

Topic 2

**Formulating and clarifying
the research topic**





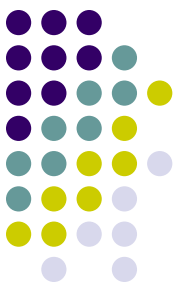
Issues covered

- Attributes of a good research topic
- Generating and refining research ideas
- Turning research ideas into research projects

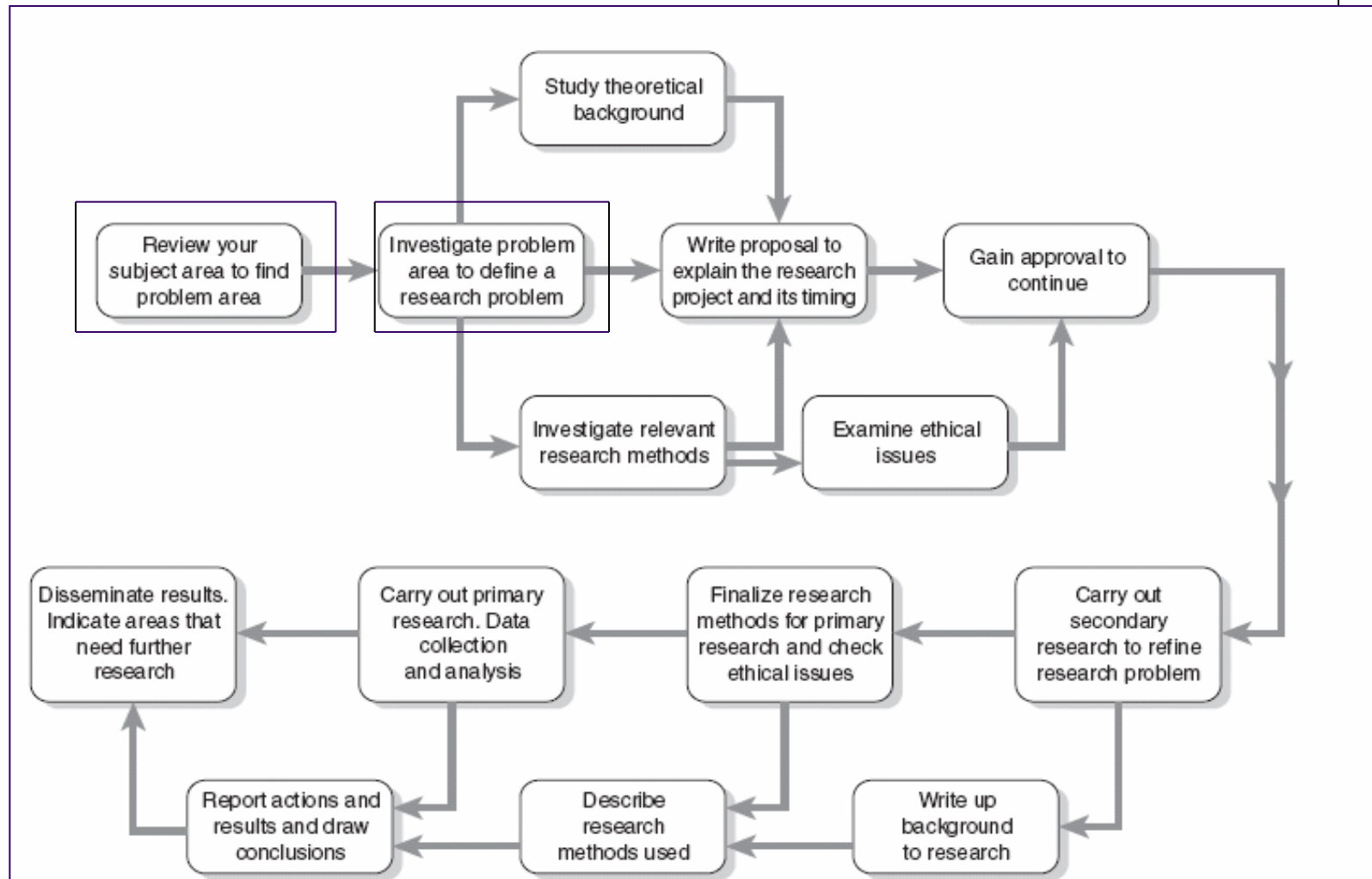


Learning objectives

- to generate ideas that will help in the choice of a suitable research topic;
- to identify the attributes of a good research topic;
- to turn research ideas into a research project that has clear research question(s) and objectives;



The research process



What do you want to do?



- 'Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to walk from here?'
- 'That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,' said the Cat.
- 'I don't much care where,' said Alice.
- 'Then it doesn't matter which way you walk,' said the Cat

How to focus on a research problem



1. Find an interest in a broad subject area (problem area).
2. Narrow the interest to a plausible topic.
3. Question the topic from several points of view.
4. Define a rationale for your project.

Find an interest in a broad subject area (problem area)



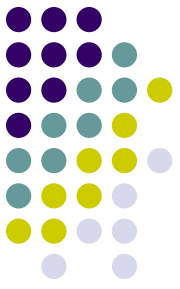
A problem area - the general body of knowledge which interests you

What is your motivation for doing the research?

What relevant interest, experience or expertise do you bring to bear on the subject?

What are you going to produce?

Narrow the interest to a plausible topic



You need to start by identifying question



which demands an answer
a need which requires a resolution
a riddle which seeks a solution

AND

It can be developed into a research problem

Features of a suitable research topic



- The topic is of great interest to you and matches your career goals
- The topic meets the standards set by GSOM
- The topic has to be achievable within the available time, resources and data
- You should be able to draw conclusions related to the problem
- You should be able to state the problem clearly

Are topics researchable?



1. An enquiry into the history of the building of the Channel Tunnel.
2. A study to compare the results in school history exams for 16-year-olds throughout Europe between 1970 and 1980.
3. The effects of parent unemployment on their children's attitude to schoolwork.
4. What factors must be evaluated and what is their relative importance in constructing a formula for allotting grants to university students in Scotland.
5. An analysis of the influence of Palladio's villa designs on large country houses built in Britain in the eighteenth century.
6. Whether the advantages of foreign borrowing by Third World countries outweigh the disadvantages.

Are topics researchable?



7. The composition of prefabricated elements of buildings in the construction of multi-storey car parks in tight urban situations in large conurbations of the United States of America during the 1970s.
8. A study of how hospital patients' recovery is affected by the colour of their surroundings and of how they react to the effects of different light levels after major operations.
9. The impact of local tax and exaction policies on the London commercial office sector.
10. Economic implications of the programme of rental increases and housing sales in China.
11. How the career plans of school leavers compare with their subsequent careers in terms of self-satisfaction and self-adjustment, and what information the analysis of the difference between planned and realized careers provides to assist in career planning.

Common mistakes when choosing a research problem



- Making the choice of a problem an excuse to fill in gaps in your own knowledge
- Formulating a problem which involves merely a comparison of two or more sets of data - there is no research activity
- Setting a problem in terms of finding the degree of correlation between two sets of data
- Devising a problem to which the answer can be only yes or no

Checklist of attributes of a good research topic



- Does the topic fit the specifications and meet the standards set by the examining institution?
- Is the topic something with which you are really fascinated?
- Does your research topic contain issues that have a clear link to theory?
- Do you have, or can you develop within the project time frame, the necessary research skills to undertake the topic?
- Is the research topic achievable within the available time?
- Is the research topic achievable within the financial resources that are likely to be available?
- Are you reasonably certain of being able to gain access to data you are likely to require for this topic?
- Are you able to state your research question(s) and objectives clearly?
- Will your proposed research be able to provide fresh insights into this topic?
- Does your research topic relate clearly to the idea you have been given (perhaps by an organisation)?
- Are the findings for this research topic likely to be symmetrical: that is, of similar value whatever the outcome?
- Does the research topic match your career goals?

without being clear what you are going to do it is difficult to plan your research;

to enable you to choose the most appropriate research strategy and data collection and analysis techniques;

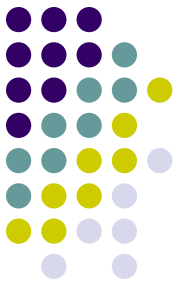
to ensure that your topic meets the requirements;

to ensure that your topic is one that you are capable of doing and excites your imagination;

to ensure that you will have sufficient time and money resources to undertake your topic;

to ensure that you will be able to gain access to the data you require;

to ensure that the issues in your topic are capable of being linked to theory.





Generating research ideas

Rational thinking

- Examining your own strengths and interests
- Looking at past project titles
- Discussion
- Searching the literature

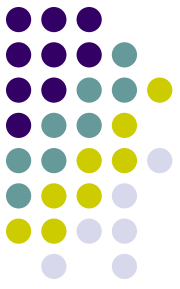
Creative thinking

- Keeping a notebook of ideas
- Exploring personal preferences using past projects
- Relevance trees
- Brainstorming

Examining own strengths and interests



- you choose a topic in which you are likely to do well
- you choose a topic in which you are already have some academic knowledge
- there is the need to think about your future



Looking at past project titles

- Scanning a list of past project titles
- Scanning actual research projects



Searching the literature

- articles in academic and professional journals
(academic *review articles*)
- reports
- books



Exploring personal preferences using past projects (1)



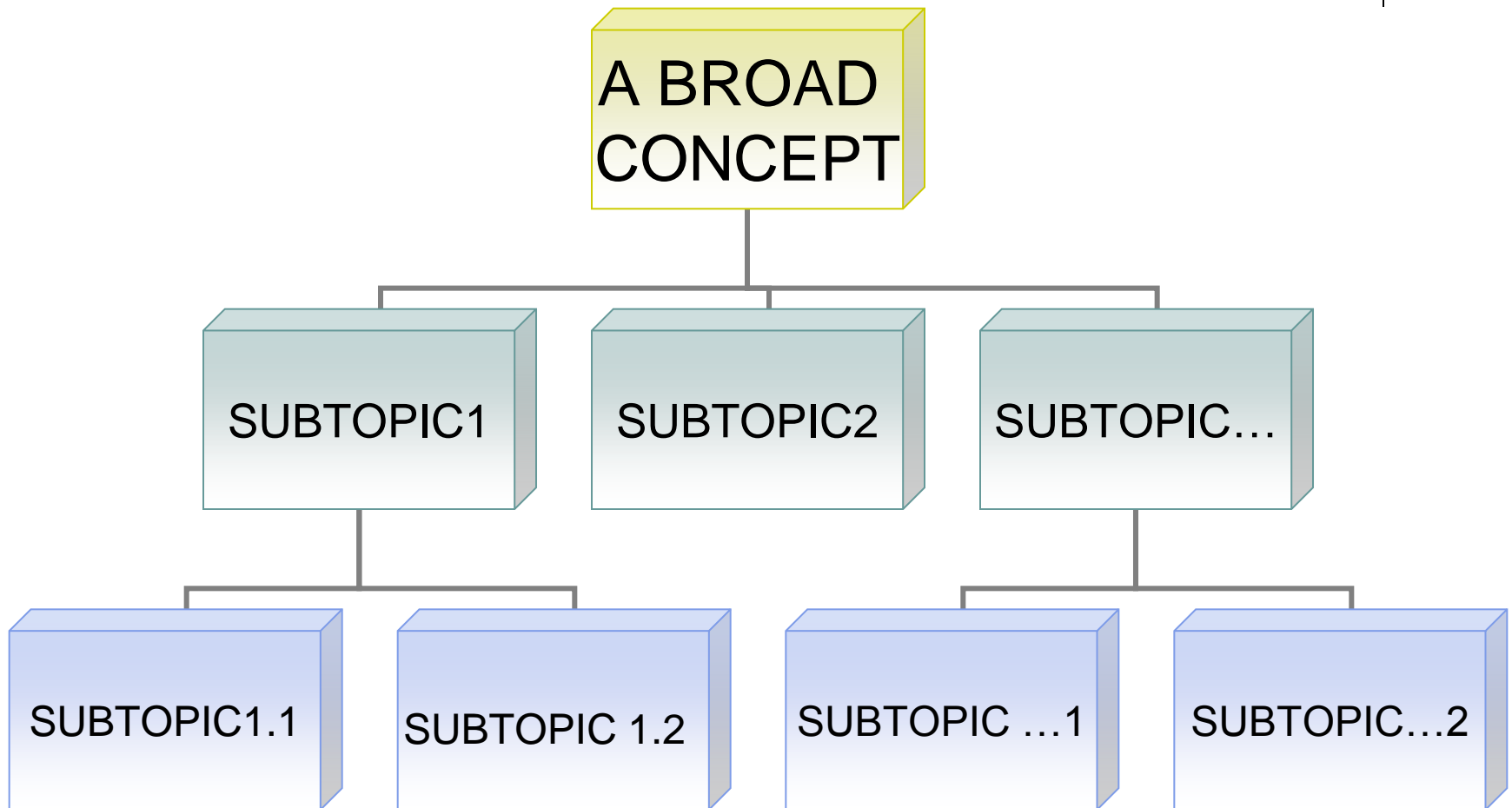
- Select six projects that you like.
- For each of these six projects note down your first thoughts in response to three questions (if responses for different projects are the same this does not matter):
 - a) What appeals to you about the project?
 - b) What is good about the project?
 - c) Why is the project good?

Exploring personal preferences using past projects (2)



- Select three projects that you do not like.
- For each of these three projects note down your first thoughts in response to three questions (if responses for different projects are the same, or cannot be clearly expressed, this does not matter; note them down anyway):
 - a) What do you dislike about the project?
 - b) What is bad about the project?
 - c) Why is the project bad?

Relevance trees



Questions used to define sub-problems



- What are the parts of your topic and what larger whole is it a part of?
- What is its history and what larger history is it a part of?
- What kind of categories can you find in it, and to what larger categories of things does it belong?
- What good is it? What can you use it for?

Brainstorming



It is best undertaken with a group of people, although you can brainstorm on your own.



The technique of *brainstorming*



- Define your problem
'I am interested in marketing but don't know what to do for my research topic'
- Ask for suggestions relating to the problem.
- Record all suggestions observing the following rules:
 - ✓ No suggestion should be criticised or evaluated in any way before all ideas have been considered.
 - ✓ All suggestions, however wild, should be recorded and considered.
 - ✓ As many suggestions as possible should be recorded.
 - ✓ Review all the suggestions and explore what is meant by each.
 - ✓ Analyse the list of suggestions and decide which appeal to you most as research ideas and why.



Refining research ideas

- The Delphi technique
- The preliminary study
- Integrating ideas

To use the Delphi technique you need



1. to brief the members of the group about the research idea (they can make notes if they wish);
2. at the end of the briefing to encourage group members to seek clarification and more information as appropriate;
3. to ask each member of the group, including the originator of the research idea, to generate independently up to three specific research ideas based on the idea that has been described (they can also be asked to provide a justification for their specific ideas);
4. to collect the research ideas in an unedited and non-attributable form and to distribute them to all members of the group;
5. a second cycle of the process (steps 2 to 4) in which individuals comment on the research ideas and revise their own contributions in the light of what others have said;
6. subsequent cycles of the process until a consensus is reached. These either follow a similar pattern (steps 2 to 4) or use discussion, voting or some other method.

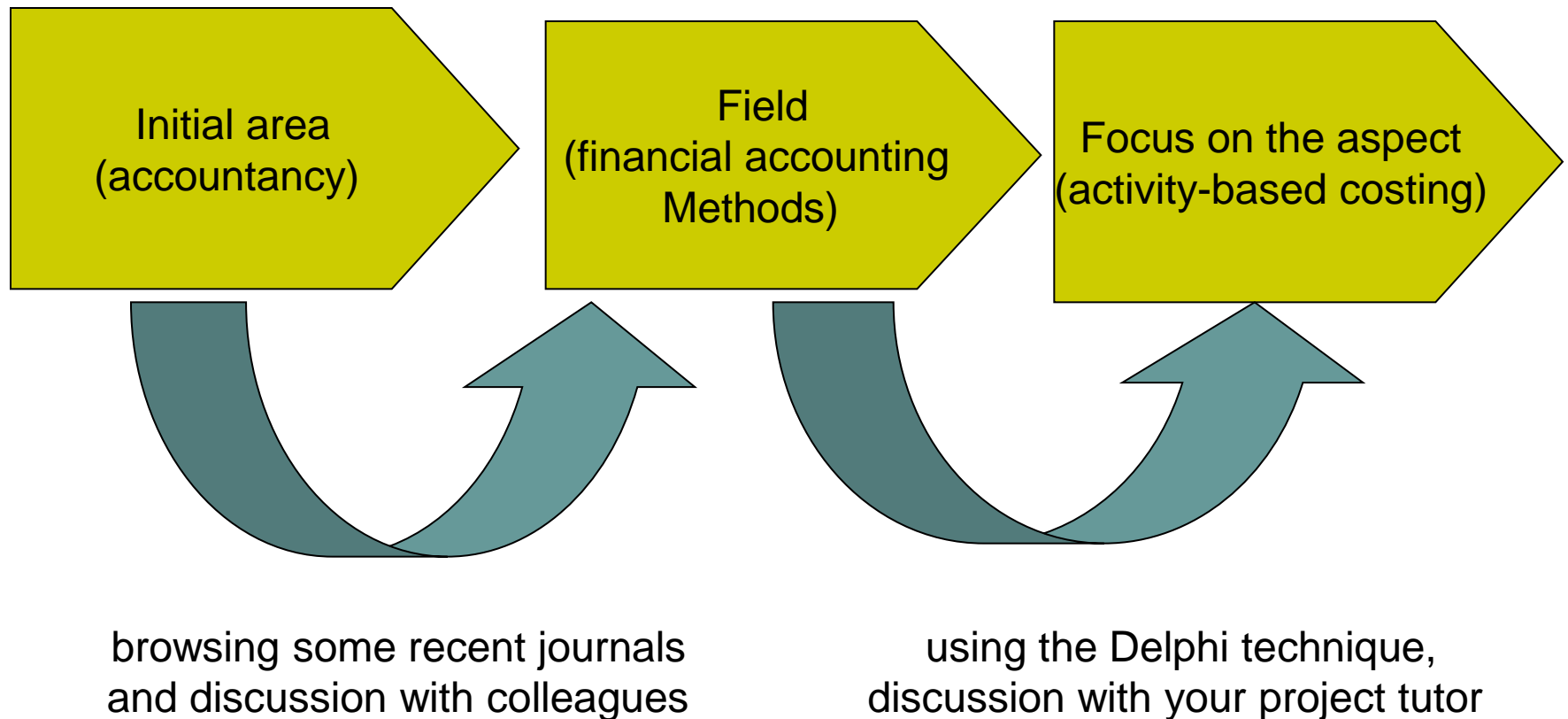
The preliminary study



The underlying purpose is to gain a greater understanding so that your research question can be refined

- the first iteration of your critical literature review
- informal discussions with people who have personal experience of and knowledge about your research ideas
- gain a good understanding of your host organisation (in case of the research within an organisation)

Integrating ideas

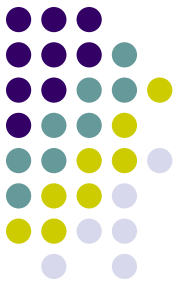


Turning research ideas into research projects



- Writing research questions
- Writing research objectives

Examples of research ideas and their derived focus research questions



- Job recruitment via the Internet
- Advertising and share prices
- The use of aromas as a marketing device
- The future of trade unions
- How effective is recruiting for new staff via the Internet in comparison with traditional methods?
- How does the running of a TV advertising campaign designed to boost the image of a company affect its share price?
- In what ways does the use of specific aromas in supermarkets affect buyer behaviour?
- What are the strategies that trade unions should adopt to ensure their future viability?

Phrasing research questions as research objectives



Research question

1. Why have organisations introduced team briefing?
2. How can the effectiveness of team briefing schemes be measured?
3. Has team briefing been effective?
4. How can the effectiveness of team briefing be explained?
5. Can the explanation be generalised?

Research objective

1. To identify organisations' objectives for team briefing schemes.
2. To establish suitable effectiveness criteria for team briefing schemes.
3. To describe the extent to which the effectiveness criteria for team briefing have been met.
4. To determine the factors associated with the effectiveness criteria for team briefing being met. b To estimate whether some of those factors are more influential than other factors.
5. To develop an explanatory theory that associates certain factors with the effectiveness of team briefing schemes.



Written report №1

is devoted to generating and refining research idea and the preliminary research topic formulation (2 pages)

- Field of interest
- Suggested Topic
- Research question(s)
- Type of research
- Intended outcomes
- Methodology

Please prepare a PowerPoint presentation for 5 minutes

The purposes of the research proposal



- Organising your ideas
- Convincing your audience
- Contracting with your 'client'