# Unit 10: Managing Your Research Project

## Overview

We have reached the end of LDRS 697. In this unit, you will spend time thinking about how you will sustain your action research project, examine key elements that you need to be aware of while managing your project and create a project schedule outlining the details you need to complete your project on time. Finally, you will build a community of shared practice—a peer support group where you regularly share your progress, ask questions, and encourage each other in your research..

## Topics

This unit is divided into the following topics:

1. Sustaining Your Work as a New Researcher
2. Project Management

## Learning Outcomes

When you have completed this unit, you should be able to:

* Explain how you will sustain your own work.
* Reflect on key elements of project management.
* Create a project schedule that will help you complete your research project on time.

## Activity Checklist

Here is a checklist of learning activities you will benefit from in completing this unit. You may find it useful for planning your work.

**Activity 10.1:** Read a chapter and reflect on questions in your learning journal.

**Activity 10.2:** Read a chapter and reflect on questions in your learning journal.

**Activity 10.3:** Create a project schedule.

**Assessment:** Complete the discussion post and review colleagues project schedules.

## Resources

Here are the resources you will need to complete this unit.

* Parsons, J., Hewson, K., Adrian, L., & Day, N. (2013). *Engaging in Action Research: A Practical Guide to Teacher-Conducted Research for Educators and School Leaders*. Brush Education Inc.
* Other online resources will be provided in the unit.

## Topic 1: Sustaining Your Work as New Researcher

Now is the time to get started with your action research project. Remember, this is not a huge project and it is best to start small. You are examining something that is of interest to you and will help you move forward with your plans as a leader.

Typically, when you read about action research, you will read that advocates usually speak in terms of “cycles.”What they mean is that action research is “recursive” and “iterative.” Don’t be confused by these terms. They simply mean that action researchers are interested in problem solving. That means that they choose something they wish to improve, and then they create a plan to seek improvement.

The cycles are generally titled something like (a) planning, (b) doing, and (c) reflecting. It’s simple really. You have to first figure out what the problem is and what you believe the best way to solve it will be. Second, you engage in the action of collecting “data” (or information) that you best believe will help you solve your problem. Finally – although not really finally – you consider what you have done and how you will determine if you have, in fact, helped to solve the problem.

However, since the problem you care about solving is valuable to you, your research probably will not end there. In other words, you might engage in another action-research cycle to see if things have improved and determine further areas of exploration.

The point is to assess your actions, learn from your research, and apply what you have learned to achieve a progressively better outcome. Sometimes you will find that you need to take a step backward or sideways to learn how to move forward. There is no perfect number of iterations any one action research project might take because, as you know from life, problems seem eternal. You might solve one, but another will soon take its place.

Note that the goal of your work is to both (a) help you engage in solving a problem you care about and (b) helping you become more powerful problem solvers in general. For your work at TWU, you will only work to solve one small part of a problem you care about – or else you would never graduate!

In this unit, you will engage in a plan for solving one small piece of what probably is a much larger problem. Because there might be a number of obstacles that you will experience while you are conducting your research project, it is best to create, revisit, or revise a project schedule often so that you can stay on track. When you are doing research, things seldom go as you’ve planned.

That said, a map of your planned activities and dates will help you from the first steps to the final stages of sharing your work with others. You will learn about obstacles and strategies to overcome them in the following learning activity readings.

Be prepared that what you have planned might not work exactly how you have planned it, but it will work – sometimes much better than you thought at first. What we mean by that is that you will probably learn more and differently than you thought you would.

## Learning Activity 10.1: Read two chapters and Reflect

For this learning activity, read chapter 6: From Plan to Action **and** chapter 11: Pacing Yourself in Engaging in Action Research by Parsons et al. (2013).

Next, reflect on the following questions in your e-Portfolio:

* In your past, have you waited for others to solve problems or would you have stepped up to solve a difficult problem? Why? What happened?
* Have you changed the way you look at problems now then you did at the beginning of this course?
* Do you see yourself as a problem solver? For you to become the best problem solver you can be, what skills or attitudes do you need to work on?
* When you created your action plan, what concerns were there?
* Based on the needs identified in chapter 11, what do you think is going to be most important strategy to help you stay on track?
* As you self-assess (and none of us have all the skills we need), what potential obstacles might you face during your project? How will you solve them?

*The learning activities in this course are ungraded, unless specified. They are designed to help you succeed in your assignments in this course, so you are strongly encouraged to complete them.*

## Topic 2: Project Management

Parsons et al. write, “Figuring out what to do and when to do it is key to project management. In any project, some activities might be done at the same time; others must be done in a sequence. It is wise to know which activities are which, and creating a schedule is part of sorting this out” (2013, p.80).

You have already started your research project by asking a good question, conducting a literature review, and planning your methods. Now you will move into data collection, analysis, and a final report. The next steps in this research project may present some challenges so it is important to have a clear schedule of necessary activities so you can complete your project in time to graduate from MA Lead.

Project management is as simple as creating a logical and manageable plan of action so you can successfully complete your research. This includes both (a) the steps you will take and (b) the order and dates you plan to take them. When things do not go as planned along the way, consider how will you address changes in your plan without being frustrated or quitting. In other words, make your best, most well-organized plan and then get used to happily flying by the seat of your pants as you make it happen.

If your experiences are like ours, the action research process will be both difficult and rewarding. You will grow so much that you might not even recognize yourself when you are finished, so be sure to document your thoughts, self-discoveries, and new understandings throughout your learning journey.

## Learning Activity 10.2: Read and Reflect on Project Management.

Begin this learning activity by reading Chapter 7: Managing your Research Project from the Parsons et al., (2013) textbook.

Now it is time to think about creating a project management schedule to help you stay on track. Begin by answering the following questions in your reflective learning journal. These questions are from p. 77 in the Parsons et al., (2013) textbook:

* Why you are undertaking this project?
* What impact do you expect the project to have?
* What will your project produce as a final product?
* What are the major milestones of the project?
* When do you expect to reach them?
* Who will receive updates and have input as the project proceeds (e.g., stakeholders, team members)?
* How will this communication take place?
* What resources and funds do you need to complete your project?
* Who are your major stakeholders?
* Who should be “in the know” about your research project and provide insight as your research project proceeds?
* Who has skills that you need?
* Who has resources you need?

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## Learning Activity 10.3: Create a Project Management Schedule

For this learning activity you will follow the steps outlined in chapter 7: Managing Your Project, beginning on p. 80 (Parsons et al., 2013). Write your responses to these questions in your learning journal:

Note to Production: Please include some suggested physical resources and digital platforms for creating the project management schedule? e.g. posterboard, flowchart, spreadsheet, word doc, Canva, etc. It would be good to include some visual examples as well.

1. Write down the research project’s major objective. (One sentence, starting with the phrase “My project’s major objective is to …..)

2. Write down how the research project attends to this objective. (Two sentences.)

3. Divide the research project into its major steps. Write each step on a separate piece of paper, and write what needs to be done to complete each step. (Two sentences for each step.)

* Mark each step with a different colour (you could use highlighters or sticky dots).
* Sequence the major steps (by shuffling the papers). This will be a rough sequence.
* Break down each major step into sub-steps.
* Write down what you need to do to complete each substep. (Use outline form, and use separate pieces of paper for each substep. Consider what resources and people you need to muster and assign as part of creating substeps.)
* Mark each substep with the colour of its organizing major step.
* Add a “time budget” to each substep (estimate how long each substep will take).
* Sequence the substeps within each major step, answering the question: “What has to be done before the next substep can happen?”
* Review the sequence. Consider the following questions, and reshuffle as necessary:
  + With all the substeps spelled out, do some of them fit more logically in a different part of the sequence? – Could some parts of the sequence be done concurrently?
  + Review the sequence again to consider (if you have not done this already) where to schedule review points with your team and evaluation points with formal reviewers. Add these into the sequence. (Note that this might generate new substeps about preparing for review and evaluation points.)

4. Put the sequence on a timeline with dates, paying attention to the time you budgeted for each substep. Write this timeline out. Use the colours to identify when you are working on parts of each major step, as necessary.

5. Share your draft schedule with a supportive colleague. Listen to the insights this colleague brings to your work. Specifically, take the plan you have created and talk it through it with a colleague/critical friend. Ask your colleague/critical friend these questions. (a) Is there anything that doesn’t make sense to you? (b) Do you understand (can you see) every step I have outlined? and, (c) If it were you, what would you do differently?

6. Commit to building a community of shared practice. That is, find a group of people (why not other students in this same program) and build a support group where you regularly share what you’ve done as you are engaging in the doing of it. This helps you, but it also helps your colleagues. Plus, and even more important, support helps you complete your work. Feel free to reach out to your MA Lead colleagues and determine ways to regularly connect and engage with each other (e.g. email, WhatsApp, Zoom).

Note: To be transparent, one reason for changing the way TWU works with its graduate students is because we have come to believe that cohort-based graduate work is both a learning experience and encourages a much superior completion rate. This model of study will help you finish your work on time.

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## Summary

In this final unit of 697, you thought about how you will sustain your action research project, examined key elements for managing your research project, and created a schedule that will help you complete your project on time. Finally, you built a community of shared practice, a support group with your colleagues where you regularly share your progress, ask questions, and encourage each other. Please continue to share your journey with your colleagues as you exit LDRS 697 and re-engage in LDRS 698. It has been a pleasure to be with you on this journey and we look forward to working with you again in LDRS 698.

## Assessment

### Discussion Post and Response:

After completing this unit, including the learning activities, you are asked to share the draft schedule with your classmates. Share this schedule in a discussion post for your colleagues. You can create a flow chart that shows your schedule visually, or you can create a table with text. The information that you want to share includes:

1. What is the research project’s major objective (two sentences)?

2. How does the research project attend to this objective (two sentences)?

3. Show each step that you will take to complete the project and write what needs to be done to complete each step. (Two sentences for each step.)

4. Put the sequence on a timeline with dates, paying attention to the time you budgeted for each step.

Next, review at least two different colleagues project schedules and provide them with feedback on their schedules. Specifically, ask the following questions in your review from Parsons et al. (2013, p.82):

1. Does the project make sense to someone outside your research? For example, can another leader understand what the research project does and why this research project should be undertaken?

2. Has the research project been discussed in ways that allow supporters to have input? (Note that we say supporters. We know there are always naysayers and, although their insights can be valuable, we encourage you not to let these people’s bad attitudes disrupt your research plans.)

3. Is it clear whose support or involvement is needed within the research project? Have those who need to be involved been invited to discuss the nature of their involvement?

4. Does the research project have a specific plan of action? Do others know what this plan of action is? Have they had input? Do they agree?

5. If you were part of this research project, would you be interested in planning, implementing, and managing the project?

6. Have the nuts and bolts of the project (objectives, resources, research method, schedule) been clearly communicated?

7. Are the specific steps that make up the research project outlined clearly? Would others know what should be done to complete the research project?

8. Is the research project well defined? Is it clear what data the research project seeks and how it will evaluate that data? Does the research project have a definite beginning and ending date? Are all the costs (time, resources, money) clear? Is the research project manageable? Is it clear when the research project has been completed?

## Checking your Learning

Before you move on to the next unit, you may want to check to make sure that you are able to:

* Explain how you will sustain your own work.
* Reflect on key elements of project management.
* Create a project schedule that will help you complete your research project on time.