result in a representative, unbiased sample?
- Were volunteers used?
- Are the size and major characteristics of the sample described?
- Does the sample size meet the suggested guideline for minimum sample size appropriate for the method of research represented?
- Is a rationale given for selection of the instrument used?

- ❑ Is each instrument described in terms of purpose and content?
- ❑ Are the instruments appropriate for measuring the intended variables?
- ❑ If an instrument was developed specifically for the study, are procedures involved in its development and validation described?
- ❑ Is evidence presented which indicates that each instrument is appropriate for the sample under study?
- ❑ Is instrument validity discussed and coefficients given if appropriate?
- ❑ Is reliability discussed in terms of type and size of reliability coefficients?
- ❑ If appropriate, are subtest reliabilities given?
- ❑ If an instrument was specifically developed for the study, are administration, scoring and interpretation procedures fully described?

#### Design and Procedure

- ❖ Is the design appropriate for testing the hypotheses of the study?
- ❖ Are procedures described in sufficient detail to permit them to be replicated by another researcher?
- ❖ Was a pilot study conducted?
- ❖ If a pilot study was conducted, are its execution and results described, as well as its impact on the subsequent study?

#### Results

- Are appropriate descriptive statistics presented?
- Was the probability level at which the results of tests of significance were evaluated, specified in advance of data analysis?
- If parametric tests were used, is there any evidence that one or more of the required assumptions were greatly violated?
- Are the tests of significance described appropriately, given the hypothesis and design of the tests?
- Was every hypothesis tested?
- Are the tests of significance interpreted using the appropriate degrees of freedom?
- Are the results clearly presented?
- Are the tables and figures (if any) well organised and easy to understand?
- Are the data in each table and figure described in the text?

#### Conclusion and recommendation

- ✓ Is each result discussed in terms of the original hypothesis to which it relates?
- ✓ Is each result discussed in terms of its agreement or disagreement with previous results obtained by researchers in other studies?
- ✓ Are generalisations made that are not warranted by the results?
- ✓ Are the possible effects of uncontrolled variables on the results discussed?

- ✓ Are theoretical and practical implications of the findings discussed?
- ✓ Are recommendations for future action made?
- ✓ Are recommendations for future research made?

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## **About the Author**

Chris Mkhize is currently CEO of a non-profit organisation: the Uthungulu Community Foundation. The organisation is based in Richards Bay, on the KwaZulu-Natal North Coast, South Africa. Chris joined the organisation after having accumulated vast experiences working with a significant number of private and public sector organisations.

At present Chris serves on numerous independent boards of non-profit and development organisations. Among others, are the Business Against Crime (BAC), and FirstRand Foundation.

As a consultant on community-driven development, organisation development, and management and administration, Chris draws heavily on years of experiences in public and private sector organisations, including numerous visits to overseas countries. He holds three degrees with the University of South Africa (UNISA). Chris is also a political commentator and proven newspaper columnist for one of his local community newspapers.

The book you are holding is the outcome of a unique assessment of opportunities Chris is able to grab from local communities, to analyse and share with others. Chris is also a student of political sciences, an analyst and a proven social researcher. He also provides mentorship services to numerous novice and aspirant writers on creative and dramatic writing.

(Outside Page)

This publication has been written primarily to assist research student who may find it not easy to write and produce academically accepted and professional research reports. Experienced student researcher will find the publication one of their useful tools in making students enjoy writing research papers. It is the author's hope that research students will find this publication user-friendly in introducing the reader to fundamental aspects of social research.

The publication, among other things, covers the nature of scientific knowledge, reasons for carrying out research and the importance of following and understanding research methods, to produce scientifically valid and reliable knowledge. Above all, the publication complements rather than try and lay claims to replacing publications on the subject. As an introductory publication on the subject, the reader is encouraged to also consult other sources for broader views on the subject.