**<PROPOSED THESIS TITLE>**

Name of student 1:

Name of student 2:

Proposed academic supervisor’s name (leave blank if you do not have an academic supervisor):

Have your proposed supervisor ***clearly*** stated that he/she will supervise you:  Yes  No

Will the thesis work be conducted in collaboration with an external organization:  Yes  No

If yes, what is the name of the company/organization:

The name and email address of the contact person/supervisor at the company/organization:

# 1 Introduction

The introduction provides readers with the background information for the research proposed, with the purpose to provide an understanding of how the research is related to other research. The introduction shall provide the following:

1. background to the topic
2. brief review of the current knowledge
3. briefly indicates gap in knowledge
4. states why your research needs to be done
5. states aim of your research and how it fits into the gap

In the introduction, the writer shall (Creswell 2002):

* Create reader interest in the topic
* Lay the broad foundation for the problem that leads to the study (bullet 1, 3 and 4 above)
* Place the study within the larger context of the literature (bullet 2 above)

# 2. Statement of the problem

The statement of the problem is the foundation for the construction of any research proposal. In addition to being an integral part of selecting a research topic, it also helps to select research design. It serves as the bases for determining research objectives, formulation of research hypotheses or research questions, and planning the research design (Booth et al 2003). It allows the researcher to describe the problem systematically, to reflect on its importance, its priority and to point out why the proposed research on the problem should be undertaken.

A problem might be defined as the issue that exists in the literature, theory, or practice that leads to a need for the study. It is important in a proposal that the problem stands out and that the reader can easily recognize it.

* A problem statement shall be presented within a context, and that context shall be provided and briefly explained, including a discussion of the conceptual or theoretical framework in which it is embedded.
* Clearly and succinctly identify and explain the problem within the framework of the theory or line of inquiry that supports the study.
* State the problem in terms intelligible to someone who is generally sophisticated but who is relatively uninformed in the area of your investigation.

Effective problem statements answer the question: Why does this research need to be conducted? If the writer is unable to answer this question clearly and succinctly, the statement of the problem will be perceived as vague and diffuse.

# 3. Purpose of the study

The purpose statement should provide a specific and accurate summary of the overall purpose of the study. Briefly define and delimit the specific area of the research. Incorporate the rationale for the study. A commonly used sentence starts with: “The purpose of this study is . . .”. The purpose should clarify who is anticipated to benefit from the results of your study and how the results may be used.

# 4. Research questions and/or Hypotheses

Questions are relevant to descriptive, normative or census type research. (What are relevant factors? How many of them are there? Is there a relationship between them?) Hypotheses are relevant to theoretical research, and when you state hypotheses the reader is entitled to have an exposition of the theory that lead to them (and the assumptions underlying the theory).

In general, you should be prepared to interpret any possible outcome with respect to the questions or hypotheses. Try to visualize in your mind tables or other summary devices, which you expect to come out of the research, short of the actual data.

Describe the main research question(s) that you intend to answer with your thesis project. Use sub-questions if needed.

# 5. Review of the literature

The literature review provides the background and context for the research problem. It should establish the need for the research and indicate that the writer is knowledgeable about the area. The literature review:

* Describes the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being   
  proposed
* Relates a study to the larger, ongoing dialogue in the literature about a topic, filling in gaps and extending prior studies
* Provides a framework for establishing the importance of the study, as well as a benchmark for comparing the results of a study with other findings
* “Frames” the problem earlier identified

The literature review shall demonstrate to the reader that you have a comprehensive grasp of the field and are aware of important recent substantive and methodological developments. Define the starting point for your study - how will your study refine, revise, or extend what is now known?

In a proposal, the literature review is generally brief and to the point. However, it shall be more extensive than the brief review in the introduction, both in terms of information about the related research that was mentioned in the introduction and by using more references. Select and reference only the more appropriate citations. Make key points clearly and succinctly. Later in your thesis, you will elaborate on this section.

# 6. Research Methodology

Any research or problem solving requires a systematic approach with methods and procedures. Indicate the steps you will take to answer every question or to test every hypothesis indicated in Section 4, to solve the problem that you are addressing. There are several research methods, e.g. design research (Hevner 2004), case study (Runeson & Höst 2009), and Survey (Creswell 2002, Robson 2002), just to mention a few. Different research methods and procedures require different descriptions.

For example, for a survey, it becomes vital to describe sampling and instrumentation. The sampling, i.e. the population and how the sample has been drawn from that, needs to be described to clarify to what extent the findings of a study can be generalized to people or situations. You shall also outline the instruments you propose to use (surveys, scales, interview protocols, observation grids). For a case study or a design research, other aspects become vital.

**Data collection**

For all studies, you need to have a systematic approach for data collection. Outline the general plan for what data to collect, and how. This may include survey administration procedures, interview or observation procedures. Also, provide a general outline of the time schedule you expect to follow.

**Data analysis**

For all studies, you need to have a systematic approach for data analysis. Specify the procedures you will use to analyze your data. If coding procedures are to be used, describe these in reasonable detail. For evaluations, describe the criteria to be used in reasonable detail.

# 7. Limitations

A limitation identifies potential weaknesses of the study. Think about your analysis, the nature of self-report, your instruments, and the sample. Think about threats to external or internal validity that may have been impossible to avoid or minimize and explain these.

# 8. Significance of the study

Indicate how your research will refine, revise, or extend existing knowledge in the area under investigation. Note that such refinements, revisions, or extensions may have substantive, theoretical, or methodological significance. Think pragmatically.

Most studies have two potential audiences: practitioners and researchers. Think about implications: What implications may the results of the study have on research? What implications may the results of the study have on practice?

# 9. References

Reference all sources that are cited in your proposal. Use established guidelines for references in text and in the reference list, e.g. the APA[[1]](#footnote-1), Harvard[[2]](#footnote-2), IEEE[[3]](#footnote-3) style.

Booth, C. W., Colomb, G. G., and Williams, M. J. (2003) *The Craft of Research* (2nd Edition), University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

Creswell, W. J. (2002) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (2nd Edition), Sage Publications: London.

Hevner, A.R. (2004) Design Science in Information Systems Research, *MIS Quarterly*, 28(1), 75-105.

Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research* (3rd Edition), John Wiley & Sons.

Runeson, P. and Höst, M. (2009) Guidelines for Conducting and Reporting Case Study Research in Software Engineering, *Journal of Empirical Software Engineering*, 14(2), 131-164.

1. <http://www.apastyle.org/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://libweb.anglia.ac.uk/referencing/harvard.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://www.ieee.org/conferences_events/conferences/publishing/templates.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)