

How to Define a Research Question

Using security culture as the central example





What is a research question?

A research question identifies exactly what the study will investigate.



What information is needed



Who or what should be studied



Which research method may be appropriate



For professional discussion and reflection • Illustrative, not exhaustive • Apply alongside appropriate organisational risk, evidence and decision-making processes



Topic, problem and question





Why the question matters

Gives the study direction



Maintains focus



Avoids irrelevant information



Identifies suitable evidence



Clarifies the purpose of the study



Start with a broad area

Security culture can include many areas. The first task is to identify which part requires further investigation.





Identify the research problem

Ask what is unclear or needs examination.

Security procedures may exist, but staff reporting behaviour may vary between teams or locations.



Define the scope

Set clear boundaries around the research.





Choose the main focus

Security culture is broad, so select one central focus.



Select the type of question

DESCRIPTIVE

What practices exist?



EXPLANATORY

Why does reporting vary?



RELATIONSHIP

What links management commitment and reporting?



EVALUATIVE

How effective is security culture training?



SECURITY CULTURE

Define the key concepts

Each important term should have a clear meaning within the study.





Make the question researchable

A good question must be answerable with realistic evidence, access, time and methods.



Avoid common problems

Weak questions often contain avoidable problems.



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Improve a weak question

! WEAK QUESTION

“Why is security culture poor at airports?”

- !** Assumes the problem
- !** Uses judgemental wording
- !** Scope is unclear



✓ IMPROVED QUESTION

“What organisational factors influence security reporting behaviour among airport staff?”

- ✓** Neutral wording
- ✓** Clear focus
- ✓** Researchable scope





The research question test



A strong research question gives the study direction before the research begins.

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