

We shouldn't be too hard on our apartment manager. We often make assumptions and are satisfied with those assumptions until we start asking ourselves hard questions. But, when the decision is important, it's wise to make the right decision alternative choice to solve that problem. In our example, the researcher has convinced the manager that he needs more information to make sure his assumptions are correct. Exactly what information is needed in order to close the information gap? This question leads us to the next step, creating research objectives.

Exactly what information is needed in order to close the information gap? Now, we are ready to create our research objectives!

Research Objectives

Defining Research Objectives

If the manager had the information to close the information gap we just identified, the decision alternative that will best solve the problem could be selected. Remember our discussion of research objectives earlier in this chapter? Recall that we said research objectives state specifically what information must be produced by the researcher so that the manager can choose the correct decision alternative to solve the problem. It is at this point that the researcher is ready to specify the research objectives. Since both the manager and the researcher agree as to the type of information that is needed to close the information gap, they can agree on the research objective. Sometimes hypotheses are stated which may be used to guide the development of the research objective. **Hypotheses** are statements that are taken for true for the purposes of argument or investigation. In making assumptions about the consequences of decision alternatives, managers are making hypotheses. For example, a successful restaurant owner uses a hypothesis that she must use X amount of food in an entrée in order to please customers. This restaurant owner bases her decisions on the validity of this hypothesis; she ensures that a certain quantity of food is served on every plate regardless of the menu choice. Businesspersons make decisions every day based on statements they believe to be true. Sometimes, those decisions are very important and the businessperson may lack confidence in making the correct hypothesis. This is very similar to what we have been discussing about assumptions, isn't it? Sometimes the manager makes a specific statement (an assumption) and wants to know if there is evidence to support the statement. In the instances in which a statement is made, we may use the term *hypothesis* to describe this "statement thought to be true for purposes of a marketing research investigation." Note that not all research is conducted through hypotheses. A research question is often used to guide research. In this case, the question, not being a statement, is not considered a hypothesis. You will learn how to test hypotheses using XL Data Analyst™ later in this book. However, for now, you should understand that when a manager makes a statement assumed to be true but is uncertain and wants the researcher to determine support for the statement, we call these statements hypotheses. Since hypotheses are essentially statements of the decision alternative's assumed consequences, they can be valuable in determining the research objective.

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Stating the research objective is extremely important, for it defines what information will be collected from whom and in what format. The key assessment to be made of the research objective is, If this information, as stated in the research objective, is provided, can a decision alternative be selected? Before we discuss particulars of defining research objectives, let's look back at our apartment complex example. The researcher and the manager agree that they can make the choice in the decision alternatives if they know if students have a greater likelihood of signing a lease with an apartment with free satellite television with premium channels than an apartment with free basic cable service. Secondly, they agree that they will want this information to come from a sample of students who are presently enrolled at the university and will be returning next academic year and who also intend to rent an off-campus apartment.

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An example of a research objective for our apartment complex example is as follows:

Research Objective: Conduct a survey based upon a representative sample of college students who have stated they intend to rent off-campus apartments during the next academic year to