

The primary focus, therefore, is on the first steps, the matter of getting research started, an area relatively neglected, an area of important need. Exploration of why the first steps frequently entail unexpected setbacks for newcomers should provide therapy and encouragement for people who have experienced difficulty and doubt. It should also invite concern for understanding the decision processes involved so that they may be repeated on later ventures with increased ease.

Major Purposes, Premises and Applications

Two purposes guide the total presentation. One is to explore why first steps frequently seem so ill-defined and so taxing. From nothing to a proposal that has sufficient possibility to merit discussion is the relatively neglected area. The other is to set forth and to discuss the use of a series of questions precisely intended to help in filling that gap. Cycling and recycling the questions should result in generating decision criteria for limiting and specifying the area and the ingredients of any inquiry. The considerations and the discretion needed to put the questions to use in deciding on a particular piece of research are later discussed item by item.

The major premise is that first steps in the conduct of inquiry of any sort are probably the most difficult, the most important, the most consequential, the least understood, the least treated and those on which the least help is likely to be available.

They are difficult because the limits are not clear until one decides what they are to be and the decisions involved are difficult. They are important because early decisions set the terms of reference for any subsequent judgments. They are consequential because standards and cut-off points for any project are built into the early choices. They are not well understood