

Marketing Research

Chapter 5 – **Problem Definition: Jump-Starting the Research Process**

LESSON 5

The Nature of Marketing Problems

Learning Objective 5.1 – The Nature of Marketing Problems

Importance of Starting with a Good Problem Definition

The description of a few helpful instruments can assist in converting the business scenario into pertinent, practical research goals. Business failures are all too frequently attributed to research when the real culprit was management's assessment of the state of the business. It's similar to translating one language into another when attempting to translate a business problem into a topic that may be investigated. Consensus is first reached on a decision statement or topic. The primary question(s) that a research user seeks to have answered are expressed in writing as a decision statement.

The phrase "problem definition" is used. Recognize that occasionally, this is truly just an opportunity search. The stages required in establishing and refining a decision statement, as well as the process of translating it into more precise research terminology, including a set of research objectives, are all referred to collectively here as the "problem definition" for simplicity's sake. The research will almost likely be detrimental or ineffective if any step of this approach fails. If it yields results that are only seen as unimportant and do not aid in decision-making, it will be meaningless. Both the squandered resources and the potential misdirection of the business make it potentially dangerous. In the end, it is challenging to identify the step in the research process that is most crucial. However, the formal definition of the issue to be addressed by the research must be done correctly in order to avoid the rest of the research process being misdirected. This is done by creating decision statements and converting them into actionable research objectives. An excellent road map is useless unless you are absolutely certain of your destination. Even if all the roads were drawn correctly, they would still not go to your desired destination. Similar to this, even the best research techniques cannot compensate for inadequate problem definition.

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Problem Complexity

Ultimately, the quality of marketing research in improving business decisions is limited by the quality of the problem definition stage. This is far from the easiest stage of the research process. Indeed, it can be the most complex.

Situation Frequency

Many commercial circumstances are cyclical. Recurring business issues are brought on by cyclical business situations. Even normal issues can arise from these ones. In these situations, it is simple to outline issues and pinpoint the categories of study that are required. Problems can occasionally be answered without further inquiry because they are so commonplace. Through a company's DSS, recurring issues can even be automatically automated. Pricing issues regularly come up. Just consider how gas prices can change when a number of stations are close to one another. The prices of one station undoubtedly impact both the sales of that station and the other stations. Similar price problems arise for businesses like those in the auto, airline, and computer industries, to mention a few. Because of how regularly these occurrences occur, dealing with them has become commonplace. Researchers know what data are required, and decision makers understand how to communicate those needs to them. In the airline sector, the majority of pricing choices are automated and based on complex demand models. The models allow for variations in travel patterns depending on the season of the year, the hour of the day, the level of competition along a certain route, and many other variables. These choices previously were supported by recurring study findings. A decision support system now just receives the data and generates a pricing schedule. The cost of flying someone from point A to point B is an interesting issue that is not taken into consideration very often when determining prices. In fact, some passengers pay fares that are significantly greater than the costs involved in bringing them to their destination, while others pay fares that are significantly lower.

Dramatic Changes

It may be simpler to characterize the issue when there is a sudden change in the corporate environment. It can be more challenging to characterize the actual choice and research problems when changes are very subtle and take place gradually. Consumer tastes frequently evolve gradually. The American diet is

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slowly changing. It can be challenging to identify trends that would have a long-term impact on a specific food industry category. It's possible that Americans are choosing lighter diets more frequently if they are gradually moving away from traditional Italian cuisine. However, it could be challenging to spot the start of such a trend and even more challenging to determine whether it's more than just a passing fad.

How Widespread are the Symptoms?

It is more challenging to combine symptoms into a meaningful problem statement the more dispersed the symptoms are. In contrast, businesses may occasionally encounter circumstances in which there are several symptoms, but they are all pointing to a single operational area. For example, a car manufacturer may display signs like a rise in complaints about how a car handles, an increase in warranty costs because of repairs, an increase in labor expenses because of inefficiency, and a decrease in performance ratings from consumer advocates like Consumer Reports. All of these signs suggest that production is most likely the source of the issue. Research questions relating to supplier-manufacturer interactions, work performance, job satisfaction, and supervisory support and performance may result from this. Although having many issues in one area might not sound very encouraging, it can be highly useful in pointing out the area that needs repair and attention the most. On the other hand, it might be quite challenging to create pertinent research questions when the issues are more prevalent. It might be more challenging to group these dispersed symptoms into one or a few related research questions if consumer complaints focused on the handling and appearance of the car and were accompanied by symptoms like consumer beliefs that gas mileage could be better and that dealerships did not have a pleasant environment

Symptom Ambiguity

Ambiguity is typically unappealing. Simply said, ambiguity makes people uneasy because of the uncertainty it introduces. Similar to this, a company situation's environmental scan may reveal a variety of symptoms that don't all seem to indicate in a certain and logical path. The problem area in this instance is still hazy, and alternate courses of action are unclear. Sales and foot traffic may increase as profitability decline in a retail establishment. They may have had lesser staff turnover, but job satisfaction was down. Additionally, there could be a number of problems with their suppliers, neither of which are obviously good or bad. In this situation, it might be quite challenging to filter through the material and arrive at a firm conclusion or set of research goals.

Learning Objective 5.2 – The Problem-Definition Process

Problems Mean Gaps

When there is a discrepancy between the existing conditions and a set of conditions that would be more desirable, a problem arises. In other words, there is a discrepancy between the current state of affairs and how they might be improved. The gap may develop in a variety of ways:

1. Business performance is subpar compared to expectations. For instance, management-set targets for sales, profitability, and margins may not be met. This sort of problem analysis is quite common. Consider all the recent releases that fall short of their intended objectives. This kind of issue would also need trend analysis. Key performance indicators are continually being watched by management. Typically, past performance serves as a precedent for setting expectations. For instance, it is typical to anticipate an annual increase in sales of a specific proportion. Management typically understands that they may have a problem on their hands when sales fall short of this expectation or, more specifically, when they fall short of sales from the prior year.
2. The actual performance of the firm is lower than the potential performance. Management must first have a general understanding of what is feasible in order to realize this gap. This might constitute a stand-alone research issue. This kind of problem-definition approach frequently includes the opportunity-seeking phase. Due to the globalization of free markets, many American and European Union businesses have redefined the maximum sales levels that can be achieved. The Civil Aviation Administration of China has loosened regulations, allowing foreign airlines access to the Chinese air transport industry. The potential market size for air travel has abruptly grown dramatically, opening up chances for expansion.
3. Business performance that is anticipated outperforms that which is actually attainable. Management occasionally has exaggerated expectations for potential performance levels—either too high or too low. Finding realistic sales prospects is a major issue with the introduction of new products. Although the proverb "90% of new products fail" may be familiar to you, how many of those failures actually had a realistic sales ceiling? In other words, was the market's potential size known to the company? In this instance, the plan rather than the result is the issue. If management had a better understanding of the whole market potential, several products that were labeled as failures may have actually been

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successes. This is demonstrated in the box above with the research snapshot. This gap can be closed by management by making decisions. Researchers provide useful information that managers might use to make decisions.

The Problem-Definition Process Steps

There are multiple interconnected processes in the problem-definition process. The lines separating each stage can occasionally be a little blurry. However, in most cases, finishing one stage leads to the next, and by the time the problem is characterized, each of these steps has been dealt with in some capacity.

1. The first stage is to comprehend the business scenario and identify the main symptoms.
2. Determine the main issue(s) from the symptoms
3. Compose a managerial decision statement and related research goals.
4. Select the analysis unit.
5. Identify the pertinent factors
6. Compose research questions or hypotheses.

Each level is covered in its own section below.

Understand the Business Decision

Gathering background data is a step in the scenario analysis process that helps managers and researchers understand the context of the decision-making process. It serves as a formal means of recording the problem-definition procedure. Exploratory research is frequently necessary to understand the situation and the state of the market.

Interview Process

In an effort to thoroughly comprehend the circumstance that has spurred a study effort, the researcher must engage in conversation with the important decision makers. The researcher should be given access to all people who have specific knowledge of or insight into this scenario because this procedure is crucial.

When asking "What are your objectives for this study?" researchers dealing with marketing managers who need the information "yesterday" frequently receive little support. However, if decision makers

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collaborate with the marketing researcher to define specific study objectives, even those with a vague notion that marketing research would be a good idea can gain greatly.

Identifying Symptoms

One of the best approaches to pinpoint the main symptoms of an issue can also be to interview important decision-makers. Remember that all issues have symptoms, just as symptoms are used to diagnose human diseases. The researcher must next delve deeper to pinpoint potential reasons of these alterations after identifying symptoms. A strategy used in interviews called probing aims to elicit longer, more detailed explanations from the conversation. Potential problem causes could be brought up in this conversation. This probing procedure will probably be quite beneficial in locating important variables that are excellent study candidates. During these interviews, one of the most crucial questions the researcher might pose is, "What has changed?" The researcher should then do further investigation to determine any probable changes' reasons. In order to ensure that no significant change has been missed, the researcher must repeat this procedure, even though it might appear tedious. The researcher should also keep an eye out for modifications to firm records, such as financial statements and operating reports. Finding out what has been said about rival companies and clients might also reveal changes.

Writing Managerial Decision Statements and Corresponding Research Objectives

Once researchers are certain of the managerial goals resulting from the research endeavor, the scenario analysis is finished. These goals are captured in decisions statements in a way that encourages various responses. Using plural nouns to describe solutions promotes the use of several solutions. In other words, it is preferable to state the "ways" in which an issue can be handled rather than the "way" in which it can be solved. In the end, research may offer proof demonstrating the efficacy of various approaches to a problem.

Determine the Unit of Analysis

The study's unit of analysis specifies who or what should supply the data, and at what level of aggregation. Researchers indicate whether they will gather information about people (such as clients, employees, and business owners), households (such as families and extended families), businesses and business units,

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departments (such as sales and finance), geographic regions, or things (such as goods and advertisements) as part of their investigations. Because many purchasing decisions are made jointly by husband and wife, the husband/wife dyad is frequently the unit of analysis rather than the person in studies of, for example, home buying. Researchers that thoroughly consider problems and use creativity frequently find that a subject can be studied at more than one level of study. Although most projects make determining the unit of analysis very simple, it is important to keep it in mind when defining the research problem.

Determine Relevant Variables

What is a Variable?

What subjects need to be researched in order to address a decision statement? By identifying important variables, researchers are able to provide an answer. Anything that varies or transforms from one situation to another is a variable. Variables can show variations in value, typically in magnitude or intensity or direction. An experimental variable is one that is used in research and is either observed or controlled. A constant is a variable's opposite. Something that doesn't change is a constant. In answering research problems, constants are useless. Since constants don't change, management isn't very interested in hearing that a factor that won't or can't be changed is the root of the issue. It can be crucial in causal research to confirm that a prospective variable is truly held constant while examining the relationship between two other variables and its causes and effects. A fictitious relationship can be disregarded in this way. To grasp how it varies from a variable at this point, however, the concept of a constant is more crucial.

Types of Variables

Types of variables can be described using a few essential phrases. Identified category membership or numerical differences can both be used to represent the variance in variables. Different words are used to explain whether a variable could be a cause or an effect. A continuous variable is one that has a range of possible values that each represent a certain numerical amount. A characteristic that is typically quantified by numbers is consumer attitude toward various airlines, with higher numbers suggesting a more positive attitude than lower numbers. This method allows for numerical scoring of all aspect of airline services, including safety, seat comfort, and baggage management. Some common business measures that depict continuous variables are sales volume, profitability, and margin. A categorical

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variable is one that identifies group membership. Classificatory variables and categorical variables are terms that are frequently used interchangeably. Categorical variables can occasionally be used to express variables with only one, two, or three possible values. Categorical variables, however, more frequently just identify membership. Adoption, or whether a consumer bought a new product or not, is a typical categorical variable in consumer research. As a result, the variable is made up of the two groups, purchase and do not purchase. The same goes for turnover, which refers to whether an employee has left the company or not. The words dependent variable and independent variable refer to many sorts of variables in descriptive and causal research. Understanding how a researcher can model business processes makes this distinction crucial. Before one may appropriately perform specific statistical processes like multiple regression analysis, the distinction must be understood. However, in some circumstances, such as when a hypothesis only involves one variable, the researcher need not make this distinction.

A process results or a variable that is anticipated by or explains another variable is known as a dependent variable. A variable that is anticipated to exert some sort of influence on the dependent variable is known as an independent variable. These variables are independent in that they are established independently of the process under investigation. In other words, dependent factors do not affect independent variables.

For instance, judgments of restaurant food quality, service quality, and customer happiness may be independent variables that influence or predict a dependent variable called average customer loyalty. Thus, a procedure is provided that combines a number of criteria to assist determine and explain the level of client loyalty. In other words, if we know how a consumer feels about a restaurant's cuisine, service, and overall pleasure, we may anticipate how loyal they will be to that establishment. Please take note that this does not imply that we can forecast the quality of the food or the services based on customer loyalty.

The traditional symbol for dependent variables is the letter Y. The traditional symbol for independent variables is the letter X. Subscripts may also be used to denote Y1, Y2, X1, X2, and so on when there are two dependent variables and two or more independent variables in a study.

Theoretical foundations are essential when designing processes with independent and dependent variables. Researchers and managers must take care to isolate pertinent and useful variables. Actionable refers to a variable that can be managed by management and relevant refers to a variable that matters when it changes. Superfluous variables are ones that should not be included in a study since they are

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neither relevant nor practicable. Theory should assist in separating important variables from irrelevant ones.

Write Research Objectives and Questions

Managers and researchers alike anticipate that efforts to define problems will lead to statements of research objectives and research questions. The researcher should create a written statement that explains any doubt on the goals of the research at the conclusion of the problem-definition phase. The translation is now finished. The research objectives are expressed in terms of possible research questions in the form of research questions. For instance, "Are consumer perceptions of food quality, price, and atmosphere related to customer loyalty?" is one of the important study questions raised in the introductory vignette. Compared to research questions, hypotheses are more focused. One significant difference between research questions and hypotheses is that a relationship's direction may typically be specified by a hypothesis. In other words, when an independent variable increase, we have enough information to predict that the dependent variable will similarly increase (or decrease, depending on the situation).

Learning Objective 5.3 – Clarity in Research Questions and Hypotheses

It is simpler to comprehend what confounds managers and to identify the problems that need to be fixed when research questions are used. The researcher's conversion of the marketing issue into a focused inquiry is known as a research question. Sales, recall of the sales message, brand awareness, purchase intention, recognition, or knowledge are just a few ways to gauge the success of an advertisement. A study's design is made easier when a more focused research question is used, such as "Which advertisement has a higher day-after recall score?" Answers to research questions should offer information that can be utilized as a benchmark for choosing among potential solutions. Clear research questions are stated in the problem statement together with well-crafted, targeted hypotheses. A sales manager can make the assumption that salespeople with the highest levels of job satisfaction will also be the most successful. A manager of advertising might think that if views of consumers regarding a product are altered for the better, consumption of the product will rise as well. Statements that can be objectively tested are known as hypotheses. Management must frequently make "go/no go" decisions. In these

circumstances, a study topic or hypothesis may be stated in terms of a significant barrier that signifies the moment when a decision is made. In this instance, the research concerns a managerial action standard that outlines a certain performance criterion that might serve as the foundation for a choice. Management will take action A if the measurement criterion (such as sales or attitude changes) proves to be higher than a predetermined level; action B if it is lower. Additionally, the number of research goals should be kept to a minimum. It is simpler to assure that each study objective will be properly covered when there are fewer of them. With too many study objectives, it becomes simple to lose concentration. When the research is finished, the findings can reveal a previously unknown facet of the issue and indicate the need for additional study to achieve the primary goal. Successful researchers who have had the experience of learning more about a marketing issue after completing fieldwork advise creating studies with questions intended to reveal the unexpected.

Learning Objective 5.4 – How Much Time Should be Spent on Problem Definition?

Budget restrictions typically have an impact on how much time is put towards problem definition. Situations in marketing can be complicated, and several factors may be important. It is impractical to look for every potential factor and minuscule influence. More resources should be devoted to problem definition the more crucial the decision that management must make. While not a certainty, more time and money will help ensure that the study objectives that are produced are pertinent and can show which influences management should pay attention to. Given their responsibility for making decisions, marketing managers may want the problem-definition process to move along quickly. Managers may become impatient with researchers who take a long time to develop a set of study objectives. However, the time required to pinpoint the actual issue is typically time well spent.

Learning Objective 5.5 – The Research Proposal

The research plan is described in writing in the research proposal. It always comprises a statement defining the problem, frequently in the form of a decision statement, as well as a statement outlining the aim of the study (in the form of research objectives or deliverables). The specific research approach and

the steps that will be taken at each stage of the research process are carefully laid out in a solid proposal. Usually, the study proposal includes a schedule of costs and due dates. The main form of correspondence between the researcher and the research user is the research proposal.

The Proposal as a Planning Tool

Making a research proposal forces the researcher to consider each step of the study process thoughtfully. Vague plans, abstract notions, and broad generalizations about issues or processes must be transformed into clear, accurate claims about particular instances. It is essential to be specific about the data needed and the research methods used so that others can grasp their full significance. Before the proposal is finished, all questions on the purpose and methodology of the research must be answered. The proposal is presented by the researcher to management for approval, modification, or rejection. The proposed study is evaluated by research clients (management), who place a focus on whether or not it will yield meaningful information and whether it will do so within an acceptable resource budget. After the initial evaluation, initial proposals are virtually always amended. The proposal aids managers in determining if the right data will be gathered and whether the proposed research will achieve the intended results. The client's evaluation of the proposal will help to guarantee that the researchers adjust it to fulfill the client's information demands if the marketing challenge has not been sufficiently translated into a set of particular research objectives and a research plan. A strong proposal clearly outlines the data that will be gathered as well as where, when, and how it will be done. It must be clear about sample selection, measurement, fieldwork, and data analysis because of this. For example, the majority of proposals for descriptive research contain a suggested questionnaire (or at the very least, a few sample questions).

The Proposal as a Contract

The written proposal serves as that person's bid to provide a particular service when the research will be carried out by a consultant or an outside research supplier. A client will typically request a number of competing proposals, and management can evaluate the relative quality of various research suppliers using these written offers. A shrewd researcher will not consent to conduct study for which there is no written proposal. The proposal also acts as a contract outlining the thing the research user is going to buy. The plan actually resembles the final research report in many aspects, but without the actual findings. If

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the participants rely solely on each individual's memory of what transpired at a planning meeting, errors and poor communication may emerge. The proposal establishes a record, which significantly lowers the likelihood of conflicts once the research has been completed. The proposal should be signed by both the researcher and the research customer as confirmation that all terms have been agreed upon. The proposal serves as a formal, written agreement between marketing executives and researchers after that. Consequently, it shields the researcher from objections like, "Shouldn't we have had a larger sample?" or "Why did you not employ a focus group strategy?" The proposal serves as both a record of the researcher's commitment and a benchmark for assessing if the actual research was carried out according to the original plan. A formal proposal plays a similar function in efforts to conduct fundamental research. Research that is backed by a public or private institution and conducted by academic researchers is commonly referred to as funded marketing research. Researchers frequently look for federal government grants. Federal grants often require a highly thorough proposal, and the funding agreement is contingent upon the research producing the outcomes outlined in the proposal. It is necessary to make one significant observation on the nature of research proposals. Not every proposal has the same structure. A researcher can modify his or her suggestion depending on the situation or intended audience. A sophisticated proposal presented by a university professor to a federal government agency to examine a fundamental consumer issue bears no resemblance to an exceedingly brief proposal submitted by an organization's internal marketing research department to its own marketing executives.

Anticipating Outcomes

The proposal uses the future tense to describe the data collecting, measurement, analysis, and other processes. The report presents the real outcomes. In this way, the proposal foresees the findings of the study. Research failures are more frequently caused by a breakdown in the problem-definition process or by the research client not fully understanding what the research project could or could not accomplish, according to experienced researchers. Even though it may seem that the proposal should make this obvious, any flaws can result in a breakdown in communication. Therefore, every technology that makes communication as transparent as possible is highly prized.

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Dummy Tables

The dummy table is one such instrument that is maybe the greatest way to inform management precisely what kind of outcomes will be generated by research. Dummy tables, which are identical to the actual tables that will provide data in the final report with the exception that they are hypothetical, are included in research proposals. They receive their moniker from the researcher's filling in, or "dummies up," the tables with plausible but false information. The tables that will display the findings of the hypothesis test are known as dummy tables. They are hence intimately related to research goals.

The researcher can question the decision maker, "Will you be able to make a decision given these findings?" and then provide fake tables to them. The idea might be approved if the decision-maker responds positively. However, it may be time to start over if the decision maker is unable to see how outcomes like those in the fake tables will assist in making the necessary decision(s). To put it another way, the client and researcher need to reconsider what study findings are required to address the issue. Examining the dummy tables may occasionally show that a crucial variable is absent or that a particular dependent variable is actually not important. In other words, the type of research findings required to arrive at certain conclusions and decide on action standards or performance criteria help to clarify the marketing challenge.

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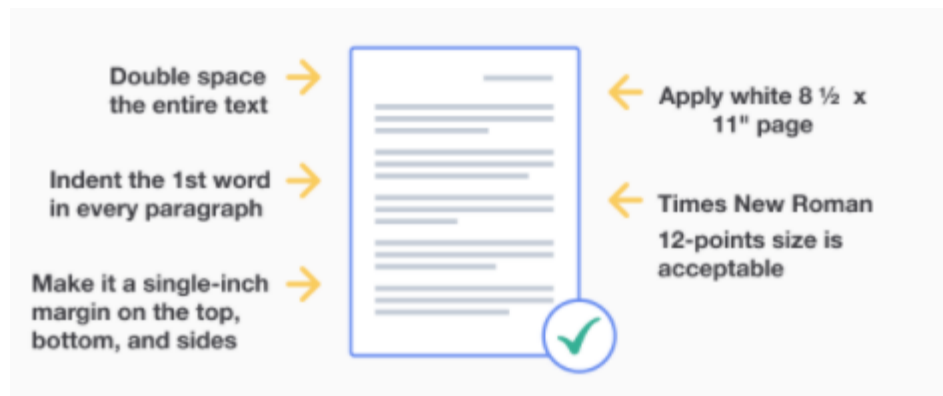
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Progress Check:

Requirements:

1. Due Date : _____
2. Essay format, minimum of 20 words and maximum of 100 words.
3. Format



Questions

1. Convert decision-making goals into pertinent research hypotheses
2. Convert research goals into questions or hypotheses for further study
3. Describe the Parts of a Research Proposal.

Answer

1. The problem-definition procedure described in the chapter can assist in ensuring the applicability of the study objectives. In this sense, a situation analysis is useful. Interviews that first identify symptoms before asking the respondent about possible explanations are particularly beneficial. The "what has changed?" technique is one tool that can be used to aid with this process. Once written, the research objectives also include the variables that the investigation will probably need.

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2. Research issues Basically, rephrase the study goals into a question. The research question can be transformed into one or more research hypotheses when the researcher has enough theoretical justification to make a more precise prediction that includes the direction of any projected link.
3. The research proposal outlines the research methodology that will be used to address a particular issue. Managers can assess the specifics of the planned research in the research proposal and decide whether changes are required. The following elements are typically included in research proposals: decision description, purpose of the research including research objectives, research design, sample design, data collection and/or fieldwork methodologies, data processing and analysis, budget, and time schedule.

QUIZ 5

Fill in the blank

1. Sales volume, profits, and margin are common business metrics that represent _____ variables.
2. The term _____ variable is sometimes also used and is generally interchangeable with categorical variable.
3. The _____ proposal is a written statement of the research design. It always includes a statement explaining the purpose of the study and a definition of the problem, often in the form of a decision statement.
4. There are at least ___ steps in the problem-definition process
5. Research questions are interrogative, whereas research hypotheses are _____.
6. The researcher submits the proposal to management for acceptance, modification, or _____
7. _____ must be translated into research objectives
8. Use _____ techniques to generate lists of potential questions that can be used in the interview process.
9. Most proposals involving _____ research include a proposed questionnaire or at least some sample questions.
10. People simply are uncomfortable with the uncertainty that comes with _____.

Answer

- 1. Continuous**
- 2. Classificatory**
- 3. Research**
- 4. 6**
- 5. Declarative**
- 6. Rejections**
- 7. Decisions statements**
- 8. Interrogative**
- 9. Descriptive**
- 10. Ambiguity**