

Conducting a Literature Review & Constructing Research Questions

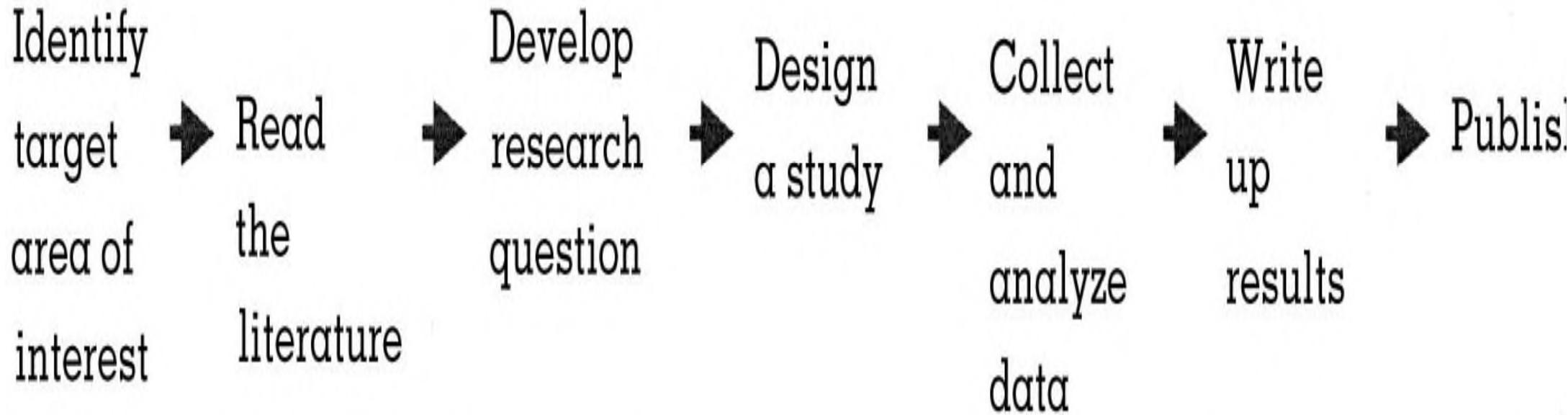
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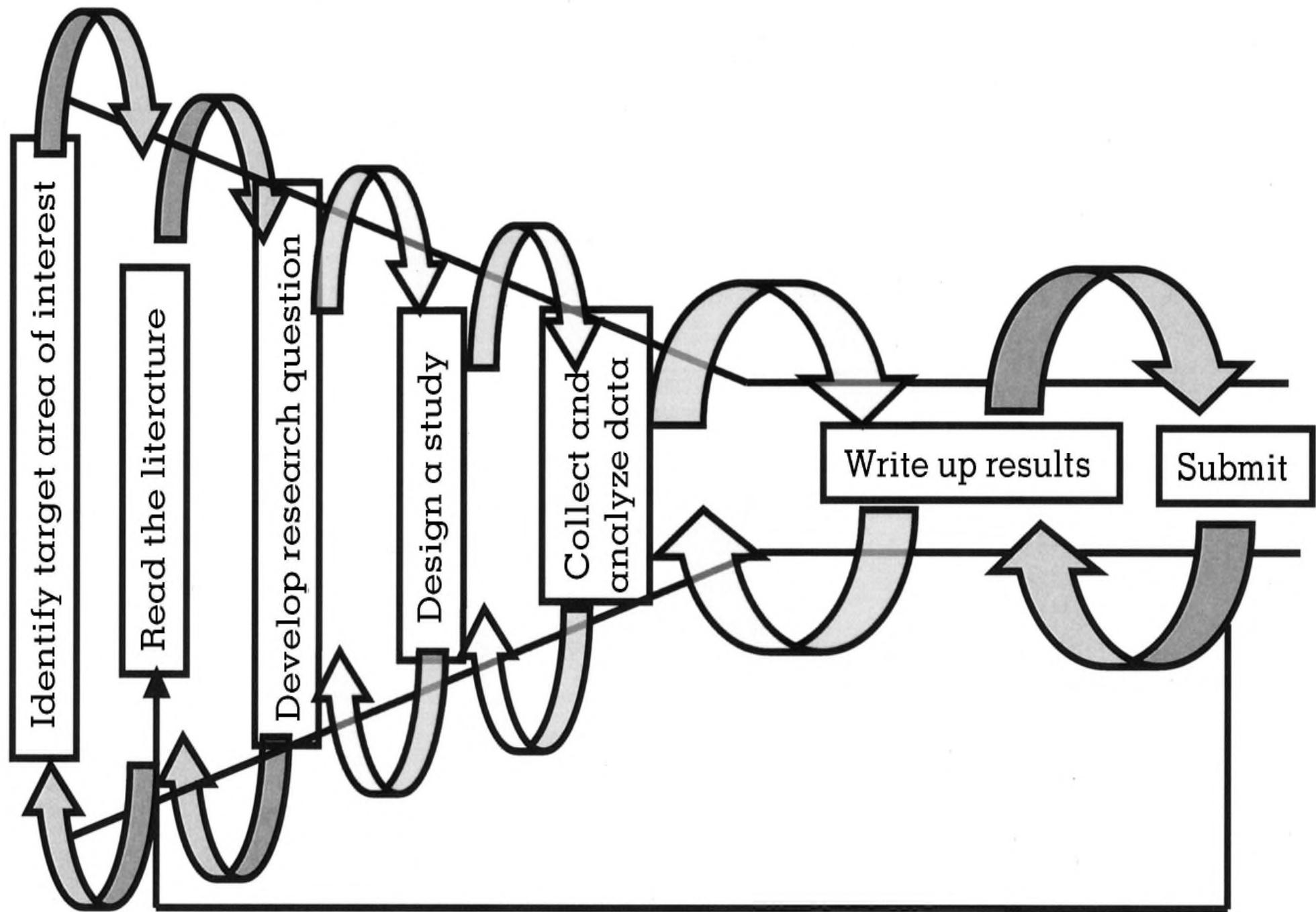
Outline of the presentation

- The research process
- Defining the literature
- Constructing Research Questions
- Key Tasks in Searching, Studying, Analysing & Writing Literature
- Where?
- Quality of the Literature Review

Traditional implicit view of the research process



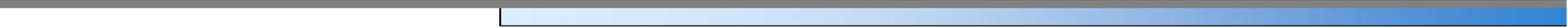
Source: Edmondson & McManus, 2007





PLANNING a RESEARCH PROJECT and GENERATING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

sources & approaches



A 'What, Why, and How' Framework for Crafting Research

What?	Why?
What puzzles /intrigues me! What do I want to know more about/understand better? What are my key research questions?	Why will this be of enough interest to others to be published as a thesis, book, paper, guide to practitioners or policy makers? Can the research be justified as a 'contribution to knowledge'?
How – conceptually?	How – practically?
What models, concepts and theories can I draw on/develop to answer my research questions! How can these be brought together into a basic conceptual framework to guide my investigation?	What investigative styles and techniques shall I use to apply my conceptual framework (both to gather material and analyse it)? How shall I gain and maintain access to information sources?

Sources of Questions

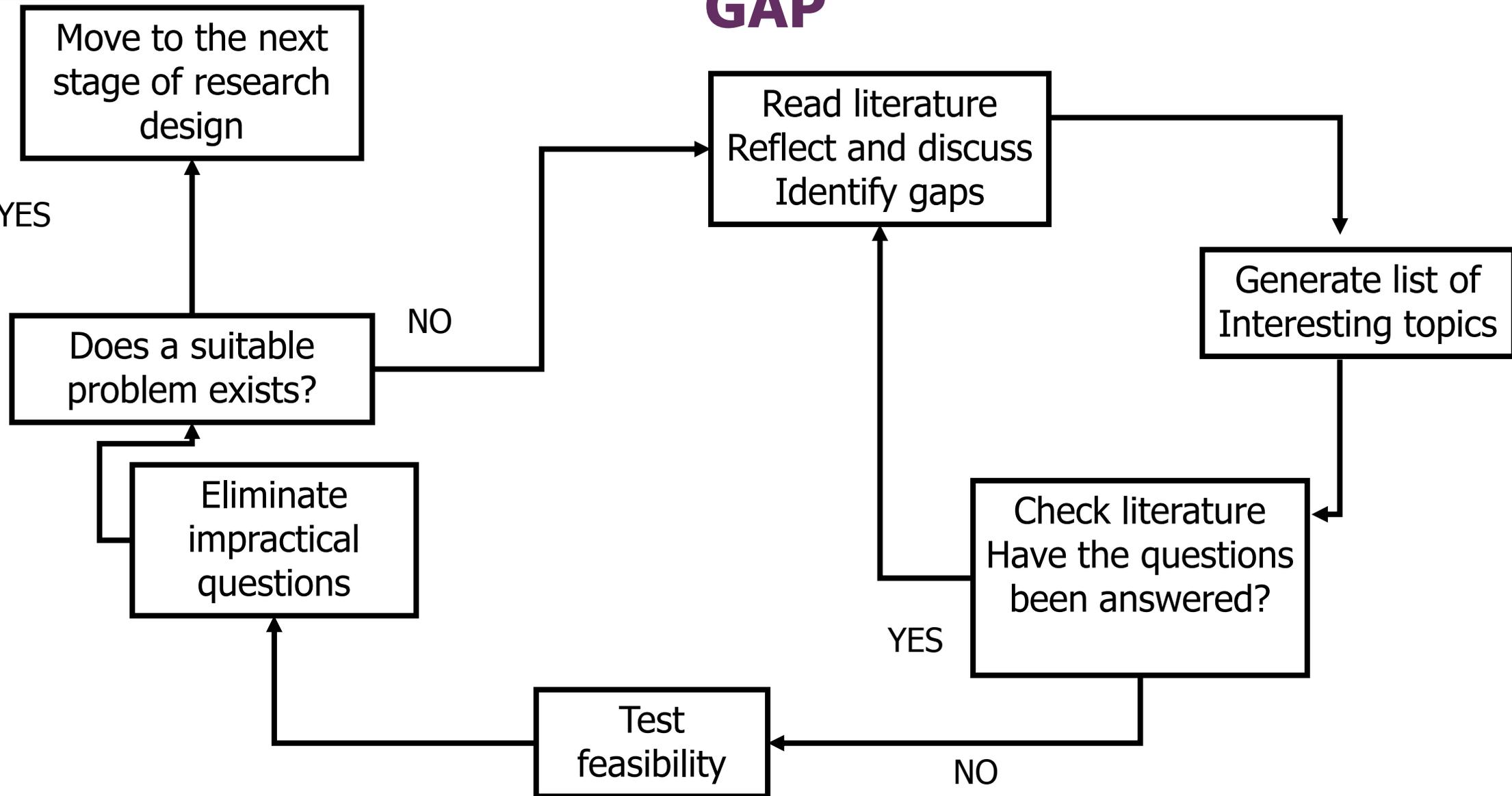
- Intellectual puzzles and contradictions
- The existing literature
- Replication
- Structures and functions
- Opposition
- A social problem
- The counter-intuitive
- Deviant cases and atypical events
- New methods and theories
- Social and technical developments and trends
- Personal experience
- Sponsors and teachers

Three approaches in generating research questions...

- Gap Spotting
- Detecting a Breakdown
- Problematizing



Process for Identifying a Research GAP



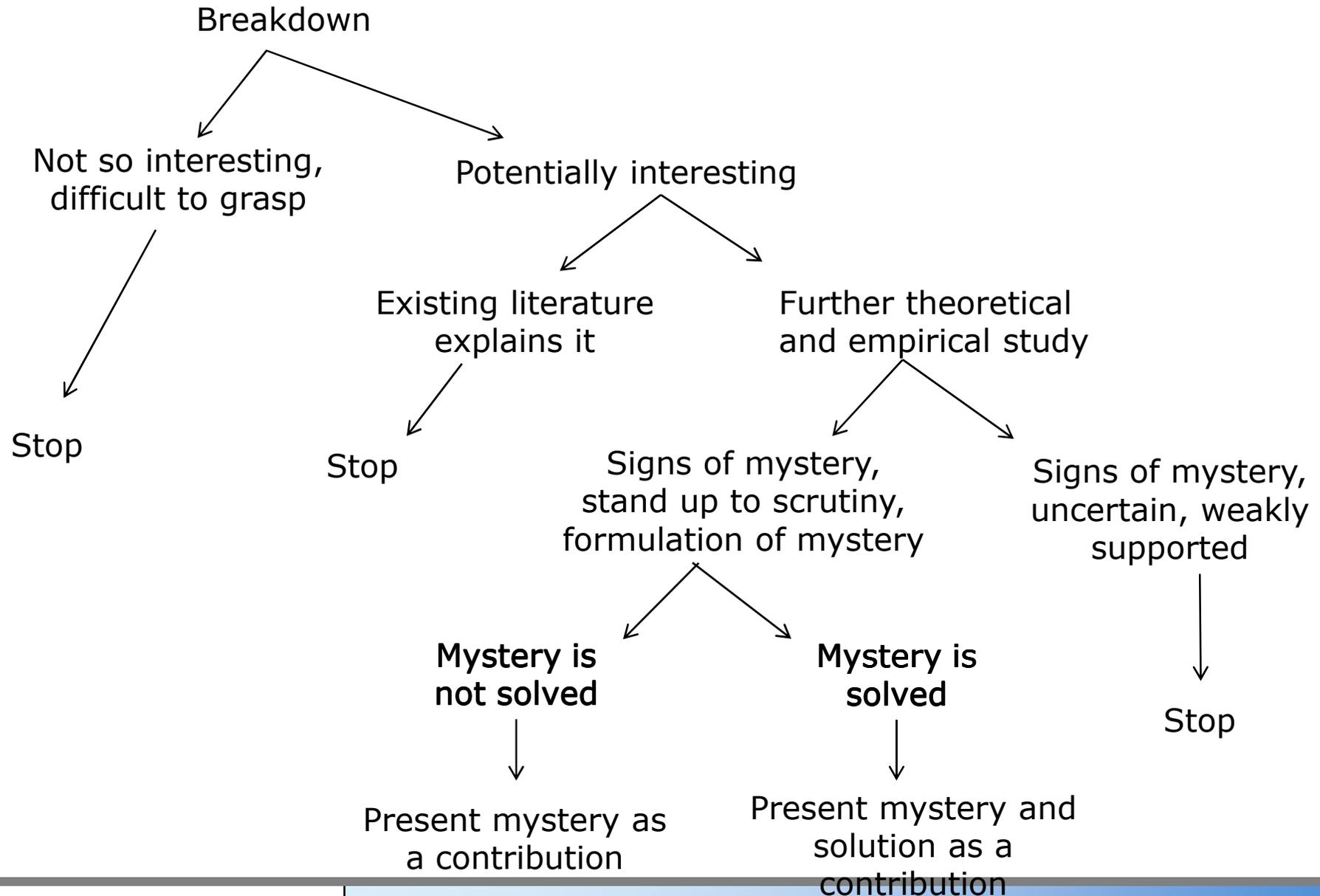
Prasantham & Dhanaraj, 2010

In this paper, we explore the origin, evolution, and appropriation of social capital by new ventures pursuing international markets. While the role of social capital is well covered in the literature, the mechanisms through which it operates over time remain poorly understood. As Mauer and Ebers (2006, p. 262) lament, '... to date we know very little about how organizations' social capital develops over time, about the factors and processes enabling and constraining its development, and about possible related performance implications'. Also, scant attention has been given to the reality of the ebbs and flows of social capital, and its boundaries when it comes to impacting economic decisions. Social capital, like any other capital asset, has to be seen as being dynamic. It appreciates under certain circumstances and depreciates in others. In addition, it can become obsolete or depleted over time. Despite this recognition, the literature does not discuss how social capital and its influences evolve over time (Adler and Kwon, 2002; Burt, 2000). As Burt (2002, p. 342) points out, 'Despite the known performance-implications of bridges, we know almost nothing about their origins and decay.' This has been echoed by management scholars who call for research on the dynamic processes in business

In this paper, we set out to fill this gap by exploring how entrepreneurial firms accrue social capital and exploit it for their international strategy. We pay particular attention to initial ties, which are known to be considerably influential for new ventures (Gulati, 2007; Jack, 2010). In so doing, we seek to address three questions: How do entrepreneurial firms develop their social capital? Does this initial social capital depreciate over time, and if so, how do they replenish it? How do entrepreneurial firms exploit social capital for international growth over time?

Given the paucity of theory in this area, addressing these questions warrants an in-depth qualitative study that will allow explicit observation of the entrepreneurial process in new ventures and the actions entrepreneurs take to build and exploit social networks internationally. We adopt a grounded theory approach studying four new ventures in the software industry over a three-year period. All these firms were located in a large cosmopolitan city in India, Bangalore, known throughout the world for its information technology prowess. The emerging market context of these firms enhances our capacity to observe the influence of social capital. The study draws upon data from

The Research Process: Decision Tree for Mystery-Focused Research



Identifying a breakdown

- “A breakdown is a lack of fit between one’s encounter with a tradition and the schema-guided expectation by which one organizes experience.” (Agar, 1986, p. 21)
- Example: Hawthorne studies: from exploring the effect of light on performance to examining radically new ideas on the dynamics of workplace social interactions. Empirical material challenged original framework of researchers.

Problematizing

- “The first and foremost endeavour to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimizing what is already known.” (Foucault, 1985, p. 9)
- The focal point is not to scan existing literature in order to identify gaps to be filled. Instead, the focal point is to illuminate and challenge those assumptions underlying existing theories (including ones own favorite theories) about a specific subject matter (Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013).
- ASSUMPTIONS ARE THE START POINT FOR ALL KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Examples

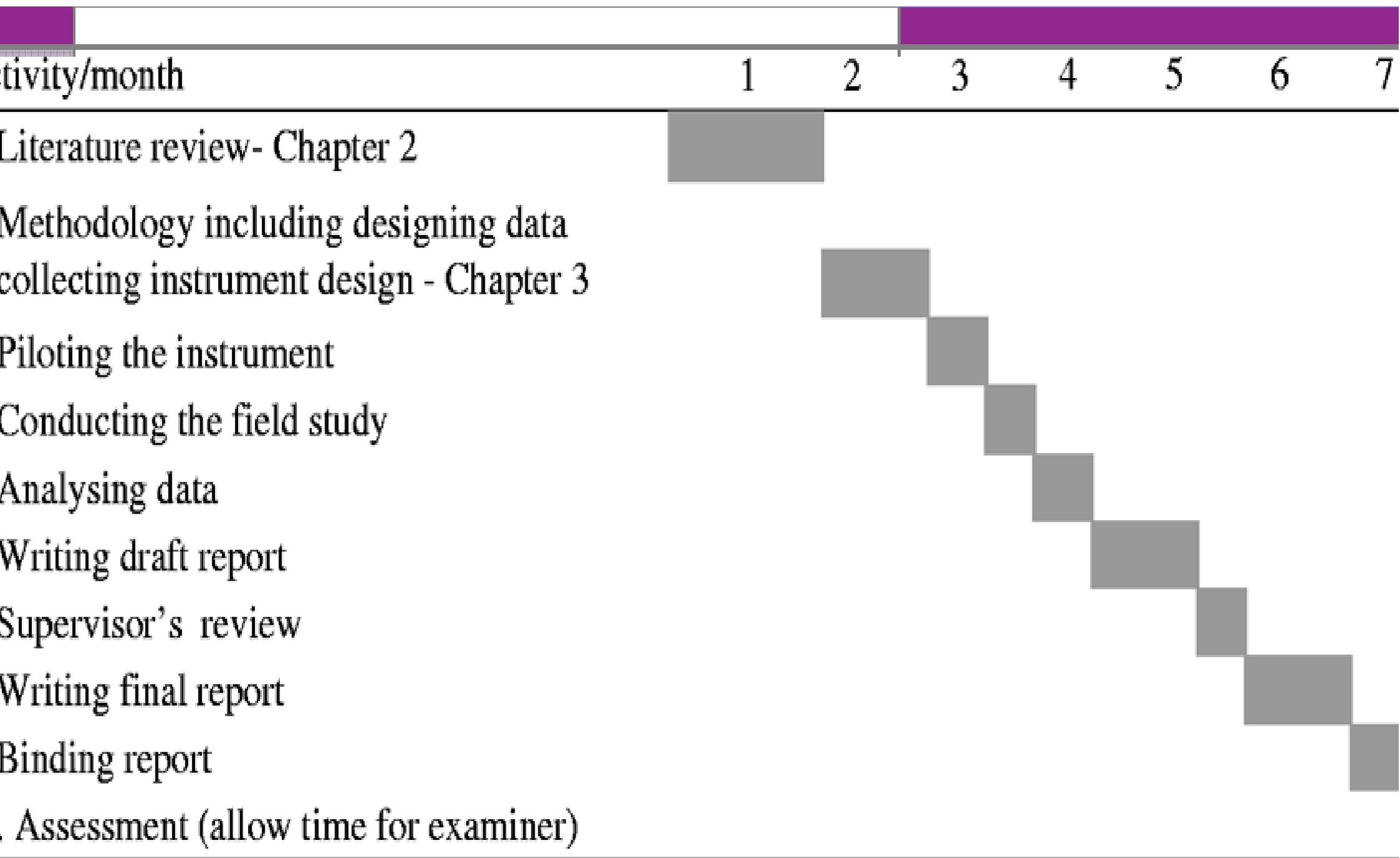
- Sandberg, J. (2000). Understanding human competence at work: An interpretive approach, *Academy of Management Journal*, 43(1), pp.9-25.
- Michailova, S., Piekkari, R., Plakoyiannaki, E., Ritvala, T. Mihailova, I., & Salmi, A. (2013). Breaking the silence about exiting fieldwork: A relational approach and its implications for theorizing, *Academy of Management Review*, forthcoming.

Challenging Assumptions: Michailova et al.

- We challenged the view that interesting theorizing would only be an outcome of high-quality, sustained relationships in the field, as suggested by the advocates of the relational foundation of research (Dutton & Dukerich, 2006; Gulati, 2007; Van Maanen, 2010).
- Whereas most exits tend to be anticipated, contributing to conventional theorizing, sometimes a revelatory exit caused by a disruptive field relationships with research participants may spur a process of paradoxical theorizing and lead to paradigm-challenging insights.

Do not forget time & Resources

- Work out a timetable, preferably in conjunction with your supervisor
- Detail the stages of your research
 - E.g. the literature review, piloting instruments and writing-up
 - Some stages are ongoing, e.g. searching the literature for new references
- Find out what, if any, resources your institution can put at your disposal for carrying out your research, e.g. :
 - travel costs, photocopying, secretarial assistance, postage, stationery
 - hardware such as tape recorders and transcription machines
 - software, such as SPSS or NVivo



What is a literature review?

- “An interpretation and synthesis of published research” (Merriam, 1988, p.6)
- “A task that continues throughout the duration of the thesis ... shows how the problem under investigation relates to previous research” (Anderson et al, 1970, p.17)
- Requires critical thinking, comparing & contrasting as well as synthesizing academic work
- The best way to learn about your research topic!!!

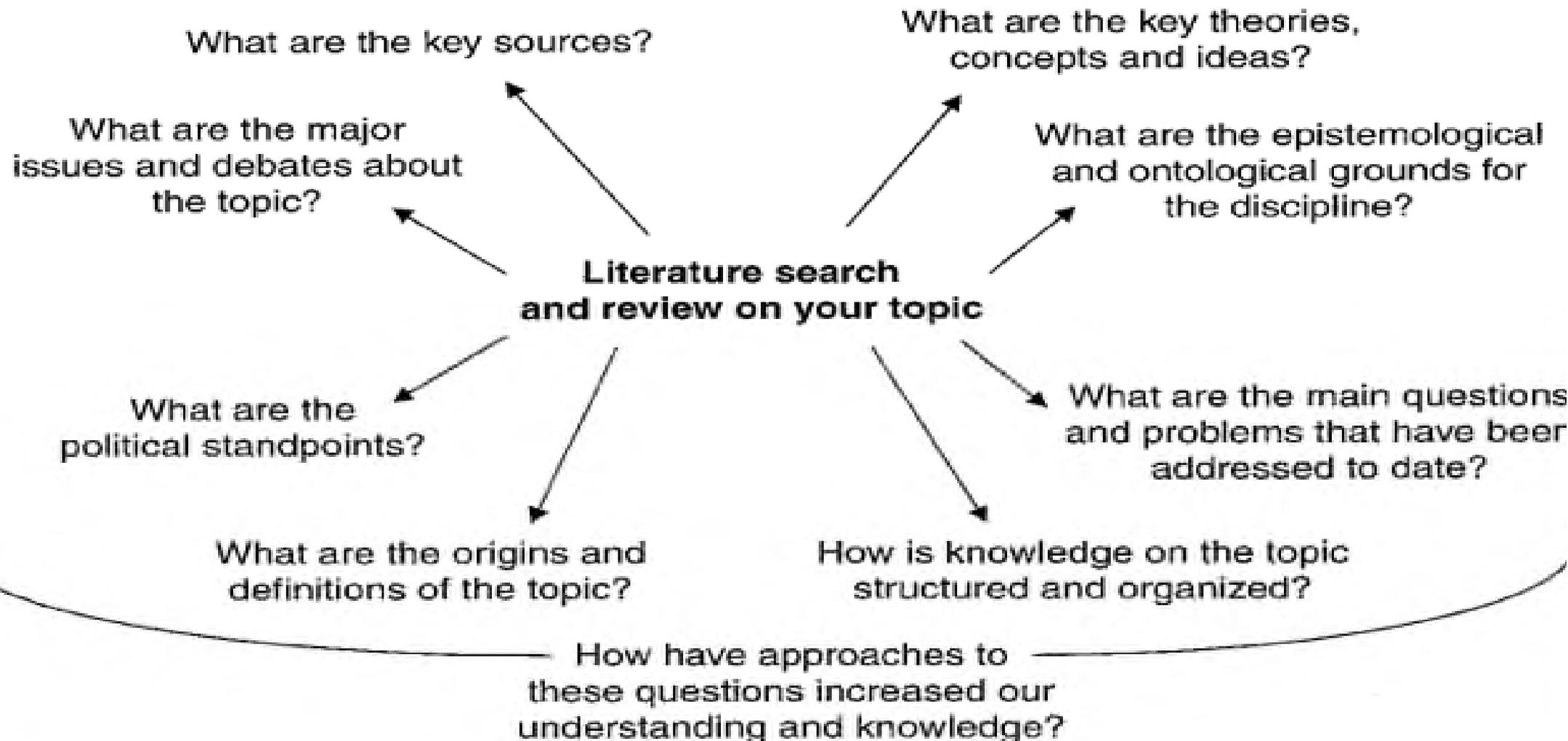
Why do we conduct a literature review? (Purpose)

- Generating Research Questions
- Distinguishing what has been done from what needs to be done
- Discovering important concepts or variables relevant to the topic
- Synthesizing and gaining a new perspective
- Identifying relationships between ideas and practice
- Enhancing and acquiring the subject vocabulary
- Identifying main methodological and research techniques used; context

Questions that a literature review should answer

- Why is this subject important?
- Who else thinks it's important?
- Who has worked on this subject area?
- Who has done something similar to what I am doing?
- What can be adapted to my own study?
- What are the research gaps or breakdowns?
- Who is going to use my material?
- What use will my project be?
- What will my contribution be?

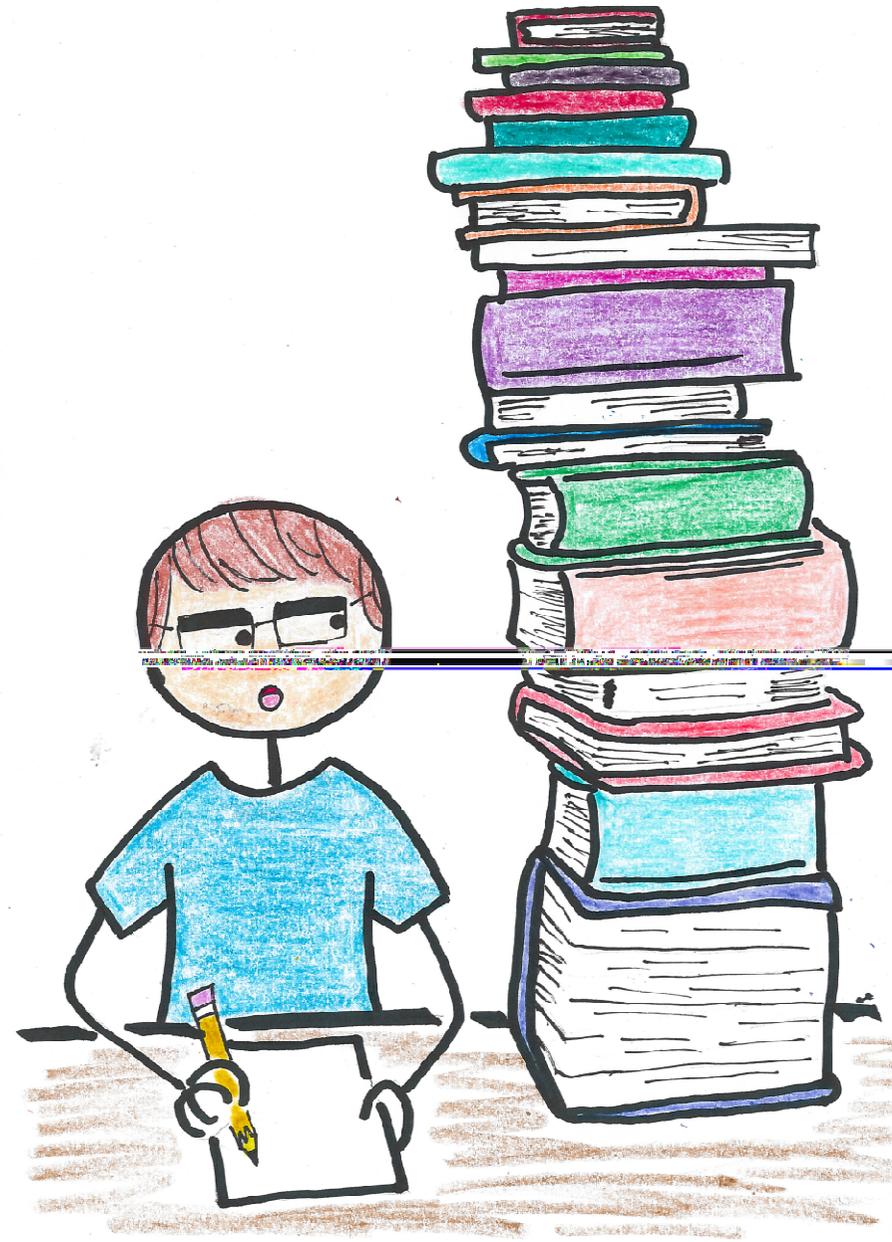
Questions that a literature review should answer



Function of the literature review

- **MA, Msc Dissertation:** Analytical and summative, covering methodological issues, research techniques and topics. Demonstrates knowledge of the theoretical issues and debates in the topic/problem. Presents and discusses state-of-the-art research in critical manner. Offers comparisons and synthesis.
- **PhD Thesis:** Analytical synthesis, covering all known literature on the problem, including that in other languages (apart from the disciplinary convention). High level of conceptual linking within and across theories. Summative and formative evaluation of previous work on the topic. Depth and breadth of discussion on the relevant philosophical traditions and way in which they relate to the research phenomenon.

- **SEARCHING**
- **STUDYING**
- **WRITING ... THE LITERATURE**

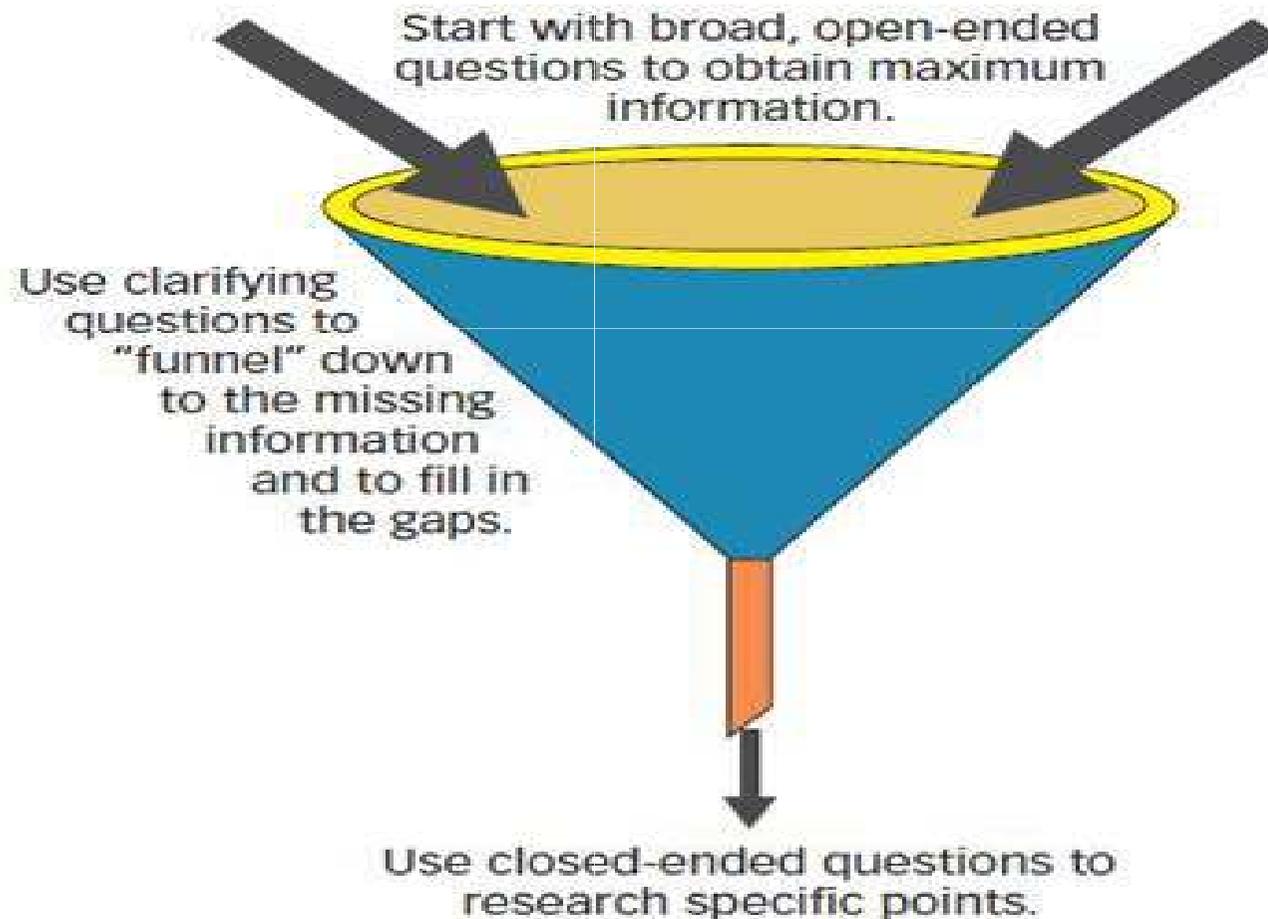


How do I search the literature?

- Read books and articles you know, or are recommended by your supervisor;
- Keep notes based on your reading;
- Note the keywords used;
- Note other literature which might be interesting later;
- Generate your own keywords. Search your institution's library;
- Search online (using an appropriate database);
- Examine titles and abstracts for relevance;
- Retrieve selected items, read, take notes;
- Check regularly for new material.

A funnel Approach

Funnel approach / FIGURE 1

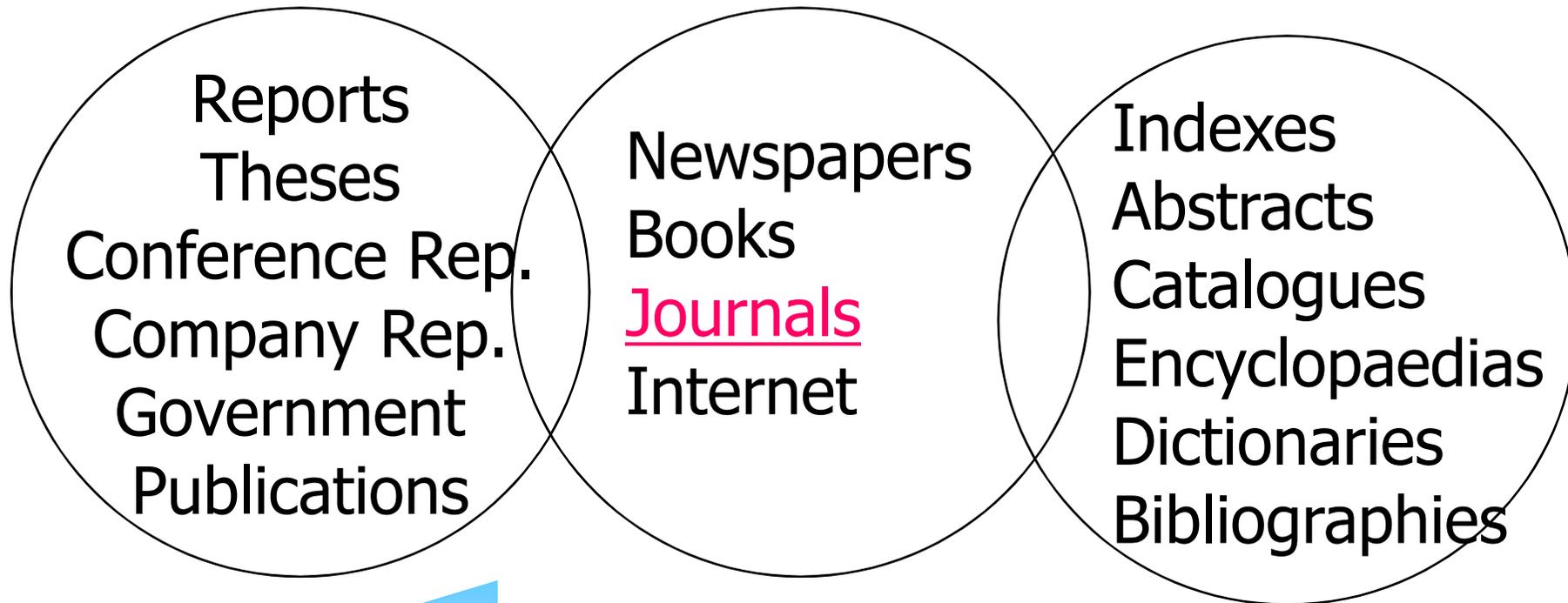


Key tasks in **SEARCHING** the literature...

Primary

Secondary

Tertiary



← Increasing Level of Detail

Increasing Time to Publish →

Parameters & Keywords

Language of Publication (e.g. English, Chinese, Spanish....)

Subject area (e.g. multinationals); Business sector (e.g. manufacturing); Geographical areas (e.g. Europe, Asia)

Publication Period (e.g. last 7 years); Literal type (e.g. **refereed journals**)

Search within publication

• Three recommended databases:

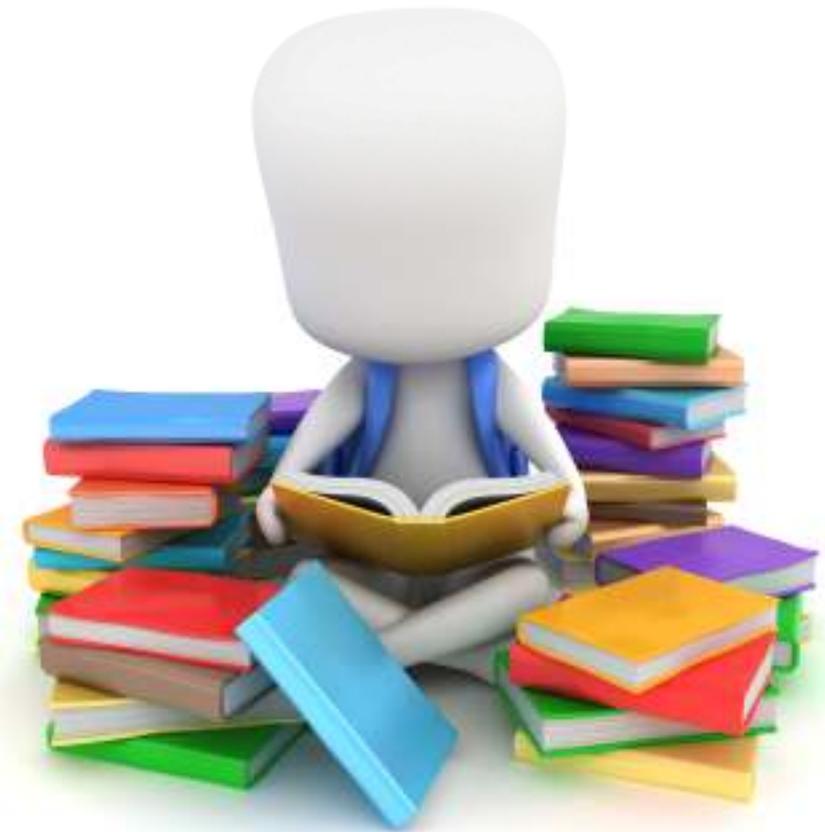
- ABI / Inform (proquest.com)
- EBSCO (epnet.com)
- SSCI (isiwebofknowledge.com)

How Your Supervisor can Help you?

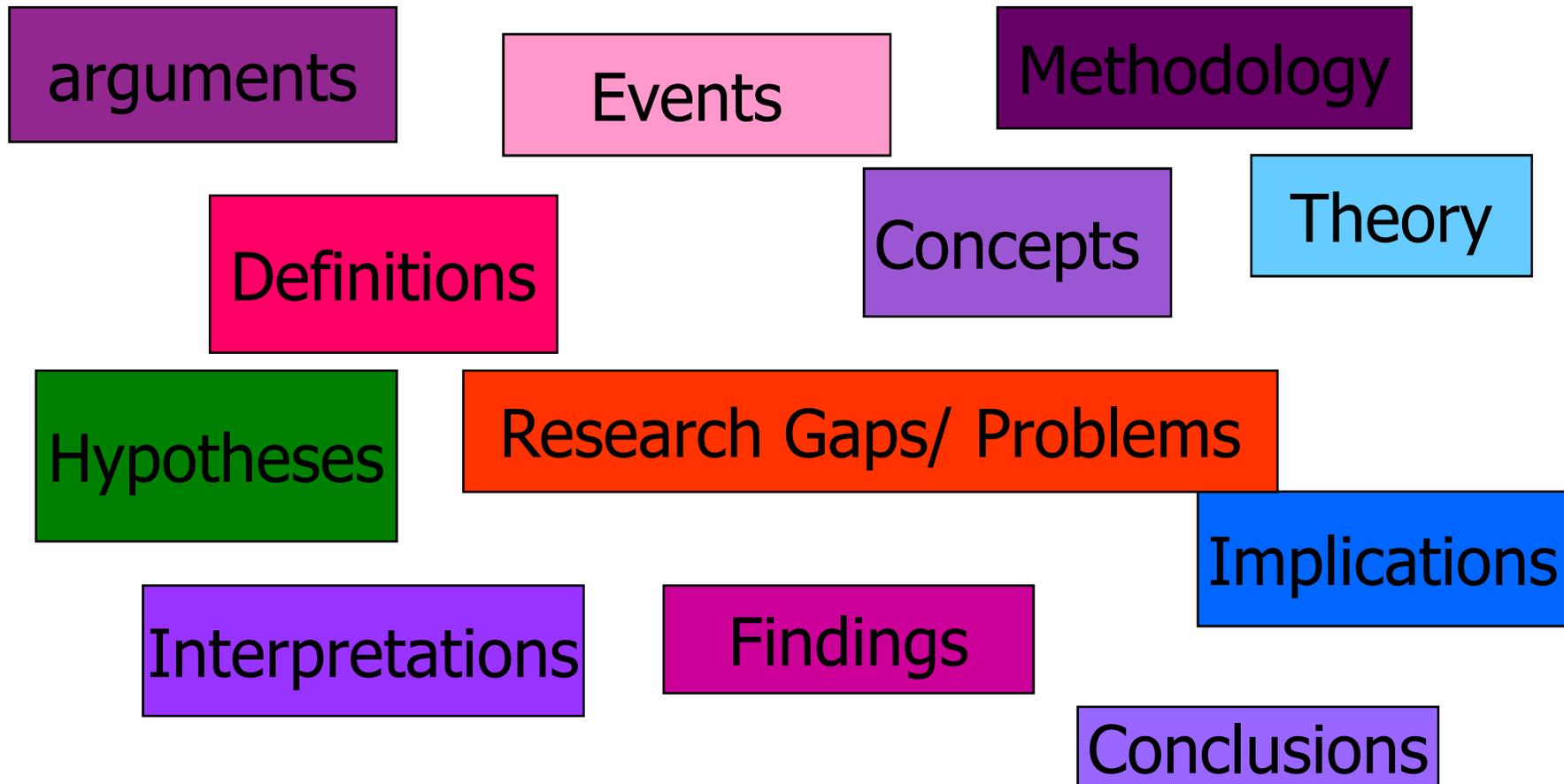
- ✓ By giving you a 'starter' reading-list;
- ✓ By mentioning key contributors and/or seminal articles in your field;
- ✓ By giving you a 'credibility' index of writers and journals;
- ✓ By suggesting other literature review and meta-analysis papers;
- ✓ By, perhaps, discussing their own research and publications with you.

Key Tasks in **STUDYING** the literature:

- Reading the literature
- Mapping and Analysing
- Comparing and Contrasting



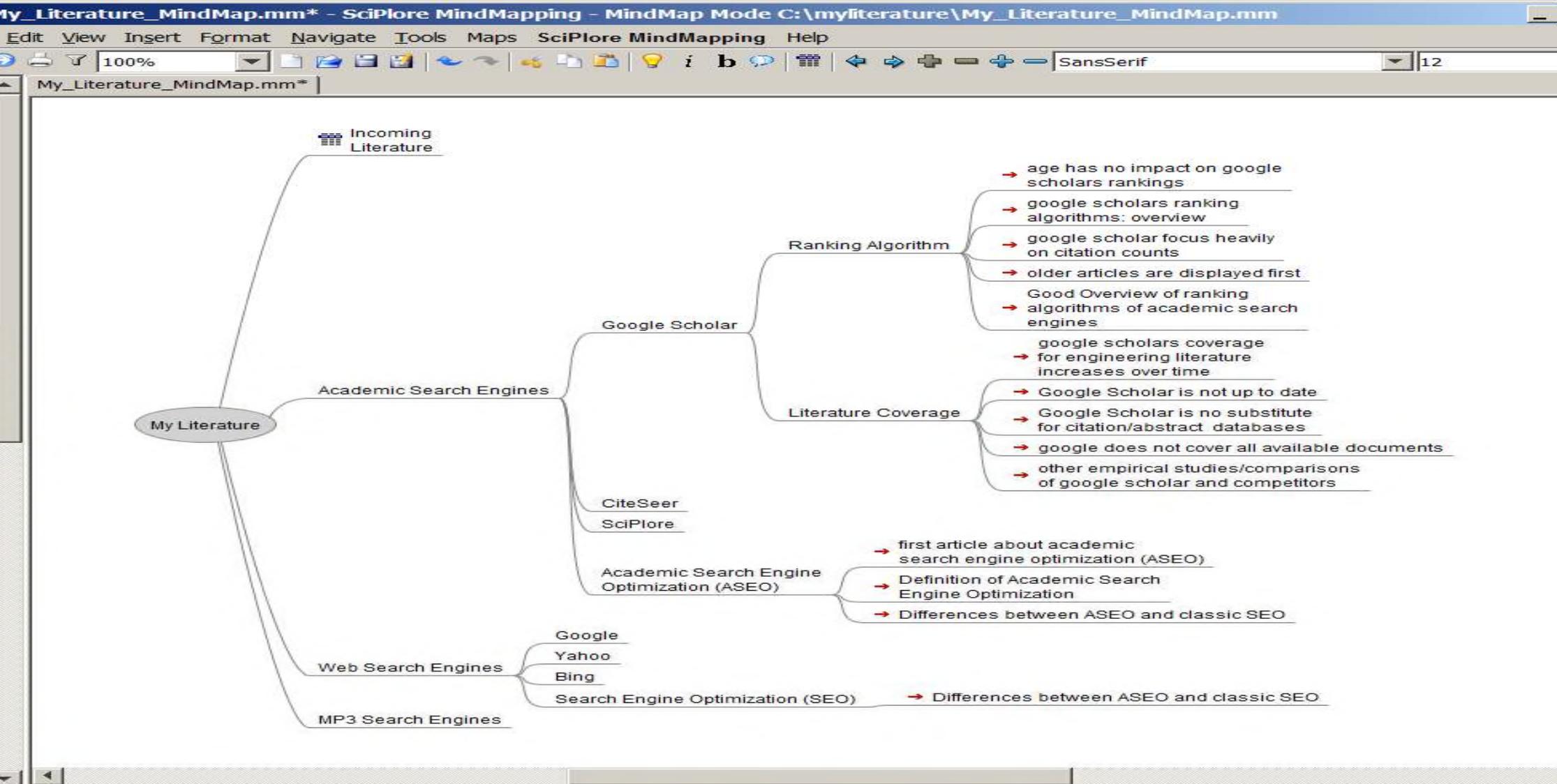
Reading the literature...



How do I read a paper?

- What were the research aims and objectives (of studied work)?
- What were the outcomes of the research?
- What approaches/methods/ strategies were used?
- In what context was the research conducted?
- What was the contribution to the field?
- Does it have any connection to my research question?
- Are there any limitations/directions for future research relevant to my research idea?

Mapping & Analysing



Issues	Options
What is the purpose of the study?	Basic research, applied research, summative evaluation, formative evaluation, action research, illuminative evaluation, ethnomethodology.
What is the scope of the study?	What is included, excluded, why and to what effect?
What is the focus for the study?	People, policy, programmes. Breadth versus depth, case study, survey, chronological, comparative and so on.
What are the units of analysis?	Individuals, groups, programme components, whole programmes, organizations, critical incidents, time period and so on.
What is the sampling strategy?	Purposeful, probability, quota, random, size, representation, significance and level of generalizability.
What types of data were collected?	Qualitative, quantitative.
How were the data managed?	Organization, classification, presentation, referenced, indexed and so on.
What analytical approach is used?	Deductive, inductive.
How is validity addressed in the study?	Triangulation, multiple data sources, multiple study.
When did the study occur?	Currency of findings, long-term investigation, short and snappy, phased and piloted.
How is the study justified?	Literature review and analysis, problem definition, practical outcomes, intellectual endeavour and so on.
How are ethical issues handled?	Informed consent, confidentiality of information, reactivity data protection and so on.
How are logistics handled?	Access to data and respondents, fieldwork, record keeping, data management and so on.

Mapping and Analysing the literature (cont'd)

Author/ date	Theory/ standpoint	Evidence	Argument	Core citations	Misc.

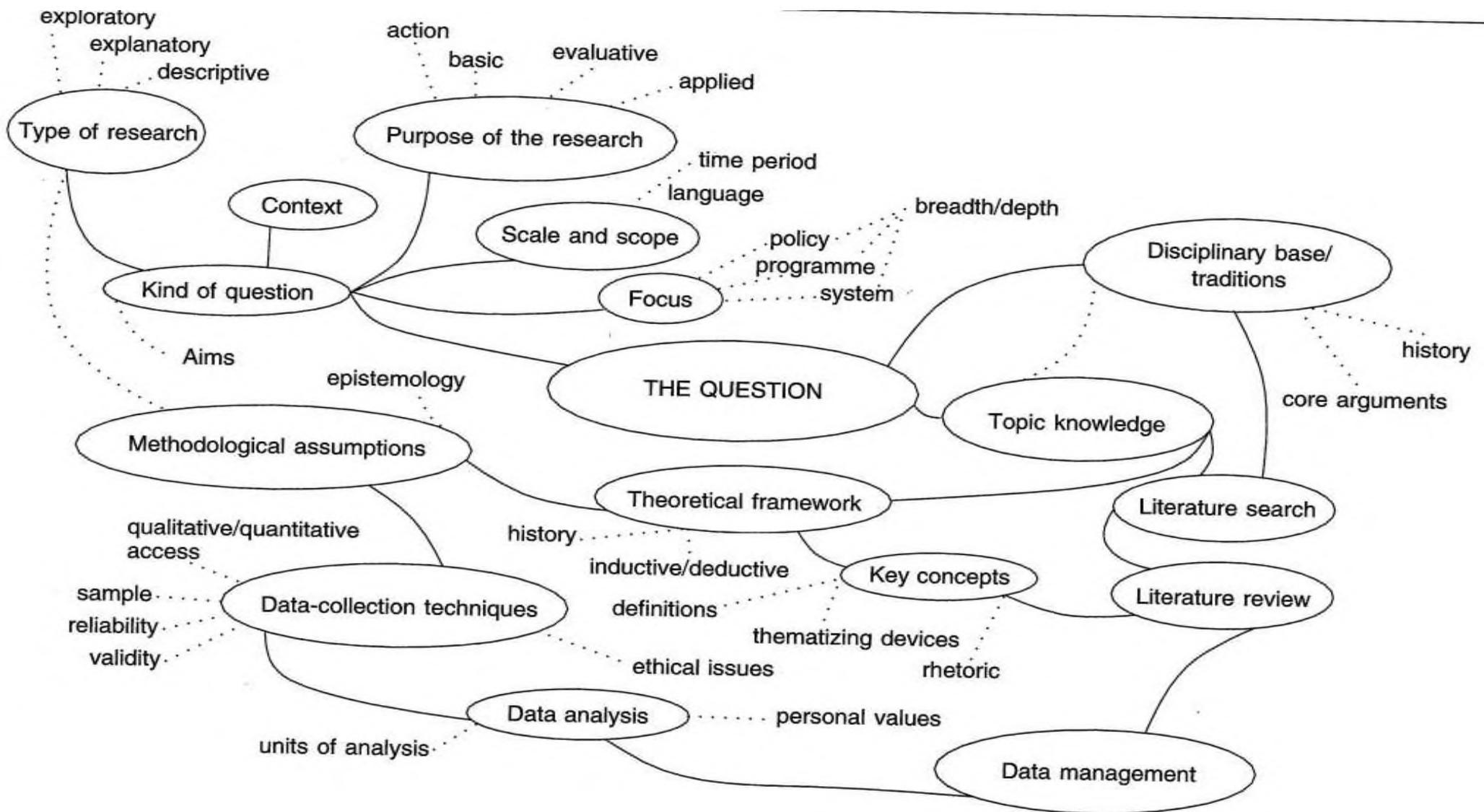
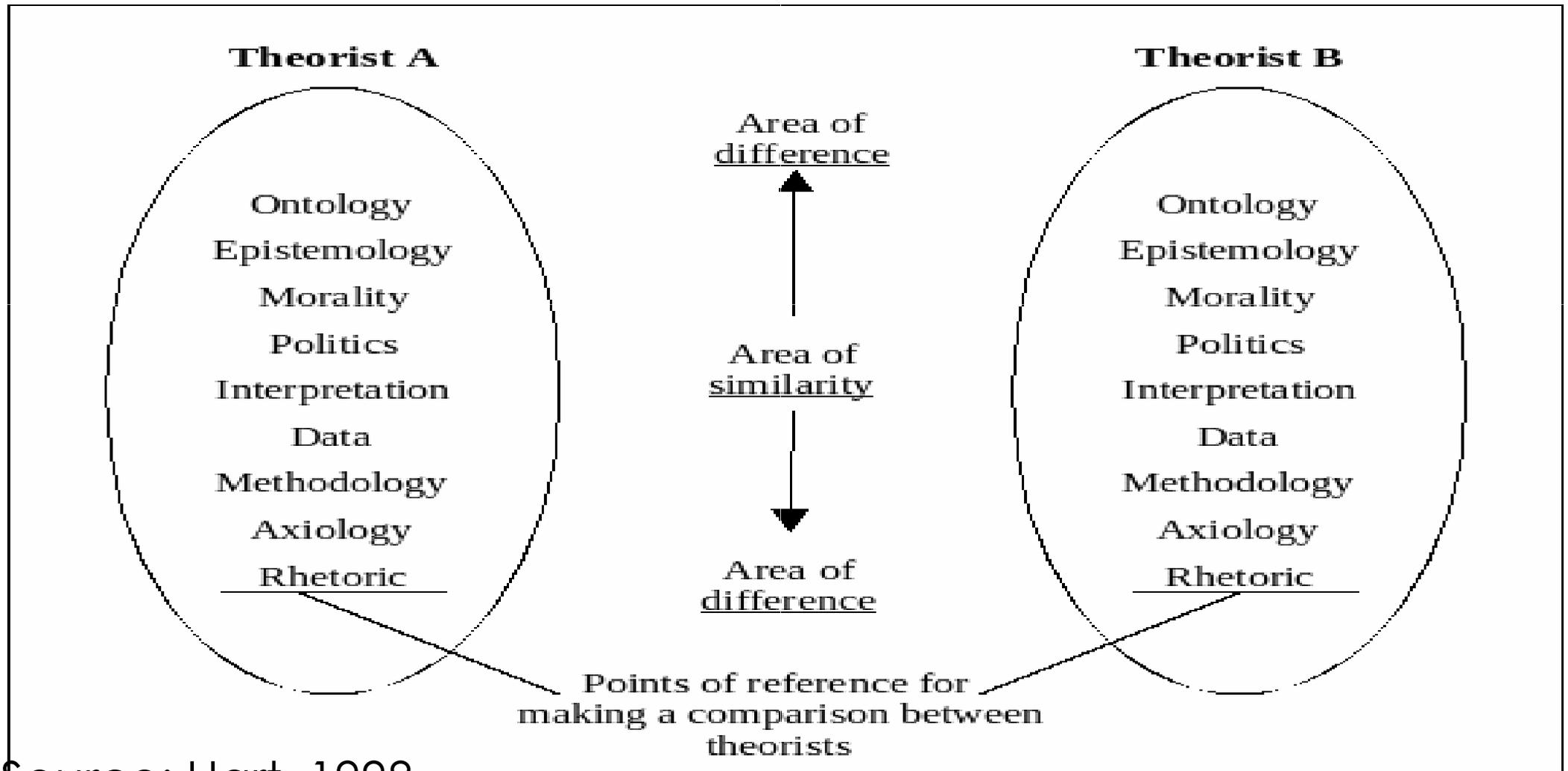




Figure 6.5 A subject relevance tree for the social science treatment of advertising

The art of comparing & contrasting...



Source: Hart, 1998

Key Tasks in **WRITING** the Literature Review...

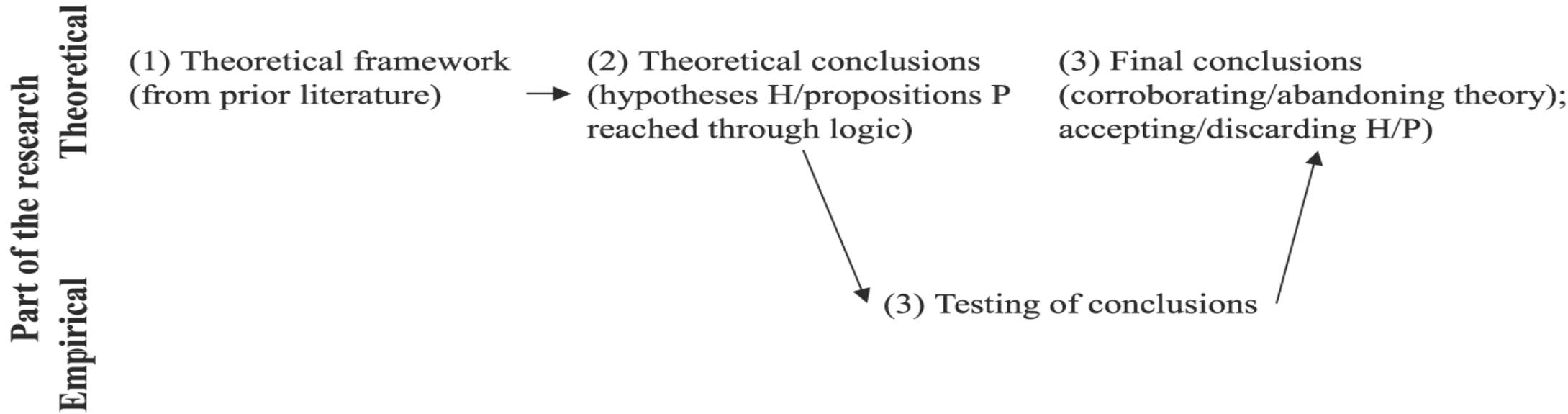
- Define terms
- Justify selection of literature
- Justify omissions
- Signal the structure
- Link your work to the literature
- Critique the literature
- Define the gap or the problem

Prompts for initial **WRITING** about the literature

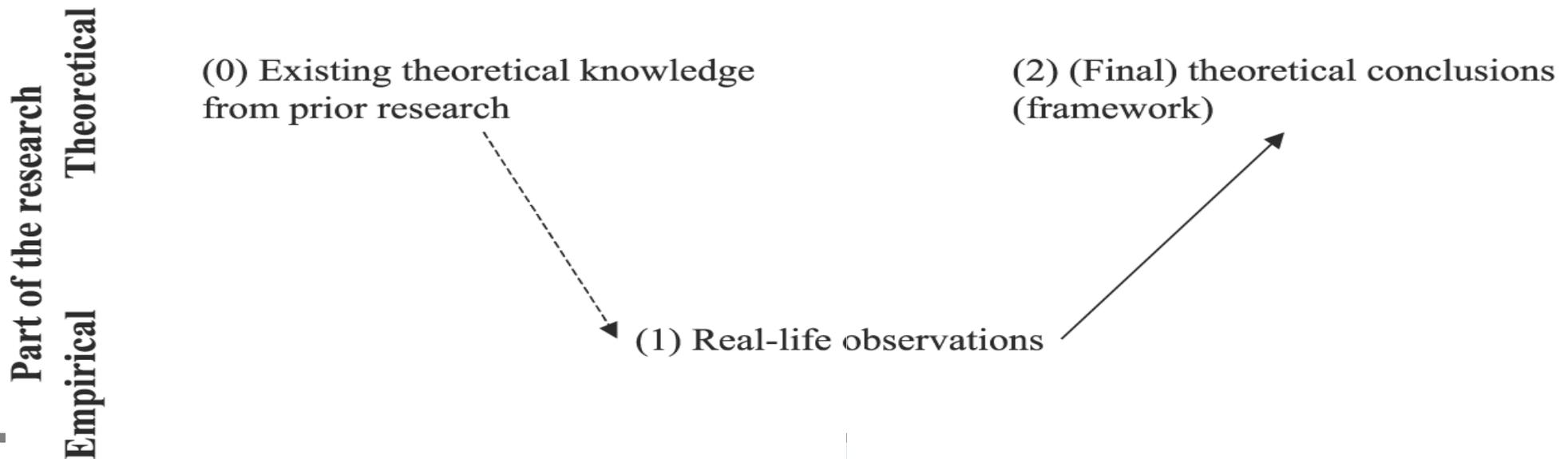
- What do I know about my research topic?
- What I am looking for in the literature is ...
- What are the schools of thought in the literature?
- The “great debates” in my research area are...

Where ???

Purely deductive research process



Purely inductive research process



Quality of the literature review

- Relevance & Critical thinking...
- Sufficiency: relates to saturation & repetition. Repetition of key scholars and theories are a sign that we have covered a substantial body of literature.

Key Sources:

- Alvesson, M. & Sandberg, J. (2013). *Constructing Research Questions: Doing Interesting Research*, Sage Publications.
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Thank you for your
attention!

