Research Design: Proposal

- The proposal shall tell the reader:
  - What kind of knowledge do you seek?
  - Which strategies will you employ?

- Content:
  - Motivation
  - Literature review
  - Purpose of the study
  - Research questions
  - What will you do? What kind of data? How? Where (which setting)? When/how long?
  - How will you analyse the data?
  - Ethical considerations?
  - Practicalities?

Research Design: Motivation

- Why is this study important?
  - Possible replies:
    - 'This is a new phenomenon'
    - 'This is under-researched'
    - 'Previous research is ambiguous'
    - 'We don't know enough about it'
  - But how to establish such propositions?
    - Do a sound literature review
    - Learn strategies from published research papers

From John W. Creswell: Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches, 2nd ed., SAGE 2003

Link to literature (previous research)

- Three different ways to argue that the study is neccessary (based on previous research):
  - Synthesized coherence: You bring together works from different areas that you believe point to common ideas.
  - Progressive coherence: You show the joint work of a community of researchers have developed over time (and now your 'piece' is needed).
  - Non-coherence: You refer to works that study the same phenomenon, but disagree.
- Learn how to reference other works:
  - refer to support your argument
  - refer in order to exemplify
  - or to argue against authors
  - direct citations
  - different referencing styles

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(Adapted from Barrett and Walsham: Making Contributions from Interpretive Case Studies", IFIP 8.2, 2005)

Plan the research: literature review

- Do a literature review
  - identify keywords (varies between databases)
  - skim abstracts and use the relevant new keywords
  - use the available facilitites for tracing forward citations
- Are you new to the field?
  - Start with encyclopedia articles, reviews, tutorials.
- Make short summaries of central articles
  - problem area, focus of study, case, conclusion
  - use e.g. EndNote (referencing tool)

The purpose statement

- Be clear: "The purpose (intent, objective) of this study is (was, will be)…"

- Focus on a single phenomena

- Use nondirectional language and neutral words

- "A tentative definition at this time for XYZ is…"

Research questions

- Research question rather than objective (specific goals) or hypothesis (predictions that involve variables and statistical tests)

- Central question plus sub-questions (for example 1 + 3). Use 'what' or 'how' questions. ('Why' suggests cause and effect)

- The research questions should guide data gathering, i.e. serve as "working guidelines"