CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK IN THE RESEARCH CYCLE

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Research Cycle

- Developed by Mckenzie in 1995
- Research method that emphasizes information problem-solving and positions researchers as information producers
- 6 Stages in the Research Cycle
- Researchers repeatedly revisit stages in the cycle as they refine data gathering processes
Stages in the Research Cycle

- Questioning - clarifies information needed
- Planning - identifies approach & data sources
- Gathering – collection of pertinent information
- Sorting & sifting - sorting and sifting information that contributes to understanding
- Synthesizing/analysing - arranging information in search of patterns and/or a clearer picture
- Evaluating - what may be missing and REPEAT ABOVE
- Reporting
Questioning

- Clarify and map out the dimensions of the essential question being explored
- Brainstorming to form a cluster diagram of related questions
- Clarify what new insight is required, what problem needs solving? What are the smaller questions which will help create an answer to the primary question? What does the researcher already know? What is missing? What does the researcher not know?
Planning

- Think strategically
- Develop information-seeking strategies; Where might the best information lie? What sources? Which resources are reliable?
- What steps will be required to protect against bias and develop a balanced view?
- This is the stage during which the conceptual framework of the study is developed (*more of this later*).
Gathering

- Various sources are used, one of which might be the internet
- If the planning has proceeded well, the time on the internet may be limited by direct hits produced by careful selection of good information sites
- It is essential that researchers save good information as they gather
The researcher may gather lots of info with each brief visit to the internet.

This stage in the cycle requires systematic scanning of data to set aside that which will contribute to insight.

The researcher sorts and sifts the information e.g. fishing net.

The researcher is looking for information which contributes to understanding.
Synthesising/Analysing

- Researcher arranges and rearranges the information fragments until some kind of picture begins to emerge.
- Stage where descriptive or econometric analysis is conducted.
Evaluating

- Early attempts at synthesis usually produce some frustration and a sense that the researcher needs to return for more information
- The researcher asks what more is needed
- The cycle kicks in once more as questioning intensifies and leads to planning and more gathering
- It is usually necessary to repeat the cycle to gather more info and complete investigation
Reporting

- The researcher or research team, reports its findings and recommendations to an audience of decision-makers
Conceptual Framework - The Need

- Biologist Heinrich et al (1984) spent a summer conducting detailed, systematic research on ant lions.
- Returning to the university, discovered results were quite different from those published by other researchers.
- Redid his experiments the following summer.
- Found they missed unexamined assumption about the ant lions’ time frame: observations not long enough to detect some key aspects.
Conclusion, “Even carefully collected results can be misleading if the underlying context of assumptions is wrong”

So conceptual framework of your study is a key part of your design

Conceptual framework is broadly: the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research
Conceptual Framework - Definition

- A visual or written product, one that “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied—the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationships among them”

- Broadly refers to the actual ideas and beliefs that you hold about the phenomena studied, whether these are written down or not;

- May also be called the “theoretical framework” or “idea context” for the study
Definition cont’d

- Is primarily a conception or model of what is out there that you plan to study, and of what is going on with these things and why—a tentative theory of the phenomena that you are investigating.

- Function of this theory is to inform the rest of your design—to help you to assess and refine your goals, develop realistic and relevant research questions, select appropriate methods, and identify potential validity threats to your conclusions.
Definition cont’d

- Conceptual framework is a theory, however tentative or incomplete it may be
- Formulating the research problem is part of the conceptual framework
Many writers identify the part of a research design, proposal, or published paper that deals with the conceptual framework of a study as the *literature review*. This can be a dangerously misleading term. In developing your conceptual framework, you should not simply review and summarize some body of theoretical or empirical publications, for 3 main reasons:
Reasons distinguish CF from Literature review

1) Can lead to a narrow focus on the literature, ignoring other conceptual resources that may be of equal or greater importance for your study;

2) Tends to generate a strategy of “covering the field” rather than focusing on those studies and theories that are particularly relevant to your research;

3) Can lead you into thinking your task is simply descriptive – merely reporting what has been previously found or theories proposed.
Modules to Construct Conceptual Framework

- There are 4 main sources:
  1) Your experiential knowledge;
  2) Existing theory and research;
  3) Your pilot and exploratory research; and
  4) Thought experiments
Experiential Knowledge

- One of the most important conceptual resources and the one that is most seriously neglected in research design
- Traditionally, what you bring to the research from your own background and identity has been treated as *bias*, to be *eliminated* from the design, rather than a valuable component of it
- But separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks
Existing Theory and Research

- The second major source

- Theory here means simply a set of concepts and ideas and the proposed relationships among these, a structure that is intended to capture or model something about the world
Pilot and Exploratory Research

- Pilot studies are focused more precisely on your concerns and theories
- You can design pilot studies specifically to test your ideas or methods and explore their implications
Thought Experiments

- Common in physical and biological sciences though not very common in social sciences
- Challenge you to come up with plausible explanations for your and others’ observations
- Can generate new theoretical models and test your current theory
Thank You