

## **Appendix D: General Advice on Using the Template**

### **D.1 Advice to the Instructor – Coursework units in Research Methods/Process**

In the context of research student study, whether we are thinking of fourth-year Honours, MSc or Doctoral, coursework is a key component. In particular, those coursework instructors tasked with offering “Research Methods”, “Scientific Methods”, “Research Process” or some similarly titled unit, could get some worthwhile use out of the pitch template. There would be the “twin” written and verbal/presentation executions – the latter being a class presentation, built around a PowerPoint slide presentation.

While the pitch template can have maximum value used as an “active” device aimed directly at the potential thesis that the student will actually write, for the coursework instructor it also can be used more “passively” as part of a broader educational/learning exercise. For example, students could be assigned a published article deemed to be of high quality, and be set an assignment to “reverse engineer” a pitch. While some aspects of this would require the use of imagination, as long as any “hypotheticals” are generated in “good faith”, the “passive” pitch exercise could readily serve a legitimate learning exercise /assessment role. Moreover, students could be asked to give a self-assessment, as well as the full cohort submitting assessment around both content and presentation skills. Another exercise, that might be well suited to a PhD cohort, is a group-work exercise – involving a “brainstorming” session aimed at exploiting the intersection of interests and skills amongst small groups of students with overlapping research interests.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I implemented such an example at the one-day workshop “Getting Published: Tools and Tricks of the Trade”, sponsored by IAFDS in Trondheim, Norway, June 2014. Pitch #14 in Table B.1, “Female Directors, Naked Firms”, represents one of the groups of students that created a new potential topic, employing the pitch template. This is now the focus of a potential “real” project between the four individuals involved.

## **D.2 Advice to the Postgraduate Coordinator**

I also want to speak briefly to the postgraduate coordinator – that person charged with “administering” the entire experience of new PhD cohorts every year. Apart from an awareness of the micro-messages above, you take the “big picture” view of how students progress, in a timely fashion and with quality checks and balances along the way (e.g. annual milestones). It is not just a matter of monitoring the progress of individual students, but also the efforts of the supervisory teams and the interactive effects from both sides. For those sufficiently persuaded by the pitch device that I am advocating, a general “training” session could be conducted that involves the student cohort and possibly the supervisor pool (at least the novice supervisors). It might also, involve incorporating a pitch component as a lead in to “conformation” milestone that most PhD students need to complete around 12 months into their candidature. Another possibility is to hold regular (annual) in-house pitch day events that, apart from anything else, deliver another (artificial) deadline for achievement in terms of the overall PhD progress.

## **D.3 Advice to the Doctoral Symposium Organiser**

Doctoral symposia are great events for many reasons. One such positive, is that many different students are brought together for a few short days from diverse backgrounds: geographically, culturally and (academic) environmentally. Intellectually there are a lot of sparks, and in my experience it is always very rewarding in such settings to devote some time to challenging (and meaningful) group work that builds trust, cooperation and leadership skills. In my view, depending on the time available, the pitching exercise presents a great opportunity in this regard.

As noted above, I implemented an example of a group-pitch exercise at a one-day workshop in Trondheim, Norway, June 2014. A preliminary session on generating research

ideas, among other things, asked the students to nominate their 3 top research interests, and based on “optimizing” the overlap interests, the fifteen students were allocated into 4 groups. A general presentation of the general pitching idea and template lasted about 60 minutes, after which the groups were given (only) 45 minutes to “brainstorm” a pitch based on the template that aimed to cover the overlap of interests across each group. Despite the fact that each group was very rushed, they were still amazingly constructive experiences. A spokesman for each group gave a brief presentation of their pitch, to the entire symposium cohort, unfortunately with only a brief time allocated for general discussion. Pitch #14 in Table B.1, “Female Directors, Naked Firms”, represents one of these groups.

#### **D.4 Advice to Others**

I think that there are other potential worthwhile uses of the pitch template – more for situations in which we would like to give a flavor of research/ research planning to aspiring “research” students. Most notably, I have in mind final-year undergraduate instructors – particularly those offering subjects that have a higher focus on/content based in research. Perhaps in some cases, such instructors would find it useful to design an assignment that “reverse engineers” a core article relevant to the subject in question. Similarly, Honours coordinators with their eyes fixed on next year’s cohort, in their information sessions aimed at bright third-year students, could include some coverage of the pitch concept as a focused/simple entrée to what a research degree is all about. Indeed, it could be tied into a “pitch day” competition (e.g. “reverse engineering” style) targeting potential Honours students – possibly with prizes, to induce effort and enthusiasm. Similar considerations apply to MSc coordinators/supervisors. Finally, the pitch template could be used as a starting point for developing a research grant application.