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# What is theoretical framework in qualitative research

Theories are developed by researchers to explain phenomena, draw connections, and make predictions. In the theoretical framework, you explain the theories that support your research, showing that your work is grounded in established ideas. The goal of a theoretical framework Before you start your research, you have to explore what theories and models other researchers have already developed. The goal of a theoretical framework is to present and explain this information. There may be many different theories about your topic, so the theoretical framework also involves evaluating, comparing, and selecting the most relevant ones. By "framing" your research within a clearly defined field, you make the reader aware of the assumptions that inform your approach, showing the rationale behind your choices. This part of your dissertation lays the foundations that will support your analysis, helping you interpret your results and make broader generalizations. Examples of theoretical frameworks in researchThe same research topic can be approached very differently within different theoretical frameworks: In literature, a scholar using postmodernist literary theory would analyze *The Great Gatsby* differently than a scholar using Marxist literary theory. In psychology, a behaviorist approach to depression would involve different methods and assumptions than a psychoanalytical approach. In economics, wealth inequality would be explained and interpreted differently within classical economics and Keynesian economics frameworks. In each of these cases, you would explain the theory you're using in order to support your interpretations and explanations of the data. How to create a theoretical framework To build your theoretical framework, follow these three steps. 1. Identify your key concepts The first step is to pick out the key terms from your problem statement and research questions. Concepts often have multiple definitions, so the theoretical framework involves clearly defining what you mean by each term. Example: Problem statement and research questionsCompany X is struggling with the problem that many online customers do not return to make subsequent purchases. Management wants to increase customer loyalty and believes that improved customer satisfaction will play a major role in achieving this goal. To investigate this problem, you have identified and plan to focus on the following problem statement, objective, and research questions: Problem: Many online customers do not return to make subsequent purchases. Objective: To increase customer loyalty. Research question: How can the satisfaction of company X's online customers be improved in order to increase customer loyalty? The concepts of "customer loyalty" and "customer satisfaction" are clearly central to this study. The theoretical framework will define these concepts and discuss theories about the relationship between them. 2. Evaluate and explain relevant theories By conducting a thorough literature review, you can determine how other researchers have defined and drawn connections between these key concepts. As you write the theoretical framework, aim to compare and critically evaluate the approaches that different authors have proposed. After discussing different models and theories, you establish the definitions that best fit your research and justify why this is the case. In more complex research projects, you might combine theories from different fields to build your own unique framework. Make sure to mention the most important theories related to your key concepts. If there is a well-established theory or model that you don't want to apply to your own research, explain why it isn't suitable for your purposes. 3. Show how your research fits in Apart from discussing other people's theories, the theoretical framework should show how your own project will make use of these ideas. You might aim to do one or more of the following: Test whether a theory holds in a specific context Use theory as a basis for interpreting your results Critique or challenge a theory Combine different theories in a new or unique way If relevant, you can also use the theoretical framework to develop hypotheses for your research. The structure of the theoretical framework In a thesis or dissertation, the theoretical framework is sometimes integrated into a literature review chapter, but it can also be included as its own chapter or section. If your research involves dealing with a lot of complex theories, it's a good idea to include a separate theoretical framework chapter. There are no fixed rules for structuring a theoretical framework. The important thing is to create a clear, logical structure. One option is to draw on your research questions, structuring each section around a question or key concept. As in all other parts of your thesis, make sure to properly cite your sources to avoid plagiarism. Example of a theoretical framework To get a sense of what this part of your thesis or dissertation might look like, take a look at our example. Sample theoretical framework This inquiry focuses on people too, who are actively involved in research. The participants also have a say in directing the inquiry to address their needs. The main assumptions in this approach are: Knowledge is developed through collaborationCollaboration requires community involvementThe concept of power is acknowledgedThere's no predetermined outcomeKnowledge is both theoretical and practicalAn example of participatory action research for a non-profit organization is to involve community members in the review of policies that affect them. Critical Theory ApproachThis framework helps researchers consider power relations within a society and emphasizes how access, voice, and representation are central to a study. For example, the researcher might ask: "How have the effects of colonization changed the role of women in this culture?" Here, the critical theory would inform your theoretical framework. This theory helps you explore power dynamics and their relationship to the subject of your study. The critical theory framework will help you pay attention to the following: The intersection of various forms of oppression and power relations in a societyExamining the influence of other structures such as capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchyThe relationship between structural forces and individual behaviorStudying the role of knowledge and how it is producedHow dominant discourses silence peopleThe significance of social actionDriving Force ApproachThis framework helps you explore the motives behind people's actions and decisions. It aims to explain why something happens. For example, the researcher might pose the question: "Why do African-American girls experience emergency room care differently than their Caucasian peers?" The driving force's approach would guide you to explore the motives behind people's actions, which helps you answer this research question. This approach taps into the following: The motivation that drives people to behave in a certain wayAssumptions about human nature and the importance of individual actionUse of case studies that are drawn from small samplesComparing different situations to see which factors have the greatest influence on decisions or actionsSemiotic ApproachThis type of inquiry uses symbols and signs to help you understand how people construct meanings. It focuses on the processes through which meaning is influenced by social context. For instance, the research question could be: "How does this culture define success?" The semiotic approach helps you explore how symbols are used to construct meaning and how meaning is influenced by cultural context. Researchers use this framework to determine: The use of signs and symbolsInterpretative repertoires - the language people use to describe their experiencesDiscourses - the socially shared set of values, assumptions, and expectations at play in your studyConceptual metaphors - comparisons that people make with ideas or objectsCultural models - the shared understandings that link people to a particular cultural groupPhenomenological ApproachIt focuses on subjective experiences, feelings, and thoughts. The goal is to understand the meaning people make of their lived experiences. For example, the researcher might ask: "What is it like to go blind?" This inquiry would utilize a phenomenological approach to guide your research process. This framework seeks to examine: The unique experiences of the individual/group you are studyingThe influence of social and cultural factors on people's beliefs, feelings, and behaviorsThe meaning people make of their experiencesHow people describe their own experiencesTranscendental Approach FrameworkIt is used to explore the "true" or universal aspects of human nature that exist independent of social context. It is a form of philosophical inquiry. In the example above, the researcher might ask: "Is going blind psychologically devastating?" This type of framework would help you explore the "fundamental," universal aspects of human nature. The researcher focuses on broad, conceptual questions about human nature. Feminist ApproachThis framework helps researchers consider how women are portrayed and treated within society. An example of a research problem would be: "How does this society define a 'real man'?" In this case, the feminist approach would guide you to explore how women are portrayed and treated within society. Symbolic Interactionism FrameworkAccording to this framework, the meaning of a situation for an individual is influenced by social interaction. For example, consider the following research question: "What is a 'high status' job in this culture?" The symbolic interactionist approach would guide you to explore how individuals define and negotiate their status within a culture, which helps you answer this research question. Functionalism FrameworkThis approach focuses on how institutions, objects, and behaviors are interconnected within a culture. For example, the researcher could pose the question: "How does this society keep its history alive?" The functionalist framework would guide this research question. It helps you explore how institutions, objects, and behaviors are interconnected for this culture. Postmodern ApproachIn this framework, knowledge is fluid, and there are no absolute truths. It challenges traditional concepts of hierarchy, power, and knowledge. For example, you might pose the question: "How do cultural norms construct gender in this society?" The postmodern approach would guide you to explore how knowledge is fluid, and there are no absolute truths. This approach is fluid, so the researcher is free to explore any topic they are interested in. It does not adhere to a specific set of guidelines. Instead, the researcher is free to explore any topic they are interested in. The researcher is free to pose broad, open-ended questions that focus on the unique characteristics of their study. Marxist FrameworkThis framework looks at how class, race, and gender influence the way people live. For example, a research question could be: "What is the meaning of 'success in this culture for a female business executive?" In this case, the Marxist framework would help you explore how class, race, and gender influence the way people live. This framework would help you consider the unique experiences of a female business executive. Considering the impact of race, class, and gender on people's lives within this society would guide your research process. Constructionist FrameworkThis approach helps you analyze language and meaning-making systems. It focuses on the process through which social structures are created and maintained. For instance, if your research study is about the youth's understanding of their rights, you might ask: "What is considered 'childhood' in this culture?" The constructionist framework would guide you to explore how social structures are created and maintained. This understanding will help you answer the research question. When using the constructionist framework, your research study is more of a process than a result. The constructionist approach focuses on the process through which social structures are created and maintained. It helps the researcher consider language and meaning-making systems. Emergent DesignThe emergent design focuses on collaborative research. It is used when the researcher wants to bring multiple perspectives into their study and has little control over the research process. An example of a question you could ask is: "What makes a marriage successful?" In this case, in an emergent design, you would be collaborating with multiple people or participants to answer this question. Emergent design framework makes it easier for you to invite participants to share their insights and opinions during your study. This approach will help you involve more people in your research process. It also enables you to gain a deeper understanding of a specific topic. Individualist ApproachIt works by identifying, understanding, and describing the behavior of individuals within a society. For example, you might develop a research question such as: "How do people in this culture experience illness daily?" The individualist approach would help you explore the behavior of individuals within the society. This framework is best used when the researcher needs a deep understanding of an individual's experience. It is helpful for exploratory research where you are noticing patterns within people's behavior. Radical Framework/Subversive MethodsThe radical approach is focused on social change and liberation. The research method uses a major research question to engage in a political project. For example, you might ask: "How does this culture perpetuate inequality?" In the radical framework/subversive methods, you would engage in a political project to answer the research question. The main difference between the radical approach and other frameworks is that you must form a major research question for this approach. Using the radical framework also helps the researcher ensure that people have a voice in their studies. Critical Race ApproachThis approach helps understand and challenge racism through the lens of law. In this framework, you analyze how laws and other societal structures impact people from different backgrounds. You might ask: "What are the barriers to education for people of color?" In this case, the critical race approach will help you explore how laws and other societal structures impact people of different backgrounds. If you are interested in the intersection of law and social justice, this approach may be for you. It helps you understand how the law works and enables you to develop a productive way to challenge racism. Categories of Theoretical FrameworksTheoretical orientation: it provides the conceptual basis for your study. It guides you through answering what's important and why while also helping you determine which data are relevant. Philosophical perspective: this helps researchers address ethical considerations during their studies. For example, political or social justice orientations are helpful in that they help researchers consider the effects of their research on society at large. The ontological perspective focuses on what is real and how it might be depicted in a study. Does it address questions like, "What kinds of things exist? What is our role as researchers? Theoretical paradigm: this provides the structure for directing your research. It highlights how you determine what is relevant and influences how you need to do your work. The importance of Theoretical Frameworks in Qualitative ResearchA theoretical framework is critical because it guides you through answering research questions and synthesizing your data. It influences how you determine what is relevant and how you locate, select, analyze, and interpret your data. It also helps to determine the worth of your study, and it helps to give a structure for guiding your research. A theoretical framework also provides a lens that helps you interpret your findings. It helps you assess the validity and credibility of your data. An example is: studying a phenomenon that impacted people from different cultures. You might look at the various theoretical orientations to help you interpret your findings. Theoretical frameworks are analogous to maps that help researchers trace out the terrain of their research. Without a map, you would not know where to go and thus, misguide your research. Likewise, theoretical frameworks help researchers stay on track throughout the research process. A good theoretical framework guides you to ask the right questions. For example, knowing which theoretical perspective is most appropriate for your research will help you choose the right research questions and thus, make your inquiry more focused.





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