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Preferences for Pay Systems:

My Dissertation:

From Concept to Completion

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Rules to Remember

1. No one wants to read your dissertation – GET OVER IT!

2. No one ever got famous from their dissertation – they got famous from future research AFTER their dissertation was done.

3. There is no shortcutting or gaming this process. You will pay the piper one way or another, whether you do a quantitative or qualitative dissertation and regardless of who is on your committee. There is no easy way out (although there are more pleasant roads to take, depending on your style).

Goal: PhD

- First you must understand the goal before you take the journey.
- Remember the following acronym:
  - "P" means *Patience*. With a lot of people reviewing your work and each one requiring perfection, don't plan on being done in record time.
  - "H" means *Humility*. Be willing to take criticism. The only passing grade is 100%, so don't get flustered when the attaboys and good jobs become scarce. The dissertation is not just another long paper; it is a learning experience with five professors that may not agree on everything.
  - "D" means *Determination*. Don't quit. Keep pushing yourself through the long waits and the criticism. Talk to your mentor when you need direction. This is YOUR dissertation, so YOU must take the reins. You've come too far to end up ABD.

What a Dissertation Is NOT?

- It's not just a long term paper!
- It's not an attempt to solve world hunger.
- It's not your opportunity to vent about a pet peeve issue to make a point that "should have been" proven already.
- It's not an attack on published researchers.
- The great American novel that everyone can't wait to read.

What a Dissertation IS?

- It is your chance to demonstrate that you understand what "good research" is.
- It is your unbiased study of a chosen topic.
- It is a recap of prior research in your chosen topic, with your added research and results.
- It is your small contribution to the world of academic research in a chosen field.
  - If the scope of research in a chosen field could fit in a Bible, your dissertation might equate to a single chapter of one book of the Bible.

Find Your Topic in the TV Guide?

- Imagine if you wanted to watch television right now, but you don't know what is on. Would you:
  - (a) Think of a TV show, check to see if it is on, and if not, then try again?
  - (b) Look at the TV listings and select a show to watch?
- Obviously you would choose the latter. So why do so many doctoral candidates choose their dissertation topics using method (a)?

TV Guide (cont'd)

- Many students think of a topic and then search the literature for a match, often with no success. When they finally give up on the topic, they start the process again.
- Why not try the TV listings method of scoping the body of current research first before selecting a topic?

4 Factors to Consider in Choosing a Topic

1. The topic should not be one that is "done to death."
   - Topics that are overdone (e.g., Situational Leadership) will take a long time to adequately research.
   - There is little original work one can add to the body of knowledge.
   - Such topics are often tiring for the researcher and the readers.

4 Factors (cont'd)

2. The topic should be an important problem
   - There should be substantial current literature on the topic (i.e., study is timely and "hot").
   - It is easier to get support on the research.
   - You "can" make this world a better place.
   - You and your peers will typically equate your doctorate with your dissertation topic.
   - Who wants to spend a couple of years researching something that is meaningless?

4 Factors (cont'd)

3. The topic should support a feasible design
   - Can you get the data?
     - If interviewing "hard-to-reach" people is vital to the research, consider that before proceeding.
   - Is time and money on your side?
     - Longitudinal studies force you to wait for useable data, and do not guarantee success.
     - Personal interviews may require a lot of travel expense and scheduling nightmares.
   - Can you do the analysis?
     - If the required analysis is way beyond your capabilities (e.g., structural equation modeling), you should reconsider, because you must be able to explain your work.
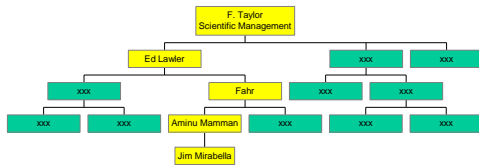
4 Factors (cont'd)

4. The topic should be one for which you have a passionate commitment (or at least a strong one).
   - Why doesn't Stephen King write romance novels?
   - You will be working on this for a serious chunk of your life, and you may need something to drive you to completion.
   - There are two kinds of topics you can choose --the one you like AND the one you know best; if they're both the same, you're truly blest.

Topic Approval

- My first topic was disapproved and I felt hurt. My problem → FEASIBILITY.
- I had to *Get Over It*.
- The Director of Research gave me the prior tips. I found three possible topics in a day, and all were approved. I GOT OVER IT!
- Lesson learned:
  - Just because 3 potential committee members from the faculty think a topic is interesting doesn't mean it is a winner or that you have a solid committee.
  - Don't be determined to "make your topic work even if it kills you." IT JUST MIGHT!
  - Let go. Drop the personal attachment. Be objective.

The Literature Review: A Family History

Think of the lit review as a family history of "your topic." Where did it begin, where are you today, and how did the research get to that point?

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Literature Review (cont'd)

- My dissertation topic was "Employee Preferences for Pay Systems as a Function of Personal Job Inputs and Job Characteristics."
- It was essentially about the pay-for-performance vs. pay-for-skill vs. pay-for-education controversy in the workplace, and how they relate to job satisfaction and retention.
- I chose my topic after having worked under different scenarios and being disgusted with the inequity in the systems.

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Literature Review (cont'd)

- My idea for the topic originated with an article I read by Aminu Mamman, and I chose to replicate his research under different conditions.
- My literature review was a historical synopsis that began with Frederick Taylor's studies in Scientific Management in the 19th century, to Edward Lawler's pay-related studies in the 1960's to Mamman's study in 1997. I essentially "filled in the gaps" between now and then.

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Choosing the Methodology

- To collect the data, I contacted Aminu Mamman in Australia and asked permission to use his survey, which was already validated.
  - Why reinvent the wheel?
  - Writing an original survey takes skill and time, especially in validation.
  - This doesn't mean that you are exempt from the validation step, but this step is likely to be much easier.

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Choosing the Methodology

- I used a sample size relative to that used by Mamman that maintained or improved on his level of sampling error.
- Since my study involved students and corporate workers, I chose to use cluster sampling because it was easier and faster to select entire classes of students and corporate work teams. Other methods were not as practical.
- I personally administered the surveys to minimize administrative error and so I could walk away with the completed surveys.

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Selling the Methodology

- Not only must your methodology be sound, but you must make it known to your readers.
  - State the target population and sampling frame.
  - State the sampling methodology and data collection technique.
  - State the reliability and validity info.
  - State how potential errors were avoided.

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Analysis, not Paralysis

- The analytical techniques need not be complex – just sound, appropriate, and done correctly.
- T-tests, ANOVAs and Regression Analysis will suffice in most of your dissertations.
- Be careful not to conclude beyond the scope of your analysis and target population.

Bringing it Home

- The last chapter of the dissertation allows you to provide personal insights.
- Relate your analysis to the prior research.
- Discuss future research possibilities.
- Offer potential improvements in your research.