

Formulating and clarifying the research topic

Formulating and clarifying your research topic

The important steps

- Identifying the attributes of a good research topic
- Generating ideas that help you select a suitable topic
- Turning ideas into clear research questions and objectives
- Writing your research proposal

Attributes of a good research topic (1)

Capability: is it feasible?

- Are you fascinated by the topic?
- Do you have the necessary research skills?
- Can you complete the project in the time available?
- Will the research still be current when you finish?
- Do you have sufficient financial and other resources?
- Will you be able to gain access to data?

Attributes of a good research topic (2)

Appropriateness: is it worthwhile?

- Will the examining institute's standards be met?
- Does the the topic contain issues with clear links to theory?
- Are the research questions and objectives clearly stated?
- Will the proposed research provide fresh insights into the topic?
- Are the findings likely to be symmetrical?
- Does the research topic match your career goals?

Attributes of a good research topic (3)

And - (if relevant)

Does the topic relate clearly to an idea
you were given -

possibly by your organisation ?

Generating research ideas

Useful Techniques

Rational thinking

Creative thinking

Searching the literature

Scanning the media

Brainstorming

Relevance Trees

Exploring past projects

Discussion

Keeping an ideas notebook

Writing research questions

Write research questions that are

- Consistent with expected standards
- Able to produce clear conclusions
- At the right level (not too difficult)
- Not too descriptive
- Use the 'Goldilocks Test'

Clough and Nutbrown (2002)

Turning ideas into research projects (1)

Examples of research ideas and their derived focus questions

Research idea	General focus research questions
Advertising and share prices	How does the running of a TV advertising campaign designed to boost the image of a company affect its share price?
Job recruitment via the Internet	How effective is recruiting for new staff via the Internet in comparison with traditional methods?

Table 2.2 Examples of research ideas and their derived focus research questions

Turning ideas into research projects (2)

Useful techniques

- Start with a general focus question
- Use the 'Russian Doll' principle to reach the essence of the question
- Discuss areas of interest with your tutor

Turning ideas into research projects (3)

Writing clear research objectives

- Check your examining body's preferences for stated objectives
- Use a general focus question to achieve precise objectives

Saunders *et al.* (2009)

Turning ideas into research projects (4)

Include SMART Personal objectives

S pecific

M easurable

A chievable

R ealistic

T imely

The importance of theory

- Asking for opinions and gathering facts – 'what' questions (descriptive research)
- Using questions that go beyond description and require analysis – 'why' questions

Phillips and Pugh (2005)

In order to:

Explain phenomena

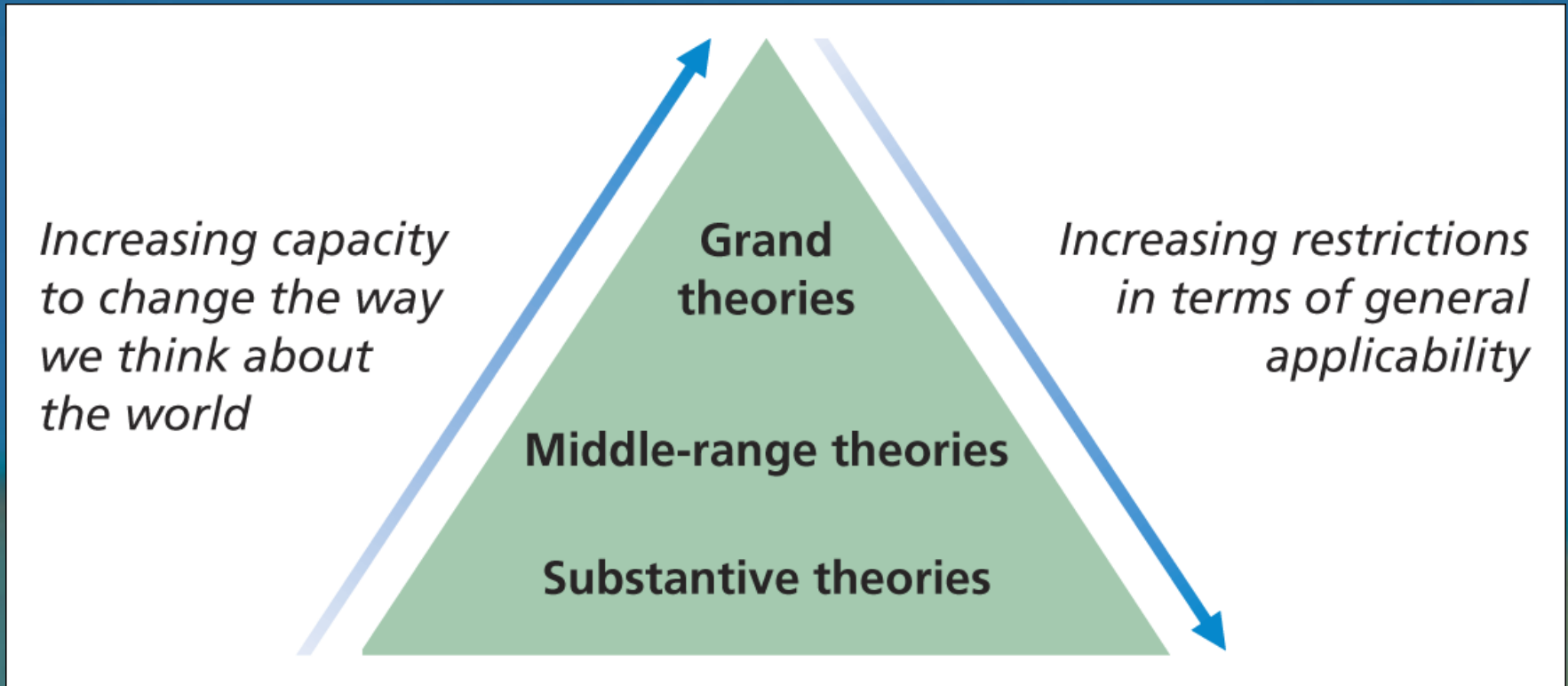
Analyse relationships

Predict outcomes

Compare and generalise

Threefold typology of theories

Grand, middle range and substantive theories



Creswell (2002)

Figure 2.1 Grand, middle-range and substantive theories

Writing your research proposal

Purposes of the research proposal

- To organise your ideas
- To convince your audience
- To contract with your client (your tutor)
- To meet ethical requirements

Content of your research proposal (1)

- Title - likely to change during the process
- Background - context within the literature
- Research questions and objectives - what you seek to achieve

Content of your research proposal (2)

- **Method** - can be in two parts: research design and data collection
- **Timescale and Resources** - (finance, data access, equipment)
- **References** - include some key literature sources

Evaluating research proposals

- How the components of the proposal fit together
- Viability of the proposal
- Absence of preconceived ideas

Summary: Chapter 2

The best research topics

- Formulate and clarify the topic
- Meet the requirements of the examining body
- Use a variety of techniques when generating research ideas
- Are focused on clear questions based on relevant literature

Summary: Chapter 2

The best research topics

- Are theory dependent
- Have a proposal containing organised ideas

Tell the reader:

- What will be done and why
- How it will be achieved