GMBA Thesis Writing
- a few words of advice

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Thesis writing – simple, heroic, or an unpredictable adventure? 😊

What people think thesis writing is like:

What I think thesis writing is like:

What thesis writing is really like:

→ it’s fun, it’s frustrating, and it feels like a ‘conquest’ once it is done!
The Thesis is an Opportunity...

• ... for exploring/analyzing more in-depth a topic that interests you – or a ‘mystery’ that puzzles you (e.g. high turnover rates in the pharmaceutical industry, or how companies are adapting to ‘aviation in a low carbon world’ e.g. CSR risk thinking at China Airlines)

• ... for exploring/analyzing the feasibility of a business idea, new direction for business etc.

• ... for strengthening your own profile: demonstrating research and analytical skills, building expertise regarding particular areas/issues
  (e.g. effective collaboration in cross-cultural teams; social purpose partnerships)
Where and how can I help?

A thesis idea where you will rely on qualitative research methods
Topics related to CSR/sustainability or responsible leadership
Some important points for students writing qual. theses

- You need to **understand your topic**
- You need to **delve deeper** into your topic, in order to become very knowledgeable about it (literature)
- You need to **formulate a research problem** (a ‘phenomenon’), a purpose for your study and the research questions that you will address
- You need to think about how to **design a study** that will enable you to collect meaningful data about this topic, and address the strengths and weaknesses of your approach (methodology)
- You need to **analyze your data** in a structured and systematic way (coding)
- You need to **reflect on what your study leads you to understand** about the phenomenon and what should be investigated further
The Perceived Value of Sustainable Aquaculture Certifications –

A Singapore Case Study

1.3 Purpose of the study

The objective of this research thesis is to investigate the value of adopting sustainable certifications for aquaculture farms in Singapore – specifically how do the government, NGO’s, farmers, retailers and consumers perceive the value of sustainable certification for local aquaculture farms?

Conflict management styles and stereotypes in organizations with a multicultural setting

That purpose leads me to my research problem:

- How do conflict management styles differ between people coming from two different cultural clusters and how it could impact their relationships and their conflicts?
- How does an educational and multi-cultural program like the GMBA influence people’s conflict management styles and stereotypes?
- How does the GMBA program contribute to building students’ cultural intelligence?
Some topics I encourage

• CSR professionals in Taiwan – e.g. how they practice responsible leadership

• Various emergent movement in Taiwan related to CSR:
  – Certified B Corp
  – Companies adopting the SROI methodology to measure social impact
  – Companies adopting true cost accounting...
Is a qual. thesis for me? The OB project

1. **Selecting a topic that interests you** – that is related to any one of the chapters in the textbook, and that will add some knowledge to our class besides what we are discussing in our sessions *(Deadline to register topic is 3rd week of class)*

2. **Learning about what is already known about this particular topic**, and what kind of questions would be relevant to look further into *(Output A: a literature review and interview guide, for mid-term)*

3. **Interviewing a min. of 5 individuals** (managers or otherwise people who are engaging in the practice in question), and analyzing the results to see what we can learn from this *(Output B: a poster that conveys this learning in a meaningful way)*
The course project

1. **Selecting a topic that interests you** – that is related to any one of the chapters in the textbook, and that will add some knowledge to our class besides what we are discussing in our sessions *(Deadline to register topic is 3rd week of class)*

2. **Learning about what is already known about this particular topic**, and what kind of questions would be relevant to look further into *(Output A: a literature review and interview guide, for mid-term)*

3. **Interviewing a min. of 5 individuals** (managers or otherwise people who are engaging in the practice in question), and analyzing the results to see what we can learn from this *(Output B: a poster that conveys this learning in a meaningful way)*
Business Plan

- Every business plan addresses a **real/practical challenge/problem** (e.g. how to grow, how to launch a product that is novel to a particular market, how to finance a particular strategy)
- A BP is written differently **depending on the intended audience** (e.g. internal use vs. potential investors vs. other stakeholder partners)
- A BP written as a thesis is not only a ‘how to’, but also **includes reflection** on these challenges/problems and how they can be solved
- The concluding discussion should be **valuable beyond the immediate needs** of the business planner – **what can we learn from it?**
Some Typical Pitfalls

• Underestimating the time that is needed for reflection, reading and writing (start early!)
• Not doing a proper literature review (a good thesis does require quite a bit of reading)
• ‘Writer’s block’ (feedback is given on what you have actually written)
• Not paying enough attention to the structure of your thesis and how to connect different parts and ideas together in a coherent whole
• And finally, taking a break midway… the threshold to get back into the process will be higher than anticipated!
The Advising Process

• Find a question, topic, idea that you care about!
• Advisor’s role:
  – Sounding board (help refine ideas and sometimes challenge them)
  – Suggest ways of improving / deepening the study, or deal with certain challenges
  – Provide feedback on written manuscript at various intervals throughout the process
• A well-written thesis on a relevant topic is an asset that can serve you well in your career!
Methodology

• **Qualitative research tradition:**
  
  – Understanding (complex) social phenomena in context (e.g. team dynamics in start-up ventures)
  
  – Case studies as a research approach, mostly interview-based (combined with written documents, data, observations where applicable)
  
  – Narratives (stories)
  
  – Allows to explore something in depth and to capture unique aspects, generates ‘rich’ descriptions
  
  – Inter-subjective interpretation (e.g. people’s perception of a strategic direction guides their action)
  
  – Analytic generalization (rich descriptions from unique contexts, but what can this tell us about the phenomenon as a whole?/how does it apply to other contexts?)