



# Thoughts on Designing a Research Strategy for a Capstone Product

BY

Thomas A. Lifvendahl, Ed.D.

*I much prefer that my own style [of writing] be my own, uncultivated and rude, but made to fit, as a garment, to the measure of my mind, rather than to someone else's, which may be more elegant, ambitious, and adorned, but one that, derived from a greater genius, continually slips off, unfitted to the humble proportions of my intellect.*

*Petrarch circa 1370 , Witt, In the footsteps, p. 263*

## Purpose

The Capstone is a means for you, as a student, to demonstrate literary and academic competence in solving business related problems using rigorous research techniques. It starts with the premise that you know how to pose a “doable” research question, re-search existent literature to determine what others have done on your subject before you, and design a research method for acquiring new knowledge. It is a scientific, reproducible approach to writing that provides the reader with comprehensive solutions to complex problems. Finally, it demonstrates your ability critically think. Therefore, along those lines I have the following four suggestions...

## Suggestion One

The heart of a research paper is the research QUESTION! Posit a focused question worth researching. Make sure it is composed in a way that clears your thinking of confusing information needs. Be specific. Examples of questions are:

1. How does Subject X affect the success of Subject Y?
2. What are the variables that determine profit in Company Y?

In an unpublished doctoral dissertation housed in Cardinal Stritch’s University Microfilms International Database titled *The transformational potential of the powerful positive question* by Lawrence W. Fidelus the author points out the following:

- A well-crafted question fosters “transformative, disruptive and constructive change”

- When used correctly, questions provide “constructive energy” sufficient of foster organizational change (it disrupts obstructionist “fixed beliefs”).
- Finally, the effect of a critical question demands collective change on the part of the organization studied.

Remember, it is the question that drives all research, both in defining the strategic goals sought to solve and the informational resources required to solve them.

## Suggestion Two

Determine what other academic researchers have done in the past in seeking to answer the query you posed in asking your research question. Note that I went to the UMI database to help me determine what other researchers did when asked how to ask a question on questioning. This is called a “meta” question (questioning questioning).

In many cases you will find that another researcher was interested in your subject and wrote a comprehensive, peer reviewed thesis that superseded your work. Many students then ask me “If someone else has done the same research why should I?” Well guess what? They too discover the same phenomenon when they did their research.

The answer is that their findings will not be your findings because the organization you wish to improve is not the organization they studied. Their work informs your work and helps you understand the logic of their recommendations. Their study provides a trail of evidence that you can follow thus avoiding mistakes they made before you.

Importantly, their study lists resources they found that could be of use to you in your research. It suggests solutions to problems discovered in your research that could be applied to your paper.

Finally, it informs the reader that you have perused the range of academic literature in your field that supports solutions to your research question. Remember, the purpose of the literature search is to prove your expertise as an academic researcher and provide assurance to the reader that you know what you are talking about.

## Suggestion Three

Choose a research method that builds on the information found in your literature search. Remember the search for relevant literature usually reveals gaps in knowledge about the subject you’re interested in and as such guides you’re mapping the gaps to be filled. Filling those gaps again requires asking questions and the tools used by other academic researchers you found in your re-search can be used to inform your study.

It is also important to remember that there is nothing wrong in using proven research methods derived from other studies. If they used a survey that matches your needs and a method for analyzing those findings then use theirs. Just acknowledge your use by rigorously citing the other researchers work. Give credit where it is due.

## Suggestion Four

Remember your research is funneling process whereby you winnow down a broad subject into a question answerable to a 12 week period that limits time for a College of Business Capstone. The simile I use to explain this is as follows:

1. Imagine you are on the shore of Lake Michigan and skipping rocks. Lake Michigan represents the depth and breadth of knowledge you are tapping into by asking a question.
2. The question is likened to the rock you are skipping. The choice of rocks to skip determines the column of water (knowledge) touched by your query.

Thus, you are consciously seeking to exclude from your study information that lacks import or defocuses your vision of need. Focusing on the right question means that you focus on the right information. Each supports the other. Thus completing the circle: QUESTION > ANSWER> SOLUTION.

## Summary

Writing the Capstone paper for many students is a scary process. My belief is that your Capstone is a positive staged event that supports confirmation that you, the student, became the problem solver you sought to become at the beginning of your program two years ago.

Keep in mind that usually my students say that when they make their final presentation to their cohort they are proud of what they have done in 12 weeks. So will you...FORGE AHEAD!

## Reference

- Fidelus, L.W. (2002). *The transformational potential of the powerful positive question*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Benedictine University. UMI Number: 3065211
- Witt, R.G. (2000). *In the footsteps of the Ancients: The origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni, studies in Medieval and Reformation thought*. Vol. 74. Leiden: E.J. Brill.