

The Theoretical Framework

Northcentral University

Center for Teaching and Learning

The theoretical lens

Determine the guiding framework for your dissertation research

A *theoretical framework* provides the theoretical assumptions for the larger context of a study, and is the foundation or 'lens' by which a study is developed. This framework helps to ground the research focus under study within theoretical underpinnings and to frame the inquiry for data analysis and interpretation.

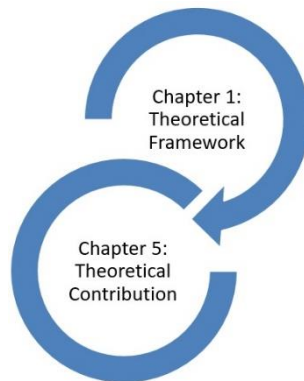


As you begin, determine with your Dissertation Chair whether your dissertation research study is best guided by a theoretical framework or a conceptual framework (see also 'The Conceptual Framework']

The theoretical contribution

Determine the potential theoretical contribution of your dissertation research

A theoretical contribution provides a theory-driven input to current thinking when your dissertation research study is framed by theoretical considerations that began with a well-defined theoretical framework. A theoretical framework allows for deliberation of the theoretical contribution(s) to current scholarship within your discipline once you determine your key study findings. Ideally, you will revisit the theoretical underpinnings of your study when you describe the theoretical contribution(s) of your study findings as you draft Chapter 5 once your study has concluded.



Where do I start?

Consider these three considerations to formulate a theoretical framework:

1. *Discipline/Field of Study*

- What is your degree program?
- What is your area of specialization?
- PhD or applied doctorate?
- What is your research focus?

2. *Theory(ies)*

- What are relevant theories aligned with your discipline?
- Which theory(ies) resonated with you in course work?
- What theory(ies) have past researchers used?

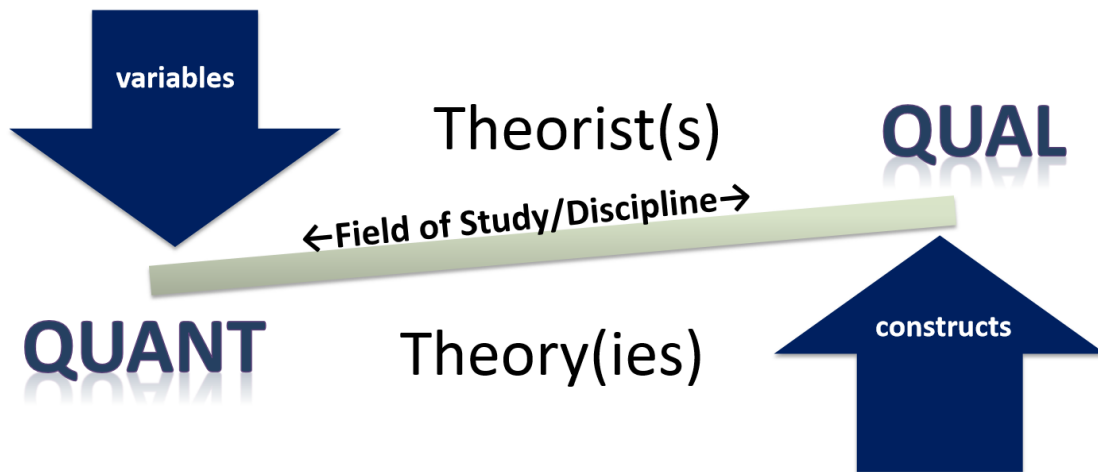
3. *Theorist(s)*

- Who was/were the original theorist(s)?
- Who adapted the theory(ies) to your discipline?

References

Casanave, C. P., & Li, Y. (2015). Novices' struggles with conceptual and theoretical framing in writing dissertations and papers for publication. *Publications*, 3(2), 104-119. doi:10.3390/publications3020104

Grant, C., & Osanloo, A. (2015). Understanding, selecting, and integrating a theoretical framework in dissertation research: Creating the blueprint for your house. *Administrative Issues Journal: Connecting Education, Practice, and Research*, 4(2). doi: 10.5929/2014.4.2.9



Review the Chapter 1 requirements in the NCU DP/DM Template

Checklist:

- Identify the guiding framework. Present the key concepts, briefly explain how they are related, and present the propositions that are relevant to this study.
- Explain how the framework guided the research decisions, including the development of the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions.
- If more than one framework is guiding the study, integrate them, rather than describing them independently. Do not select a separate framework for each variable/construct under examination.
- Do not exceed two pages. A more thorough discussion of the theoretical/conceptual framework will be included in Chapter 2.

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