## Exercise 4.1 Producing a draft timetable for your review

Produce a draft timetable for your own review. Include the phases of scoping and planning; searching and obtaining references; data extraction and quality assessment; synthesis and analysis; and writing up and disseminating.

Now identify milestones (i.e., time deadlines) or deliverables (specific outputs from each phase of the review process) and where these lie in your review timetable. These may include, but not necessarily be restricted to: a review protocol or review plan (scoping and planning); a search strategy for a principal database with sample search results (searching and obtaining references); a draft data extraction form with completed quality assessment for an included article (data extraction and quality assessment); tables of included study characteristics (synthesis and analysis); and a draft report or article (writing up and disseminating). If you are undertaking a dissertation or thesis, use the timescale that you produce for these deliverables to identify useful points at which to meet with your supervisor. If you are conducting a commissioned review or working with a review team, use review milestones as critical points for either internal or external team meetings. You may find it helpful to use the format for a SMART plan (see Table 4.4).

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| **Stage of review at time of this submission** | **Start** |  | **Complete** |
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## Exercise 4.2 Problem-solving scenarios

### Scenario A: Adebola (Too wide scope)

Adebola is starting a literature review as part of a funded pilot project on the social determinants of ill-health in Sub-Saharan Africa. She is interested in the causes of mortality for mothers and infants, She feels that she must definitely look at some leading causes of disability among adults. Then there is the increasing high profile of illness in the ageing population. In her country, there is a particular concern around HIV and AIDS. As she starts to build a list of all possible population–illness combinations, she realises that her topic has started to get out of hand.

#### What are the root causes of this particular problem?

#### What strategies might you suggest to help Adebola overcome this problem?

### Scenario B: Brenda

Brenda is a member of a small team working on a funded review in a management topic. After spending considerable time devising comprehensive search strategies for the specific review question, using the **PICOS** formulation, she has completed an initial sift of retrieved titles and abstracts. She applies the rigorous inclusion criteria devised by the team. Not a single article would make it through to the full article stage. She is concerned that the team has made their review topic too exclusive and may have only an ‘empty review’ to offer to the research funders.

#### What are the root causes of this particular problem?

#### What strategies might you suggest to help Brenda overcome this problem?

### Scenario C: Sanjay

Sanjay is a part-time student, conducting a literature review for his academic thesis. He has devised a comprehensive search plan for his literature review and meets with his supervisor to discuss his next steps. His supervisor suggests that, in addition to the topics he has already identified, he needs to access key concepts from the psychological literature. Discussing his review question with a work colleague, who has recently completed an MBA, she suggests that the management literature may also have something to contribute. Revisiting his search plan, he now finds that these suggested revisions have tripled the size of the literature to be screened and sifted.

#### What are the root causes of this particular problem?

#### What strategies might you suggest to help Sanjay overcome this problem?

### Scenario D: Eloise

It is month 10 of a 12-month funded project and Eloise is worried. She has completed data extraction and quality assessment of about half of the 80 articles to be included in her literature review. She has no idea what are the main findings that are going to emerge from her review, let alone how the literature review is going to be written on time.

#### What are the root causes of this particular problem?

#### What strategies might you suggest to help Eloise overcome this problem?

### Scenario E: Sandra

Sandra has just received the monthly budget report for her first ever 18-month literature review. It is month 7 and she has spent well over half the budget allocation for the project. The project is proceeding on schedule but she is concerned that she is going to have to report a likely end of project overspend to her line manager at her next three-monthly review meeting. She is concerned that she has underestimated the project budget for the literature review.

#### What are the root causes of this particular problem?

#### What strategies might you suggest to help Sandra overcome this problem?

### Scenario F: Tomasz

Tomasz is undertaking a systematic review on attitudes to citizenship of first-generation East European migrants. He is at a crucial stage of his literature project. He has identified all studies for likely inclusion in his review. However, he is unsure which method of synthesis to use to summarise these qualitative research reports. His supervisor has extensive experience of supervising systematic review projects, but these have all involved meta-analyses and he has never supervised a qualitative evidence synthesis.

#### What are the root causes of this particular problem?

#### What strategies might you suggest to help Tomasz overcome this problem?

### Scenario G: James

James is feeling frustrated. For some time now, he has been sending emails to topic experts on the review team asking for their input. Although they are only located 40 miles (64 km) away, in the nearest adjacent city, they seem to have ‘disappeared into a black hole in the ether’. James is concerned that, without their cooperation and input, the literature review will fall behind its time schedule and lack credibility with practitioners.

#### What are the root causes of this particular problem?

#### What strategies might you suggest to help James overcome this problem?