

Pathways Plus

Strategic Management and Leadership

Level 7

Unit 7005V1

Conducting a Strategic Management Project

Pathways Plus

Unit 7005V1: Conducting a Strategic Management Project

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SAMPLE MATERIAL

About Pathways Plus

Development guides

There are 15 development guides in the *Pathways Plus* series to cover the 17 units of the qualifications at CMI Level 7: Strategic Management and Leadership.

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- 7004V1 Strategic information management
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How to use the development guide

The development guides provide a critical commentary to the ideas of writers and thinkers in the management and leadership field. They offer opportunities for you to investigate and apply these ideas within your working environment and job role.

Structure

Each guide is divided into sections that together cover the knowledge and understanding required for the equivalent unit or units of the Chartered Management Institute Level 7 Strategic Management and Leadership qualifications.

Each section starts with a clear set of objectives linked to the learning outcomes of the qualification. You don't have to complete the sections in the order they appear in the guide (the mind map at the beginning of each guide will help you decide which sections and topics are of particular need or interest) but you should try to cover all sections if you are aiming for a full diploma qualification.

Activities

Throughout the guides there are activities for you to complete. These activities are designed to help you reflect on your own situation and apply your research to your organisation. Space and tables are provided within the activities for you to enter your own thoughts or findings, but in some cases you may choose to copy out the table or make notes in a separate notebook.

Timings

Timings are suggested for each activity to give you a rough idea of how long you should devote to them. They're not hard and fast, and you must decide whether you will benefit from spending longer on some activities than stated.

SR

Supporting resources

The text of the guides is designed to provide you with an introduction to the subject and a commentary on some of the key issues, models and thinkers in the field. The activities are there to help provide a framework for your thinking. A key component of *Pathways Plus* (*Pathways Plus* because the development guides work together with the online supporting resources to provide an overall learning journey) is the list of references given throughout the text and at the end of each topic guiding you to the most appropriate supporting resources for you to explore yourself. These are marked with the symbol SR (as shown above).

You have the opportunity to select those resources that are of most interest or relevance to you and to use them as a source of guided research on a particular topic. Many of the supporting resources are immediately available by logging into CMI's online

management and leadership portal, ManagementDirect (MDir) (<http://mde.managers.org.uk/members>), or where you work for an organisation that subscribes to this service use the specific link for your organisation ([http://mde.managers.org.uk/\(organisation name\)](http://mde.managers.org.uk/(organisation name))). These resources are marked in the reference list at the end of each topic with P+ standing for *Pathways Plus*. Once logged into ManagementDirect click on More.... on the navigation bar and select Senior Manager Resources, this will take you straight to the list of supporting resources as listed in the *Pathways Plus* topics. When there, click on the title of your development guide, the section and the topic you're interested in and then click straight to the article, video, checklist, extract or report that you want to find.

P+

For those resources that are not available through the CMI site, you will be directed to other sources (some also online) to reach what you need.

Preparing for assessment

Further information on assessment is available in the Student Guide produced as part of the *Pathways Plus* series. If you have any further questions about assessment procedures, it's important that you resolve these with your tutor or centre coordinator as soon as possible.

Further reading

Suggestions for further reading and links to management information are available via ManagementDirect through the Study Support section of the Institute's website at <http://mde.managers.org.uk/members>. Alternatively, email ask@managers.org.uk or telephone 01536 207400. You will also find titles for further reading in the Bibliography at the end of this workbook.

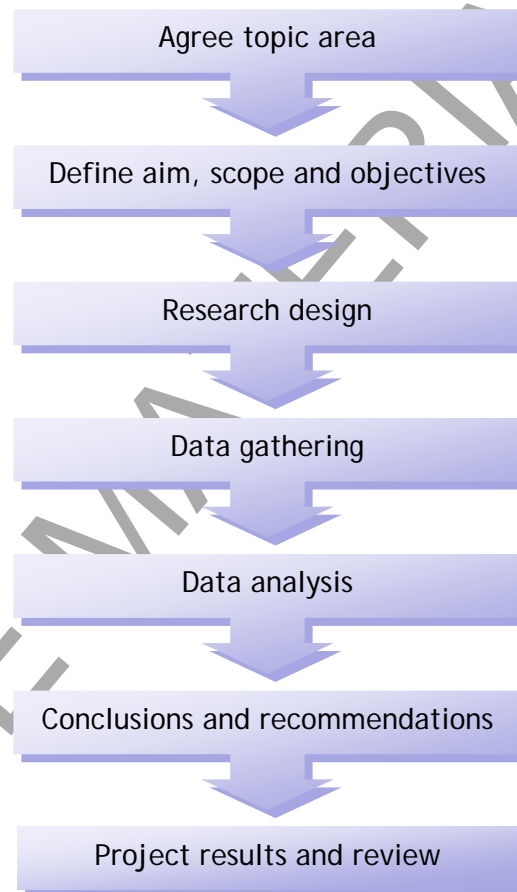
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SAMPLE MATERIAL

Introduction

Welcome to this development guide on conducting a strategic management project. This guide is about identifying, researching and producing the results of an investigative project and evaluating its impact.

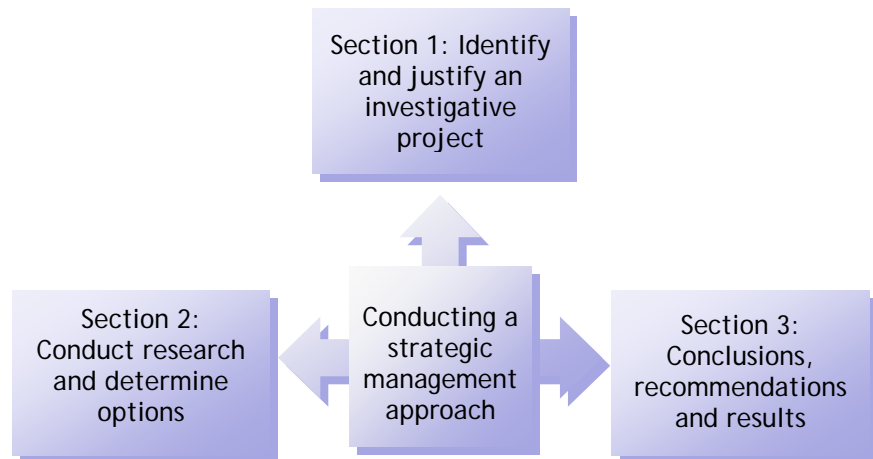
The approach used is a management-focused one which can be summarised by the following diagram.



The sections in the guide are aligned to the steps in the above process. They are designed to provide an overview of the tools and techniques required to undertake an investigative research project and to provide guidance and pointers to best practice ideas in this area.

This development guide has links to Development Guide 7009V1 *Strategic Project Management*. It complements the learning in 7009V1 which focuses more on strategic project management tools and techniques. In this guide there's also more focus on researching and investigating as opposed to planning and implementing projects, which is the focus of 7009V1.

Development guide mind map



Assessment

If you are studying for the Level 7 in Strategic Management and Leadership qualifications you will be assessed by your approved centre on your knowledge and understanding of the following learning outcomes:

Unit 7005V1:

- Be able to identify and justify a strategic investigative project
- Be able to conduct research and synthesise data to produce options that support the project aims
- Be able to draw conclusions and make recommendations that achieve the project aim
- Be able to develop and review the results of the investigative project

Section 1 Identify and justify an investigative project

Introduction

This section will help you consider a topic area for your investigative research project and then go on to develop a project aim, scope and objectives. From these you'll then explore how to design a project research methodology by developing some research questions and hypotheses and carrying out a literature review. You'll use this to carry out research design and identify suitable techniques for the investigative project.

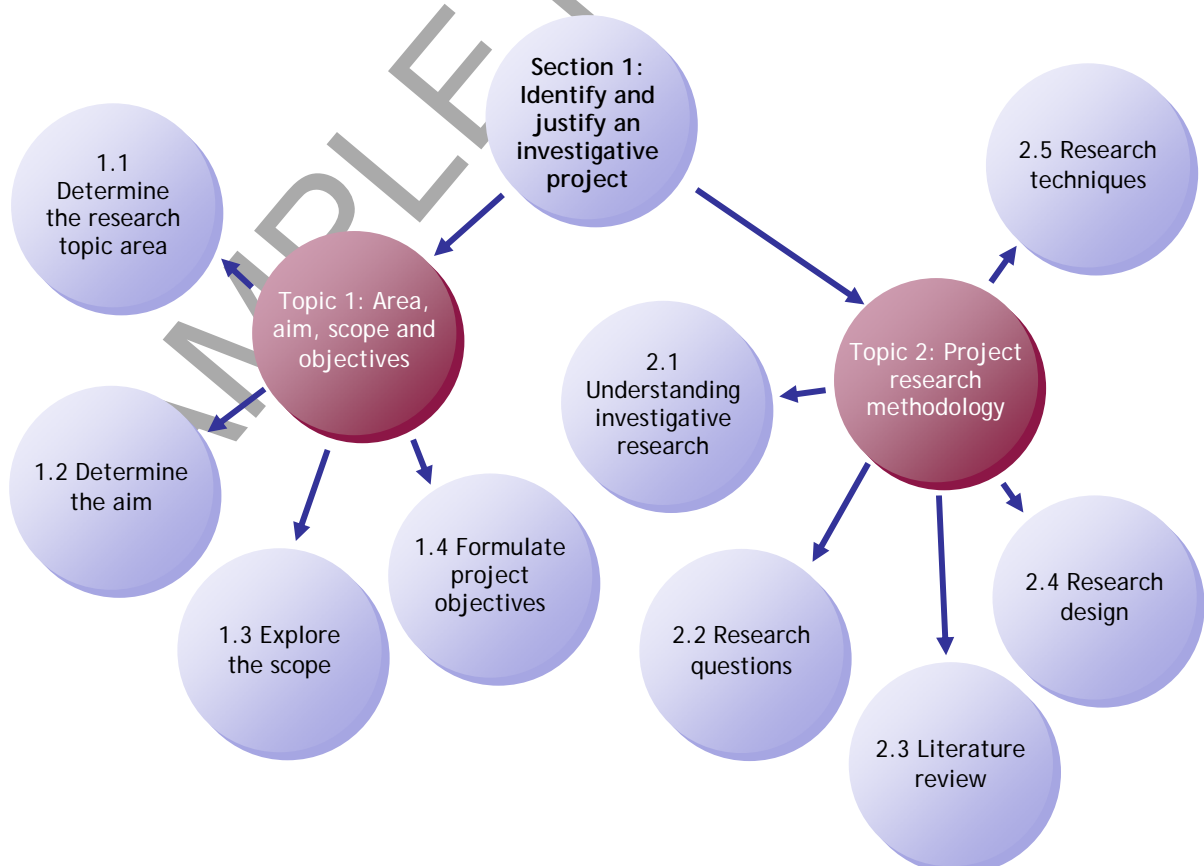
Learning outcomes

This section covers the following learning outcome:

7005V1.1 Be able to identify and justify a strategic investigative project.

Section mind map

There are two topics in this section as shown below. Check the subjects within each one and then continue with the areas you need to explore.



Topic 1: Area, aim, scope and objectives

Introduction

This topic will help you define the topic area for your investigative research project. It will help you consider potential sources of ideas for the topic area and consider the characteristics of good topic areas.

It then moves on to considering the aim and purpose of the investigative research project and helps you explore these in more detail. It also explores the scope of the project and emphasises the value in defining this.

The topic concludes by looking at what you need to consider when defining objectives for the investigative research project.

1.1 Determine the topic area

The topic area that you choose should have a strategic implication. It may be that you focus on a particular area of strategic management, possibly aligned to a particular unit of this programme, such as Unit 7004V1 *Strategic information management*. It may be that you take a broader perspective and encompass two or more units, such as Unit 7002V1 *Developing performance management strategies* and Unit 7003V1 *Financial management*. It may even be that you consider a topic area that addresses all five of the core units of the Level 7 Diploma in Strategic Management and Leadership.

As a starting point, respond to the following questions:

- Does it pose questions about strategic management and leadership?
- Is it researchable?
- Can I apply theories and concepts, tools and techniques learned studying other Level 7 units?
- Are there significant questions that need to be answered?
- Will it be feasible and practical for me to obtain answers in the time available?
- Will the results be interesting and of value to stakeholders?

Sources of research topics

Gill and Johnson suggest that topic areas for research topics may be derived from a number of sources:

- Part-time management students often identify topics from within their work area – this is often prompted by or agreed with their superiors.
- Articles in professional journals – these often take the form of an assertion which could be tested by undertaking research from practitioners.

SR 3

- Groups of managers of professional bodies such as a local branch of the Chartered Management Institute – these can be a source of ideas and access to research them.
- Consultancy projects – especially where research questions have surfaced as a result of the consultancy work carried out.

Characteristics of good research topics

Gill and Johnson go on to identify some characteristics of good research topics. These are summarised below.

Access	Can you gain access to the data needed to carry out the investigative research?
Achievable in the time available	Will you be able to plan and carry out the work in the time available? A research plan can help with this.
Symmetry of potential outcomes	What will the outcomes be? This reduces risk by ensuring any findings from the work will deliver some value.
Capabilities and interest	Is this research topic something that matches existing capabilities and interests? If so, it will be easier to carry out. If not, it might be of value for personal development but might impact on time and quality.
Value and scope of the research	What value will it deliver and for whom? It may be that the primary focus is to pass an assessment, but it should also deliver value for the client organisation or sponsor and also personal value for the person undertaking the research.

1.2 Determine the aim of the research

SR 4

In establishing the aim of the research, Van der Velde, Jansen and Anderson suggest that you make the following clear:

- why you're doing the research
- what you want to achieve
- who you want to achieve this for.

They draw a distinction between a theoretical aim, which contributes to scientific knowledge, such as testing a theory about absenteeism, and a practical aim, such as helping to solve a problem by developing an instrument to measure the tendency of employees to be absent.

Activity

Activity 1.2a

1 hour

Consider your own investigative research project. How would you define the aim? Apply the three questions Van der Velde et al suggest you ask? How clear are your answers? Discuss the results with a colleague and make notes below.

The purpose of a research project

SR 1

An alternative to defining the aim of the research project is proposed by Jankowicz. He talks about the purpose of a research project and suggests that it's particularly applicable to students who are studying for a management qualification and have to undertake an investigative project.

He defines the purpose of such a project as being an opportunity to apply the concepts and techniques acquired during the programme in a management practitioner environment. This will be in order to complete the formal learning experience and also be of use to the sponsor.

He goes on to identify two kinds of experience gained by this process. The experience of time (a placement) spent in a non-academic occupational situation with a partially academic task to complete, together with the experience of a task (doing the project) which simulates important aspects of a manager's job.

Jankowicz makes a distinction between the purpose of this kind of research and the 'purer' academic research for research-based Masters and PhD qualifications, where the focus is on adding to the body of knowledge in the area.

He argues that successful in-company, practitioner-based projects which form part of taught management programmes (such as this Level 7 unit) should not have the same purpose as a research-based degree. This project will be less about adding to the body of knowledge and more about helping to solve organisational problems and improving performance.

SR 2

Hussey and Hussey in their book 'Business Research' propose a practical list of options for the purpose of business-style research:

- To review and synthesise existing knowledge.
- To investigate some existing situation or problem.
- To provide solutions to a problem.
- To explore and analyse more general issues.
- To construct or create a new procedure or system.
- To explain a new phenomenon.
- To generate new knowledge.
- A combination of any of the above.

They suggest that research is purposeful as it's focused on achieving an outcome which could take many forms. For this project, you could be asked to produce an assignment or a more in-depth project report or a presentation for your sponsor. In this context your sponsor could be your organisation or someone within it that is a key stakeholder in the project's outcomes.

1.3 Explore the scope

At this stage it would be helpful to consider whether your investigative project topic has sufficient scope:

- Will it allow me to meet all the objectives of the unit? You should check any assessment criteria to ensure your project will meet these.
- Does it pose enough challenges in investigating the problem? It should stretch your capabilities without becoming a burden.
- Does it contain enough complexity and uncertainty? There's little point researching a topic that you know all the answers for before you start!

You might want to consider the scope in terms of difficulty and challenge versus risk and reward. The table below should prompt your thinking in this respect.

Difficulty/challenge	Potential reward/risk
<i>High degree of difficulty</i> More challenge in terms of research and investigation	<i>Higher potential reward in terms of outcomes</i> Higher risk of achieving these
<i>Lower degree of difficulty</i> Less challenge in terms of research and investigation	<i>Lower reward in terms of outcomes</i> Lower risk of achieving these

Some common questions regarding the size of the project are set out in the table below.

Question	Comment
Is it big enough?	Look for an area that provides a wide range of options. This will help demonstrate your critical analysis skills. Watch out for prescriptions for solutions to problems which may lead you to a single line of research and investigation approach.
Is it small enough?	If you choose a more general area of study, home in on a smaller part of it or your project may lack focus or be too superficial to meet assessment criteria.

The big versus small question means that you need a sufficiently large topic area to be able to apply current or previous learning and demonstrate your analytical abilities. But you also need a focussed research topic within it, so that you can demonstrate your ability to apply appropriate research techniques and interpret the results.

If your topic area now seems too narrow or limited, could you broaden it? Could you strengthen the research or trial element in some way? Is there an extra dimension such as another unit you could add?

You can conduct an initial literature search of the subject area and highlight an additional angle or related problem. Could you duplicate the research in another organisation and carry out a compare and contrast approach?

Area, field, aspect approach



Jankowicz proposes a helpful technique for defining the scope of an investigative research project. He suggests using a classification system where ideas on the topic are explored in the following way.

Area	This is the topic's broad field of study. It could be the title of one of the units of the programme or a key strategic management function such as <i>Strategic information management</i> (Unit 7004V1).
Field	This is the component of the area. It represents a sub-discipline or a theme within a business function, such as 'strategic decision-making'.
Aspect	This is a detailed facet of a field, such as 'analysis of information to identify patterns and trends'.

This process can be helpful in clarifying what will be addressed in the investigative research project and helps you formulate objectives, the subject of which will be addressed next.

1.4 Formulate project objectives

Having considered the investigative research project topic area and having examined the project aim, purpose and scope, it will be helpful at this stage to drill down a bit further and identify what the outcomes of the project will be.

This is a very valuable part of the process as it will make it clear to you what the project will deliver. This makes it easier to communicate to sponsors and other stakeholders and can be helpful in any communications you may have with your tutor or mentor.

Four categories of project objectives



Jankowicz suggests there are four ways to classify these objectives.

Objective	Comment
Acquisition and practice of concepts and techniques	It may be that you formulate objectives that relate to strategic management concepts and techniques. The concepts and techniques may be specific to the subject area or might relate to the investigative research process. These objectives may be assessed via learning outcomes or assessment criteria, for example, for the Level 7 qualification in Strategic management and leadership.
The management environment	For this level the strategic management environment is relevant. It may be that you formulate objectives that will contribute to gaining experience of the management environment you're operating in. By conducting this investigative research project you'll be adding to and building on this experience.
The personal learning experience	You may formulate objectives that focus on your personal learning from the experience of conducting the investigative research process. Jankowicz suggests these might fall into three areas: technical skills, social and interpersonal skills and personal pressures which you may need to overcome.
The contribution to the organisation	Your investigative research project may have some interest to and support from a sponsor organisation. If that's the case, it would be helpful to include some objectives that could provide beneficial outcomes for them.

Activity

Activity 1.4a

1 hour

Using Jankowicz's four-category approach formulate some objectives for your investigative research project.

Discuss these with a colleague. How well were they understood? Based on this feedback you might like to revisit the objectives and improve them.

SR

Supporting resources

Books

- 1 Jankowicz, D., (1995), *Business Research Projects*, Chapman and Hall – a good fundamental textbook on management research
- 2 Hussey, J., and Hussey, R., (1997), *Business Research*, MacMillan – helpful for exploring management research
- 3 Gill, J., and Johnson, P., (1997) *Research Methods for Managers*, 2nd edition, Paul Chapman Publishing Ltd – another fundamental textbook
- 4 Van der Velde, M., Jansen P., and Anderson, N., (2004), *Guide to Management Research Methods*, Blackwell Publishing – provides a good overview of research methods