

GUIDES TO UNDERTAKING RESEARCH

2.4 Reviewing Research Project Progress

Periodic reviews are always very useful help to identify and assess obstacles to progress and decide what to do about them. Project reviews, even if informal, should involve peers and/or mentors, so as to provide objectivity, and once completed it is worth spending time reflecting on the review outcomes. The most serious blocks to future progress will then need strategies designed to overcome them, especially if the timeline is tight. Note it can probably be assumed the original project timescales were optimistic, what is important to know is what the consequences of being late are. Consider also the following points:

- Is the project on time? How constrained is the schedule and how fixed are the deadlines?
- What were the expected outcomes or goals in the proposal? Are they still good goals?
- Were milestones (intermediate goals) set? What were they and when are/were they due?
- For each specific project goal what obstacles have been encountered? Is there a common feature to these obstacles.
- What skills have been gained in this project and were they gained at the expense of time?
- What parts of the project depend on other people, and might that be a problem later?
- Have all envisaged resources actually been available? If not, what effect has that had?
- What ethics applications are outstanding and what are their expected timelines?
- Has there been adequate oversight, support and supervisor feedback?

In sum:

- Where is the project now relative to where is it supposed to be?
- If progress is insufficient, how can this be corrected? Does it matter?

Other thoughts:

- How do you make sure that this self-assessment is not deluded?
- Are there other people available to help with this assessment?

The future:

- How linear is the project? That is, does one project section depend on the successful outcome of another section? Not only is this a serious vulnerability, it often invisible unless examined directly.
- Related to the previous point, if something totally unexpected happened to block one small part of the project, could it block progress of the whole project?
- If you had to do a presentation now about the project would that scare you?
- Is data collection slow, such that outcomes (or lack of them) are impossible to see until much later?
- What useful data would be easiest to collect now (or very soon), and why not get it now?

- What data collection is guaranteed to work well and be informative? What is not?
- How much work and time are you putting into the project? Is it enough? Too much? Are other projects or work schedules interfering in it?
- What would happen if the mentor or supervisor disappeared unexpectedly for a month?

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