Goizueta Business Library
Creating Bridges to Knowledge

Best Practices and Pitfalls for Conducting Credible Research

Approach your research with an open mind, free of bias and assumptions

- DO conduct solid research to test and inform your hypothesis/ideas.
- DON'T skew your research (intentionally or unintentionally) to support what you believe to be the answer/solution.

Start by thinking broadly

- DO step back and start your research by focusing on fully understanding context, e.g. the industry, competitors, market size and segmentation, geographic, economic or regulatory factors, etc. Begin your research with the goal of <u>understanding your problem, not immediately solving it.</u>
- DON'T dive right into the weeds; rather imagine a search path shaped like a funnel, with the broadest part representing the first stage of your research, and then methodically working through your questions down the increasingly narrow section.

Seek out the timeliest data

- DO rely on data that is appropriately timely for your project.
- DON'T use old data as it may undermine the impact of your recommendations and reflect poorly on your research process; there are creative ways that you can update key data points.

Build your case by conducting thorough, robust research

- DO use <u>multiple, different information types</u> in order to benefit from different perspectives, validate content, and minimize bias (e.g. industry trade magazines, market research reports, associations, wall street analyst reports, syndicated data, etc.);
- DON'T base your recommendations on minimal and poor quality research; they will not hold up.

Sell your case by using solid, credible evidence

- DO use only credible, authoritative, reliable sources (databases and websites) for your research.
- DON'T use questionable sources; even just one can call into question the viability of your recommendations, and therefore undermine all of your work on the project.

Think outside the box

- DO think about proxies for your issue; are there other industries or organizations or issues that could be viewed as representative substitutes for identifying best practices, successes, or even failures from which you could glean insights to apply to your problem.
- DON'T be too literal or narrow when framing your questions; be persistent, keep probing and don't give up too easily.

Keep probing problems and considering risks

- DO push yourself to question the evidence, to identify and address problems and risks as part of the research process.
- DON'T fail to identify risks and probe potential issues; use your evidence-based research to prepare your client for these realities; ignoring these represents a huge gap in the research process.

Document all of your research

- DO include a properly formatted bibliography, and cite all sources referenced throughout your deck. At a glance, it tells the story of your intellectual discovery process and choices, the research you conducted that helped to inform and support your thinking and recommendations.
- DON'T underestimate the importance of clearly sourcing relevant cites throughout your deck. Failing to do so might infer that the evidence is not credible, planting a seed of doubt that could undermine the overall impact of your recommendations.