AN APPROACH TO CLARIFYING Ph.D. RESEARCH

Draft 1 Started October 2022

 Getting a clear articulated approach to a new research project is often a difficult step for fresh Ph.D. students. Traditional undergraduate education does not equip them for this since it lacks effective tutoring in scientific and other research methods. More fundamentally, it does not help students to think in any deep sense.

Depp or complex thinking requires a level of self-awareness, a fearless approach to ambiguity and uncertainty and an unbounded curiosity. Being smart may not help and can even be an obstacle. It is also helped by having an appropriate method of inquiry that directs attention to the fundamental questions.

This document is an experiment in structuring such an inquiry that offers the chance of clarifying a proposed or ongoing piece of research. It is based on the little known discipline of qualitative systems thinking (or qualsystems) but the user does not need to have studied qualsystems to gain the benefit.

It consists of a process of inquiry that can be

- Self-study and reflection
- A discussion frame with peers
- A tutoring fame with a supervisor

Getting Started -

Work through the six modes of inquiry which are named monad, dyad, triad, tetrad, pentad and hexad and then a seventh section which is pulling it all together.

This approach is dynamic and emergent so cycling and refining back and forth between the modes is encouraged.

Approach this more as an intuitive patterning exercise than a piece of analysis. One application of this method is hypothesis formation, a key to innovative research.

THE MONAD

Universe of Inquiry (UOI)

MAKE NOTES IN RESPONSE TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:
- What are you curious about that seems to be pointing to the possibility of new knowledge or and fresh interpretation?
- What area of inquiry attracts you to take on a Ph.D.?
- Is there something that perplexes you that might be worth researching into?
- Is there a topic in your studies or experience so far where the explanations given feel very unsatisfactory?

Review and reflect on your notes and identify a theme that you intuit could be a unifying focus for your research?

(1) Write two or three words that summarise the possible focus and place in the centre of the Monad Diagram
(2) pick out four or five ideas from the rest of your notes that seem closest to or enriching towards the unifying centre and note them in the first circle.
(3) In the second circle add any that are possibly relevant but more marginal
(4) Outside the second circle note the ideas that, although of interest at the start of this exercise, are irrelevant, distracting or could be confusing to the main focus.

THE DYAD

Why research this universe of inquiry?

The known / unknown boundary

MAKE NOTES IN RESPONSE TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

• What is the state of the known in this topic of inquiry?	• What are the unknown areas of interest?
• What are the primary assumptions of the prevailing view of the topic?	• What are you questioning about those primary assumptions?
• What is interesting for its own sake in this topic?	• What is of interest in this topic from an external perspective?
• What idea that could be different is attracting you?	• What are the forces that would reject that idea?

Review and reflect on your notes and identify the tension that is likely to energise the research unifying focus for your research.

(1) Write notes in response to the contrasts identified in the pairs of questions
(2) Summarise them into one pair that feels like the impetus to make this a research field.
(3) Headline the pair in the Dyad Diagram.
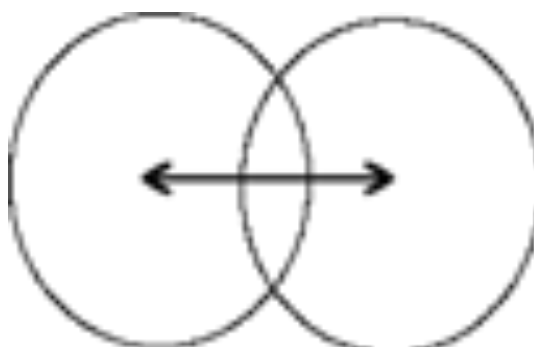
THE TRIAD

What approach?

Finding the Energising questions

MAKE NOTES IN RESPONSE TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

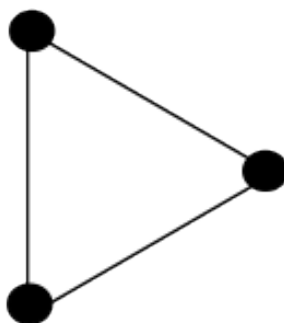| |
|---|
| **AFFIRMATION**

• What do you feel the developmental impetus is that is calling out for investigation and fresh thinking? |
| **RECEPTIVITY**

• What do you see in the current literature and discussions that indicates this would be accessible to take on? |
| **ENGAGEMENT**

• What questions have you come up with that could generate a proposition for research? |

THE TETRAD

What field of work is required?

Articulating Research Field

MAKE NOTES IN RESPONSE TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

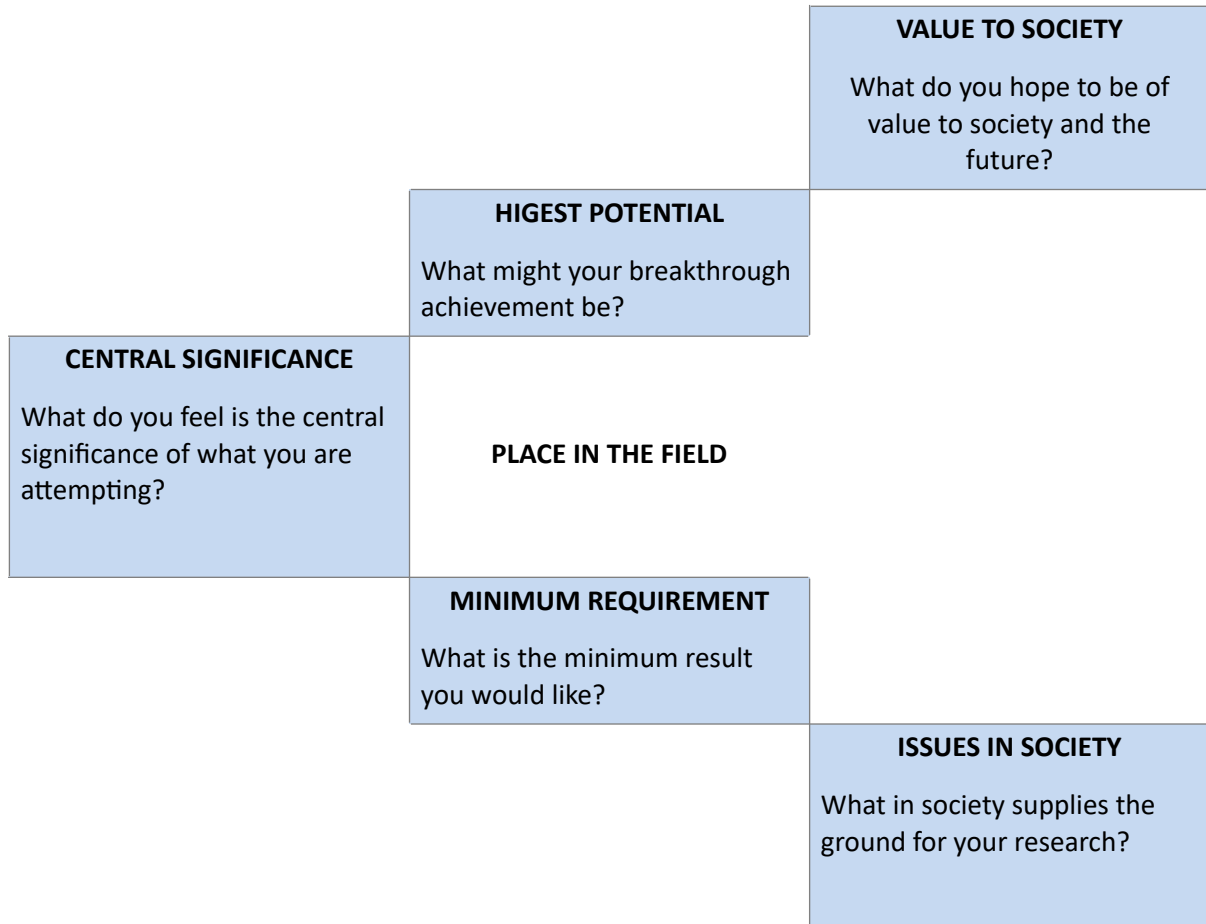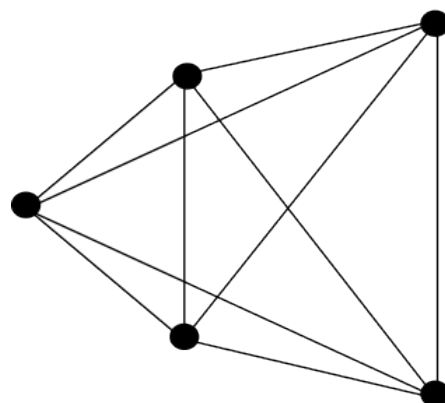|	**IDEAL** What might a satisfying thesis look like, be able to do?	
METHODS What research methods will you need to utilise to develop and articulate your thesis?	**PROVISIONAL TITLE**	**SKILL** What existing skills and experience do you bring to bear; and what will you need to learn?
	RESOURCES What access to resources do you need and what permissions to use them?	
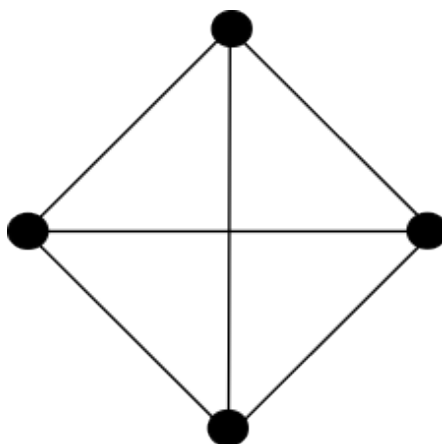
THE PENTAD

What potential value ?

Identifying the possible significance
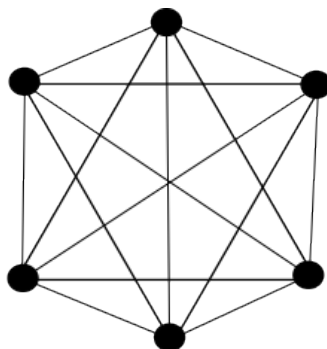
MAKE NOTES IN RESPONSE TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

VALUE TO SOCIETY

What do you hope to be of value to society and the future?

HIGEST POTENTIAL

What might your breakthrough achievement be?

CENTRAL SIGNIFICANCE

What do you feel is the central significance of what you are attempting?

PLACE IN THE FIELD

MINIMUM REQUIREMENT

What is the minimum result you would like?

ISSUES IN SOCIETY

What in society supplies the ground for your research?
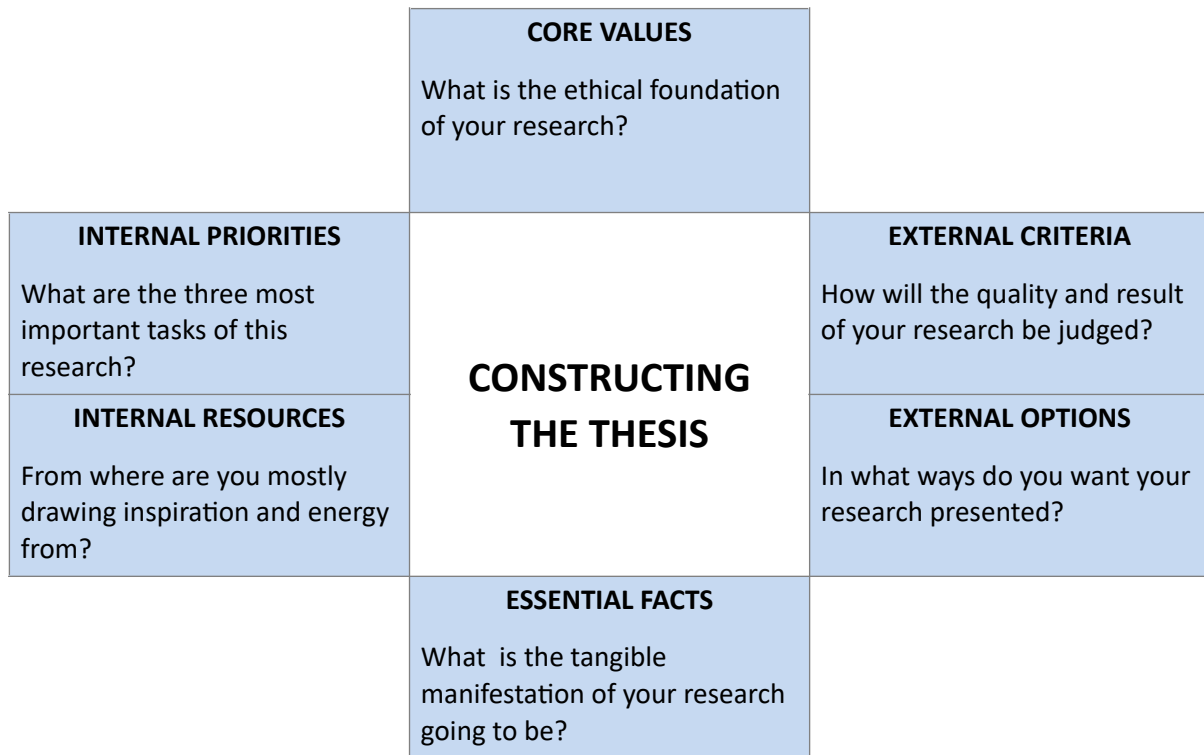
THE HEXAD

Shaping the   **thesis**

Bringing the angles together

MAKE NOTES IN RESPONSE TO THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

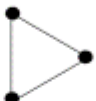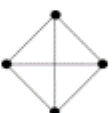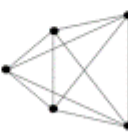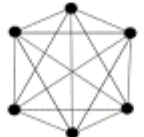|	**CORE VALUES** What is the ethical foundation of your research?	
INTERNAL PRIORITIES What are the three most important tasks of this research?	**CONSTRUCTING THE THESIS**	**EXTERNAL CRITERIA** How will the quality and result of your research be judged?
INTERNAL RESOURCES From where are you mostly drawing inspiration and energy from?		**EXTERNAL OPTIONS** In what ways do you want your research presented?
	ESSENTIAL FACTS What is the tangible manifestation of your research going to be?	

PROCESSING THE WHOLE PICTURE

ESSAY

Drawing on the review you have made write a brief (500-800 word) essay distilling the narrative of your justification for taking on this research. Use the qualsystems as a take off but find your own narrative voice to convey that. You can try thisnout on your peers and your supervisor or other coach.

APPENDIX

The Underlying Sequence of Qualsystems

- **MONAD** – *Universality* :
  (Sub-Universe of Concern . . . . . .)

- **DYAD** – *Complementarity.*
  (Essence v Existence)

- **TRIAD** – *Dynamism:* Relational life
  1. Affirming influence: Envisioned Pattern
  2. Receiving/Denying influence: Accessible Resources
  3. Reconciling influence: Creative Spirit

- **TETRAD** – *Field of Action.*
  1. Ideal,
  2. Ground,
  3. Instrumental,
  4. Directive

- **PENTAD** - *Potential significance:*
  1. Quintessence
  2. In the service of ...
  3. Higher nature
  4. Served by ...
  5. Lower nature

- **HEXAD** – *Coalescence of Fact and Value*
  1. Core values
  2. External options
  3. Internal priorities
  4. Unavoidable facts
  5. External criteria
  6. Internal resources

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