

# MAKING THE MOVE:

## NAVIGATING A TRANSITION FROM DISCIPLINARY ENGINEERING INTO ENGINEERING EDUCATION RESEARCH



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University of Kentucky

1

## RESEARCH IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION

We will walk you through a brief history of engineering education. You will talk about your research goals.

2

## IDENTIFYING YOUR RESEARCH AREA

We will talk about sources of research ideas. You will take time to identify an area of interest.

3

## DEVELOPING YOUR RESEARCH METHODS

We will introduce you to the importance of theory and research methods. You will brainstorm strategies for data collection.





# **RESEARCH IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION**





# EARLY HISTORY

**1802**

1st engineering program (Civil) established in the U.S.

**1852**

First professional organization established (ASCE)

**1862**

Morrill's Act (Land Grant Act)

**1802**

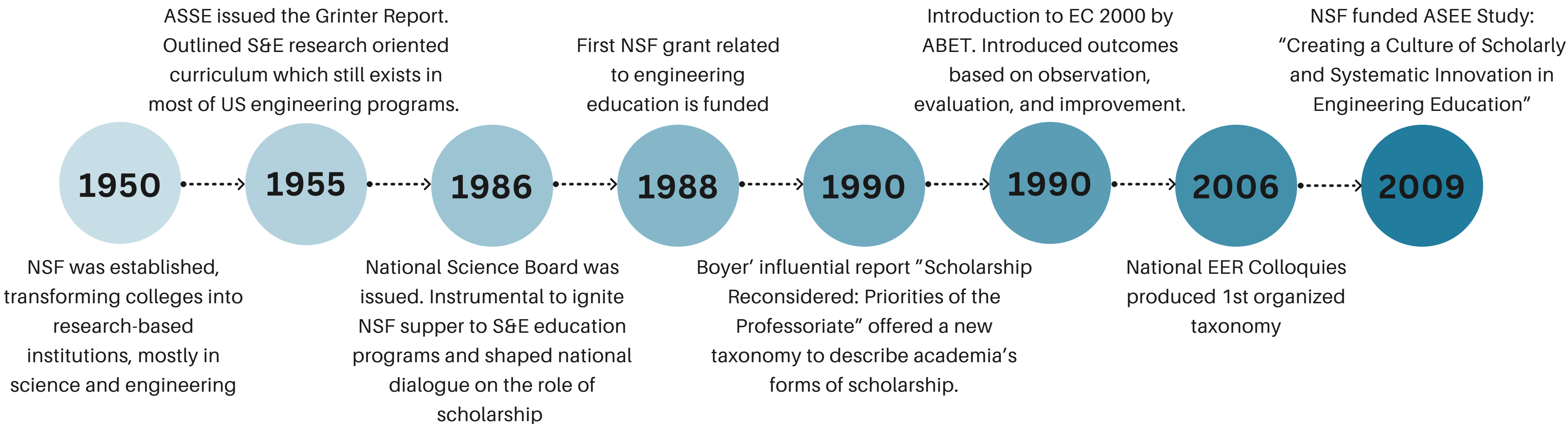
Society for Promotion of Engineering Education (SPEE) formed. Later became ASEE

**1802**

1st SPEE periodical focused on "technical education".  
Later became JEE



# TOTODAY





# LEVELS OF INQUIRY

1

## EXCELLENT TEACHING

- Involves the use of good content and teaching methods

2

## SCHOLARLY TEACHING

- Good content and methods and classroom assessments and evidence gathering
- Informed by best practices and best knowledge, inviting of collaboration and review.

3

## SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING & LEARNING (SoTL)

- The question is tied to learning, pedagogical, or social theory and interpreting can increase significance of findings
- Close attention to design of study and methods used, which will have greater impact of results

4

## RIGOROUS ENGINEERING EDUCATION RESEARCH

Same as SoTL plus including unique components:

- Research question (why or how) and not assessment (what or how much)
- The question is tied to learning, pedagogical, or social theory and interpreting can increase significance of findings
- Close attention to design of study and methods used, which will have greater impact of results



# ENGINEERING EDUCATION RESEARCH AREAS

The Research Agenda for  
the New Discipline of  
Engineering Education.  
(2006).

**01 - EPISTEMOLOGIES (THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE)**

**02 - LEARNING MECHANISMS**

**03 - LEARNING SYSTEMS**

**04 - SOCIALLY-RELEVANT ENGINEERING**

**05 - ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGIES**





# **IDENTIFYING YOUR RESEARCH SPACE**

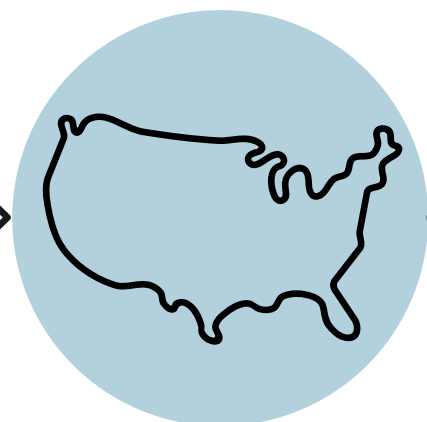
# IDENTIFYING YOUR RESEARCH TOPIC

Defining your research topic and the scope of your project is crucial to getting started.

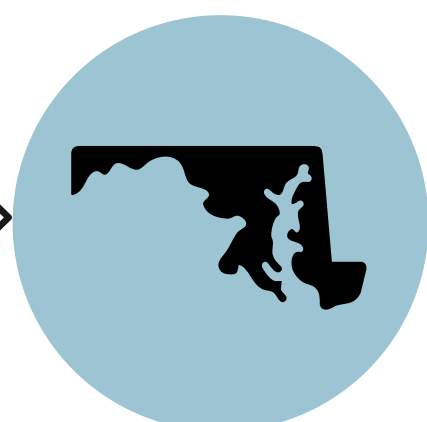
How is chemical engineering taught at universities across the world?



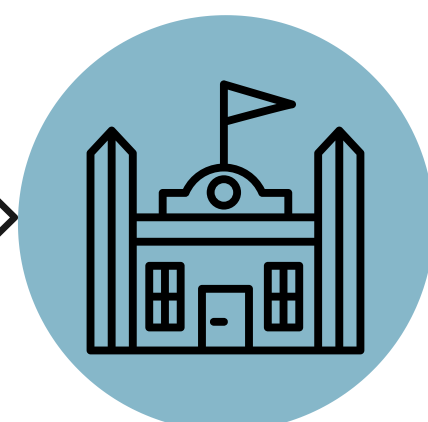
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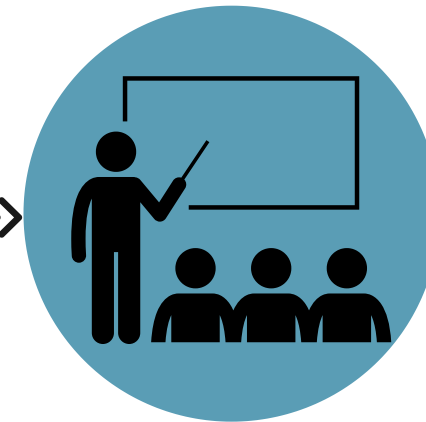
What specific skillsets do chemical engineers in industry need in the state of Maryland?



Where are the gaps in learning for chemical engineering students at my institution?



How can I effectively incorporate communication into a thermodynamics course?



How do students perceive the importance of communication in chemical engineering?



# SOURCES OF IDEAS

## 01 - REPORTS

What are you interested in learning more about in terms of your teaching or your students' learning?

## 02 - OWN EXPERIENCES

Thinking about the teaching and learning issue you've identified in previous workshops, briefly state this issue as a research question

## 03 - COMMUNITIES





# UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENA

## Examples of Realites in Education

**Behavioral phenomena:** the observable actions of individuals or groups and to mental phenomena such as knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, motivations, perceptions, cognitions, and emotions.

**Social phenomena:** the interactions between and among individuals, and to the characteristics, structures, and functions of social groups and institutions, such as families, communities, schools, and workplaces, as well as the physical, economic, cultural, and policy environments in which social and behavioral phenomena occur.

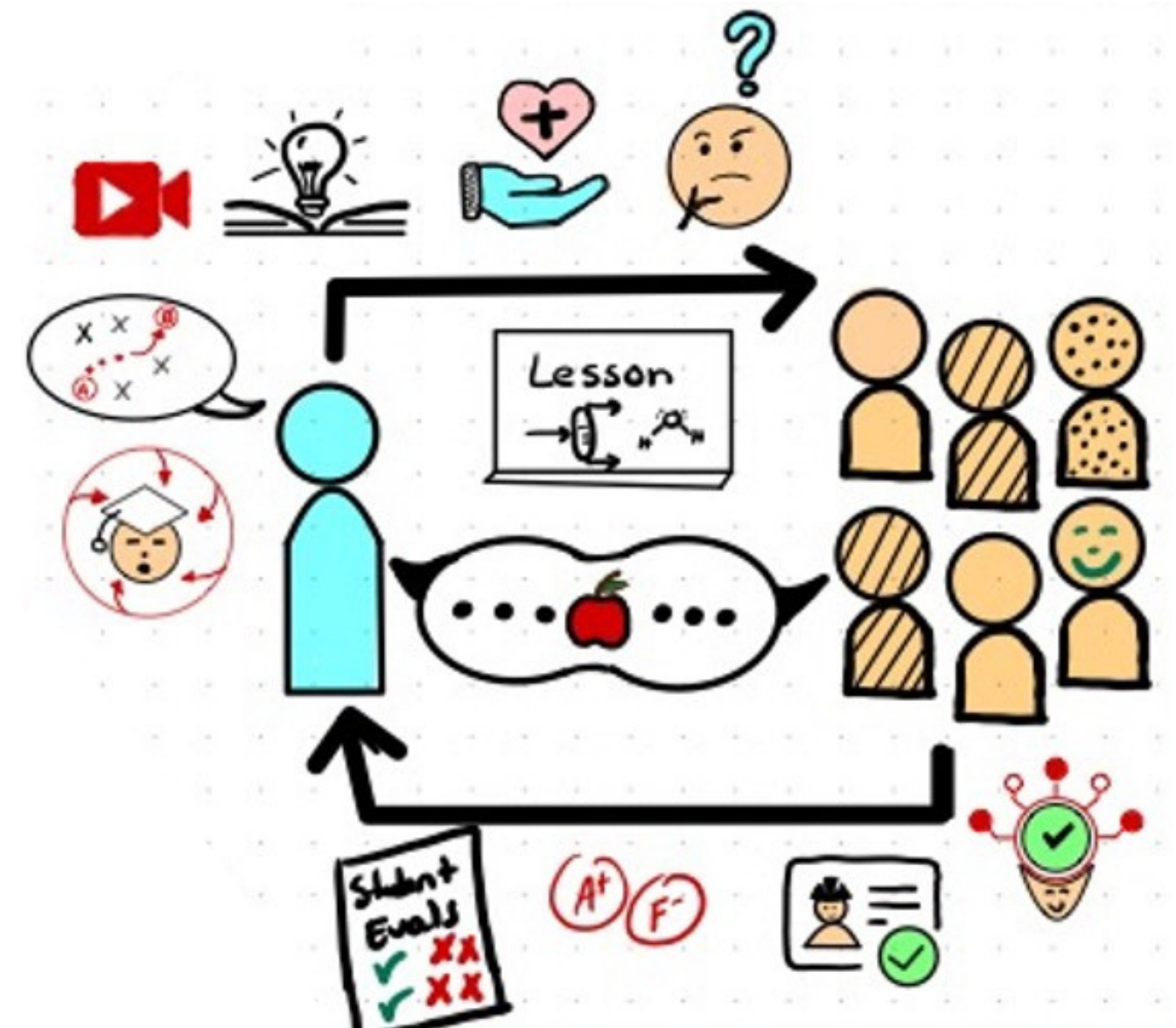
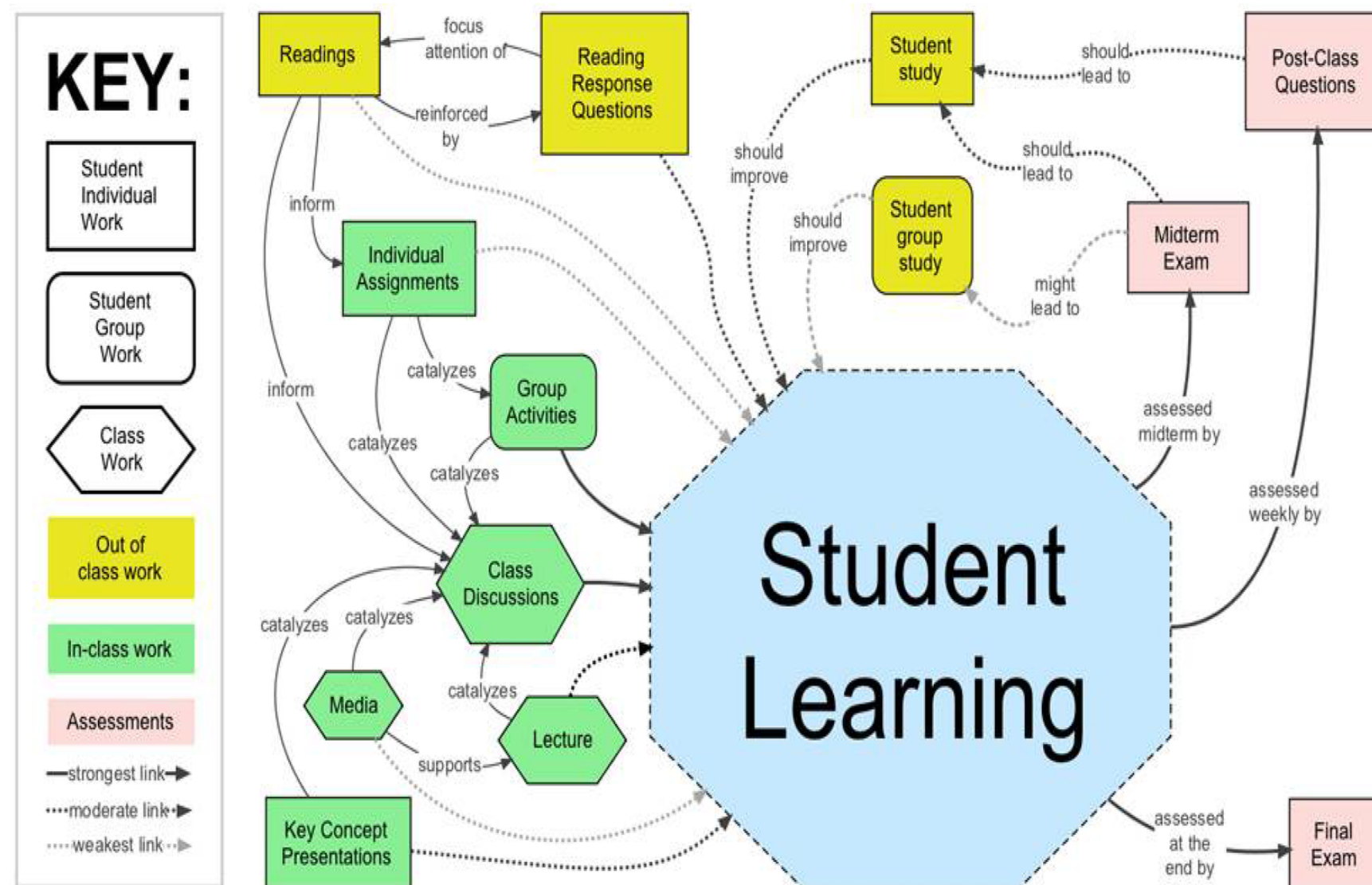




# UNDERSTANDING THE PHENOMENA

## Pictorial Maps for Research Ideation

- Visual representation of a behavioral or social phenomenon in education.
- Illustrates elements, relationships, and interactions using graphics, symbols, and diagrams.
- Simplifies complex information, aids visualization of factors, and supports analysis and decision-making in education.



# LITERATURE REVIEW

What do you already know about this topic/question?  
Where might you go to look for literature for your review?

01 - NARRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

02 - SCOPING REVIEW

03 - SYSTEMATIC REVIEW



teaching excellence

teaching excellence framework

teaching excellence in higher education

teaching excellence framework tef

teaching excellence and achievement program

teaching excellence educational innovation

teaching excellence and student outcomes framework

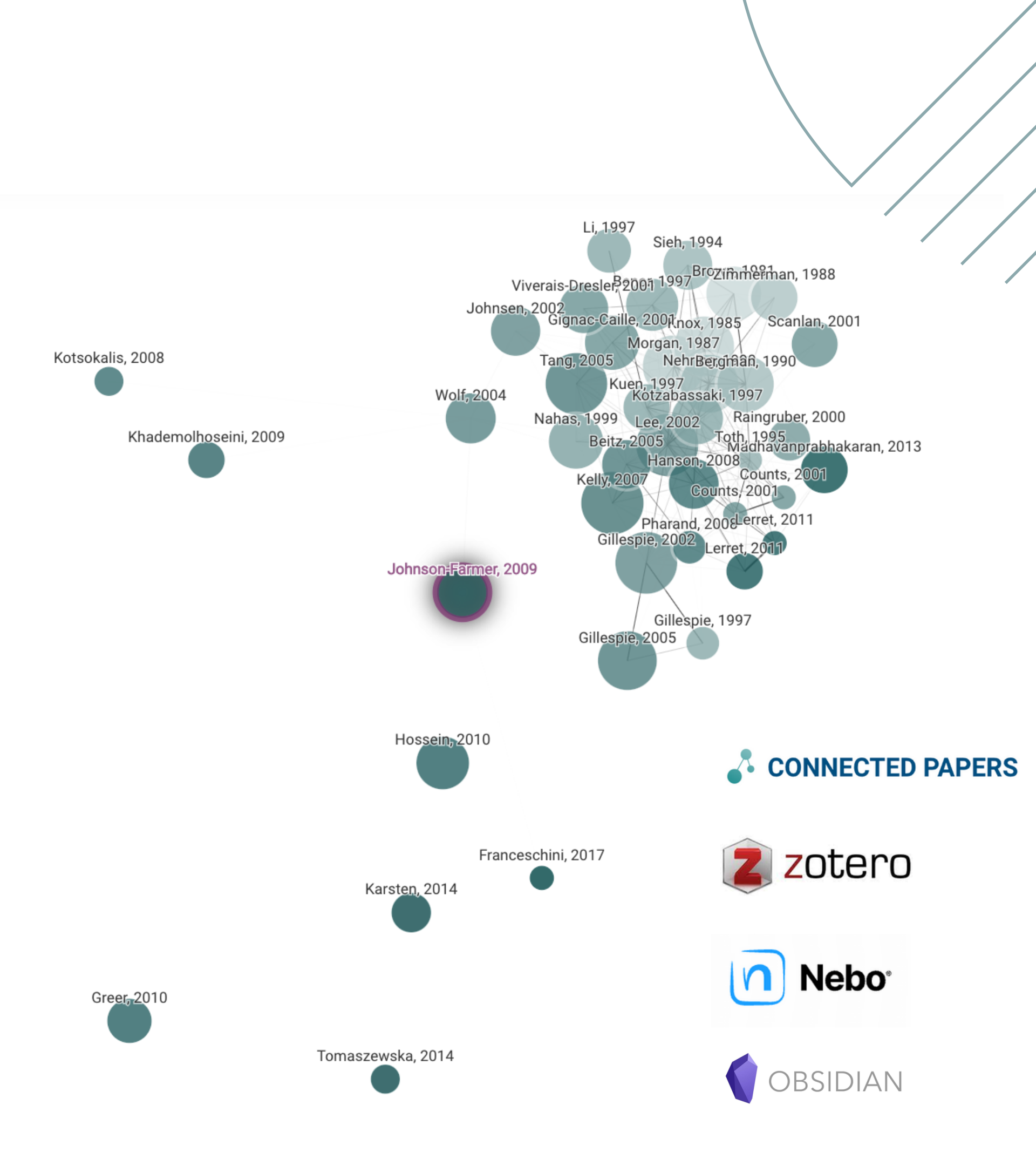
teaching excellence awards

teaching excellence award winners

teaching excellence at digital commons

teaching excellence in the disciplines

[HTML] Teaching excellence: what great teachers teach us  
B Johnson-Farmer, M Frenn - Journal of Professional Nursing, 2009 - Elsevier  
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CONNECTED PAPERS

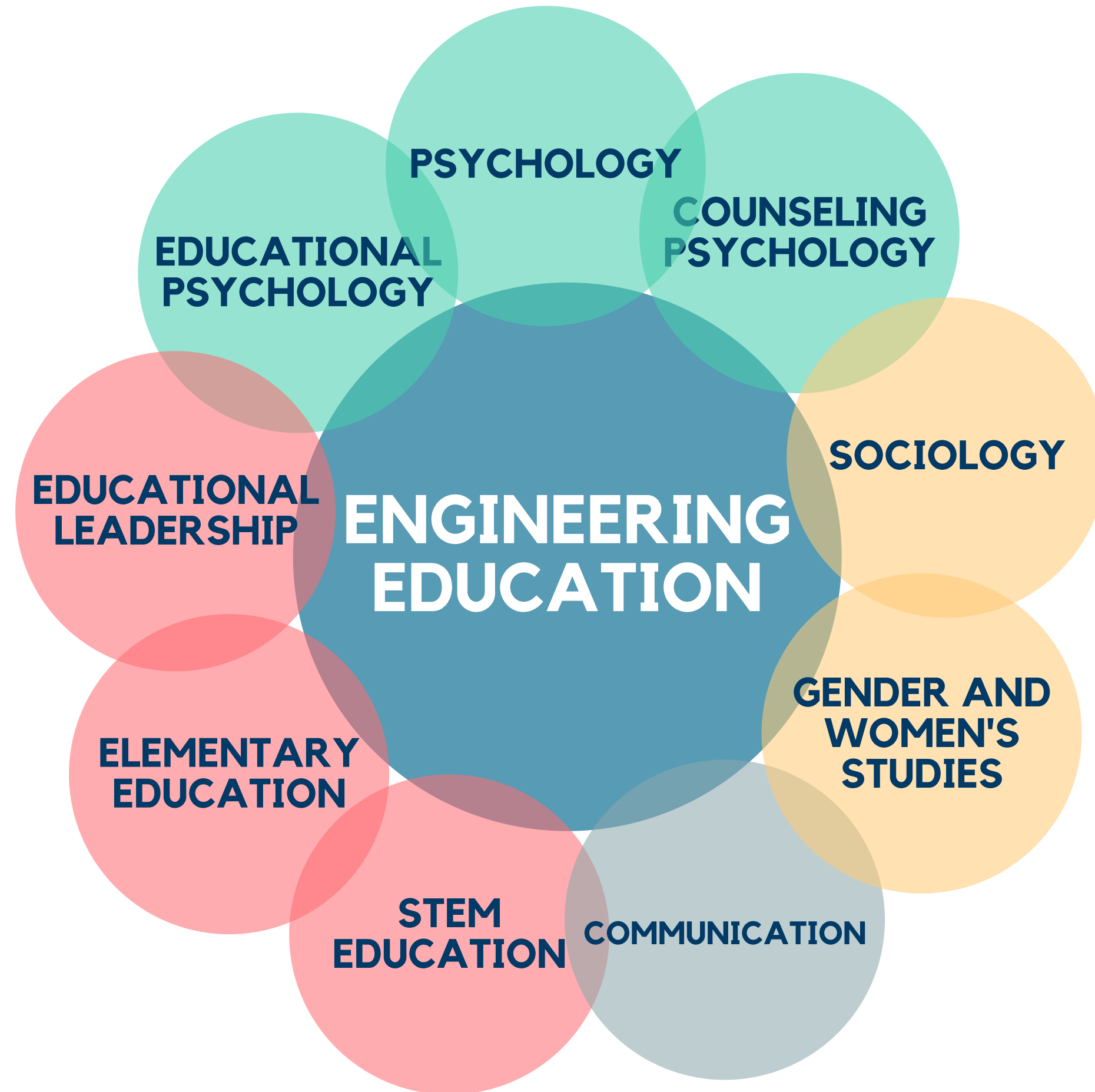
zotero

Nebo

OBSIDIAN



# ESTABLISHING OUTSIDE COLLABORATIONS



# ACTIVITY #1:

## CREATING A PICTORIAL MAP FOR EXPLORING PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS IN THE CLASSROOM

### Why this is important?

- **ABET Criteria 1**: "an ability to **identify, formulate, and solve** complex engineering problems by applying principles of engineering, science, and mathematics."
- "The ideal of being a lifelong learner is no longer a platitude. It has become economic necessity, and the academic community is only beginning to **understand that traditional teaching methods and curricula must be adapted to develop a twenty-first-century workforce and citizens of an increasingly complex world.** – Buck Goldstein and Holden Thorp, Editor, Science, Boyer 2030 Commissioner

### What is the phenomenon?

### What does the literature says?

- Problem solving: a process, used to obtain a best answer to an unknown, or a decision subject to some constraints.
- Problem solving is not the same as exercise solving
- Students who train mostly in exercise solving tend rely heavily on solutions they have seen before, rather than working directly from first principles.
- Thus, a problem with brand new context presents a formidable challenge to them.



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## CREATING A PICTORIAL MAP FOR EXPLORING PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS IN THE CLASSROOM



Groups 3-4 participants



3 m

Brainstorm and discuss 1-2 KEY problem solving skills you believe are important for students in the classroom. Think broadly and consider both cognitive and interpersonal skills.





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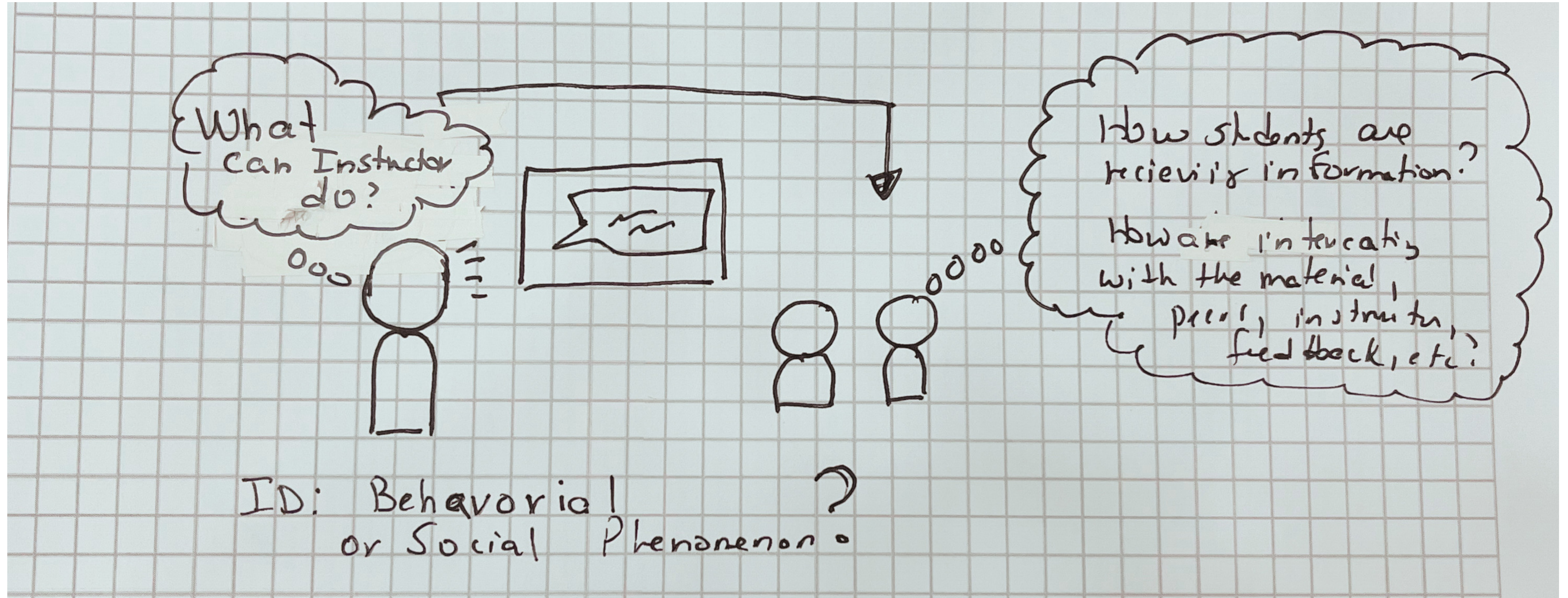
8 m

As a group, create a pictorial map that represents these skills acquisition as a social phenomena between you and the students. You can use symbols, diagrams, illustrations, or any other graphical elements to depict the skills and their interrelationships.





# GETTING STARTED ON YOUR PICTORIAL MAP





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3-5 m

Compare and contrast the different maps to identify common themes and patterns across the maps. Discuss the insights gained.



## ACTIVITY #1

# LESSONS LEARNED

Pictorial maps can help generate ideas for research in engineering education in several ways



**Identification of Gaps:** reveal areas where the phenomena is not adequately represented or explored in educational settings.

**Relationship Exploration:** spark ideas for research on how various variables, such as instructional methods, assessment strategies, or classroom dynamics, impact the development and application of the phenomena

**New Perspectives:** visual representations of complex concepts, allowing researchers to investigate unconventional angles or alternative approaches to addressing the phenomena.

**Comparative Studies:** Comparing maps generated by different groups or across different contexts can highlight variations in the phenomena stimulating research focused on understanding the cultural, disciplinary, or contextual factors.

**Intervention Design:** Researchers can use the maps as a basis for designing and testing interventions, exploring their effectiveness, and contributing to evidence-based practices

**Data Collection Types:** Analysis of elements and relationships can guide in selecting appropriate data collection methods sources like surveys, observations, interviews, or existing educational records for gathering relevant data.







# **DEVELOPING YOUR RESEARCH METHODS**

# A CALL FOR RIGOROUS RESEARCH IN ENGINEERING EDUCATION

## QUESTION

Pose significant questions that can be investigated empirically.

## THEORY

Link research design to relevant theory.

## METHODS

Use methods that permit direct investigation of the question.

## REPRODUCIBILITY

Replicate and generalize across studies.

## DISSEMINATION:

Disclose research to encourage professional scrutiny and critique

Borrego (2007); Felder, (2007); Shavelson (2002).



# THINKING ABOUT GENERALIZABILITY

Exploring a problem of broad appeal



**Need to think about the distinction between local and transferable studies**

"If you do something in your classroom, isn't it automatically generalizable?"



**Need to go against your training**

Scientists and engineers are trained to expect that once a fact is proven or discovered, it is universally true. Reproducing the exact same experimental conditions with humans (e.g., classroom) is impossible.

What contributes to the low retention rates of chemical engineering students at the University of Kentucky?



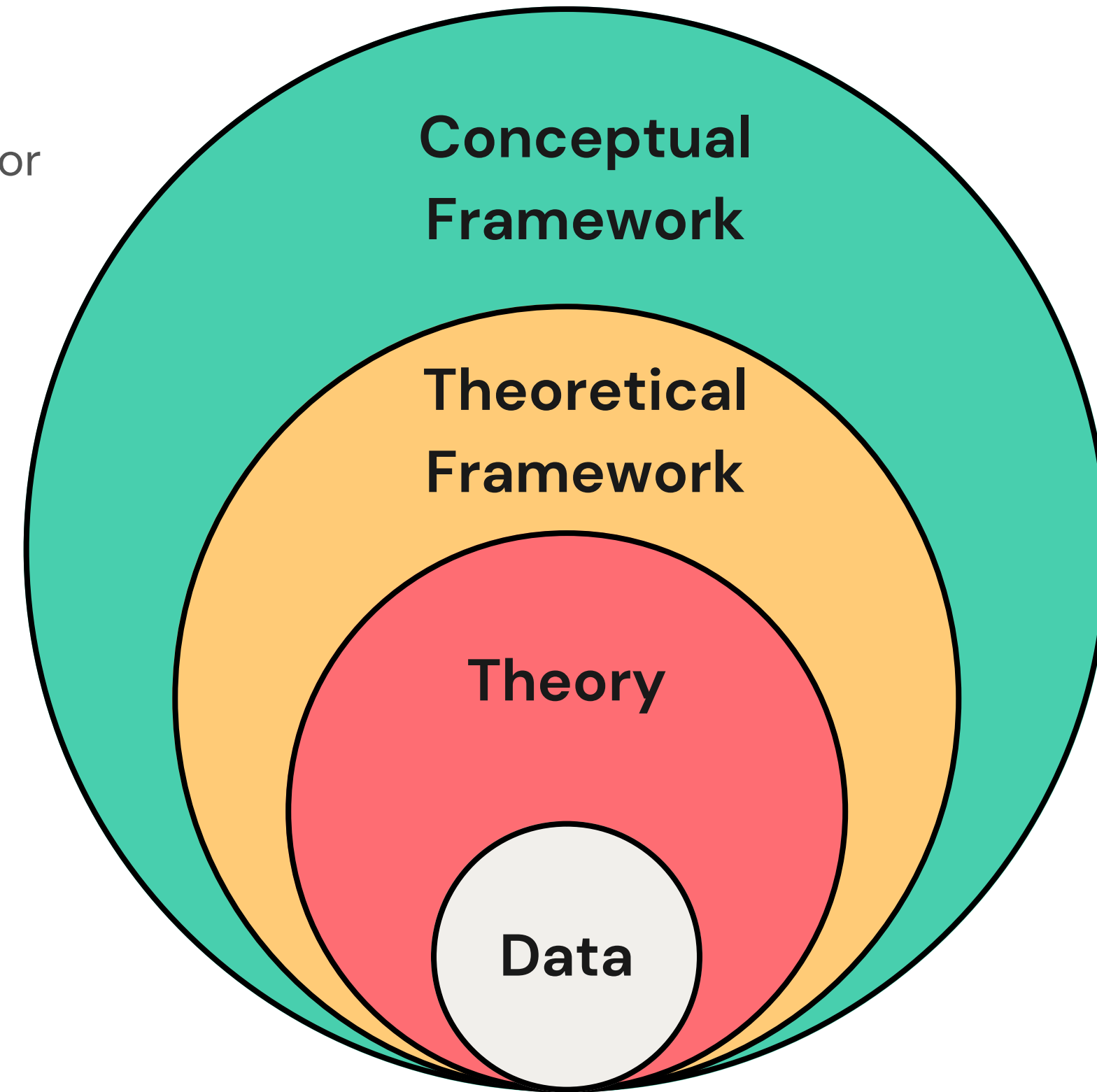
What contributes to the low retention rate of first generation students at public universities?



# FRAMEWORKS (LENSES, FILTERS, ANGLES)

## THEORY

Description of relationship between concepts and ideas that help us understand the world. It can be supported by preliminary data or by a vast body of research—the more data supporting the theory, the stronger it becomes



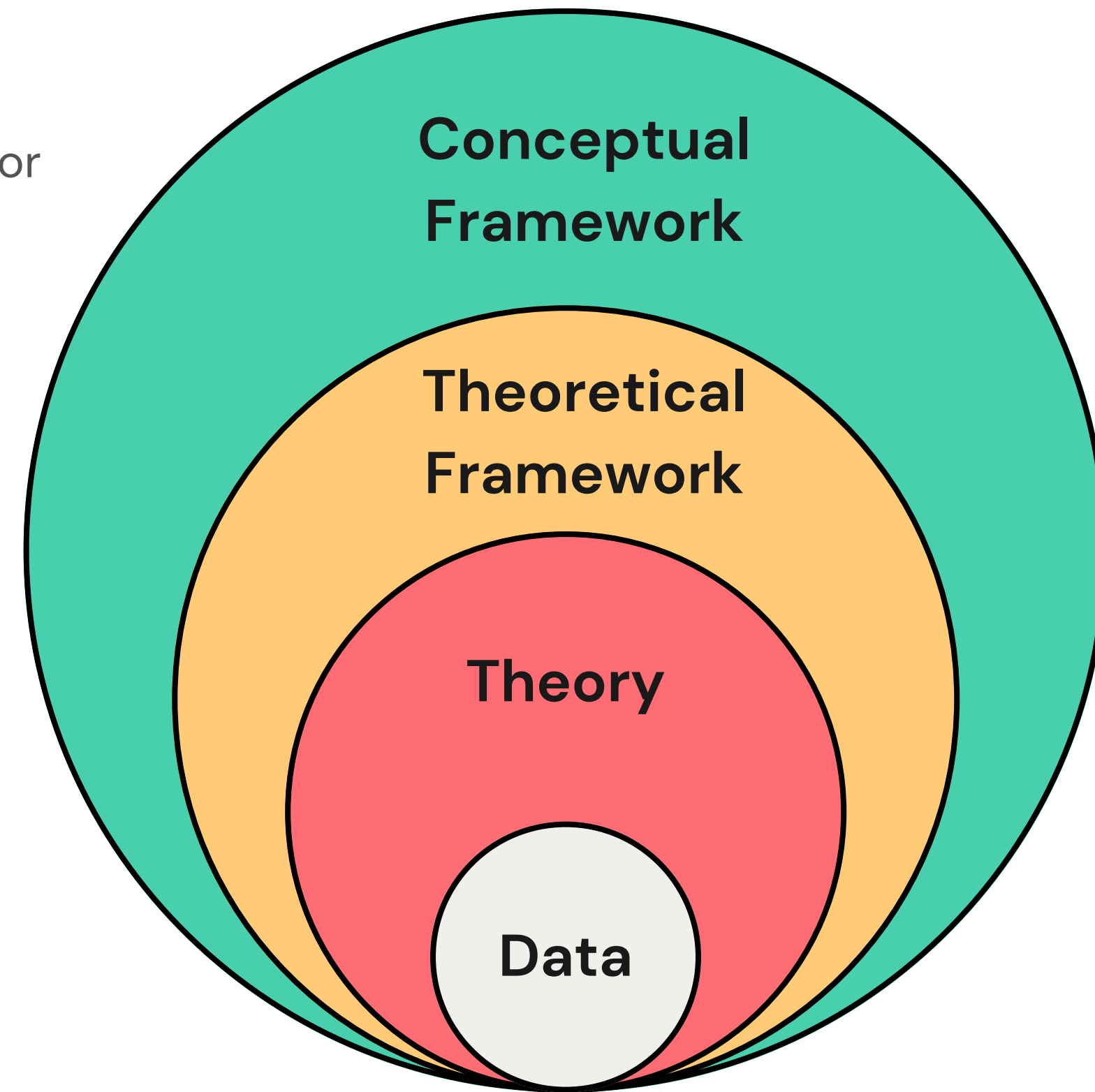
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# FRAMEWORKS

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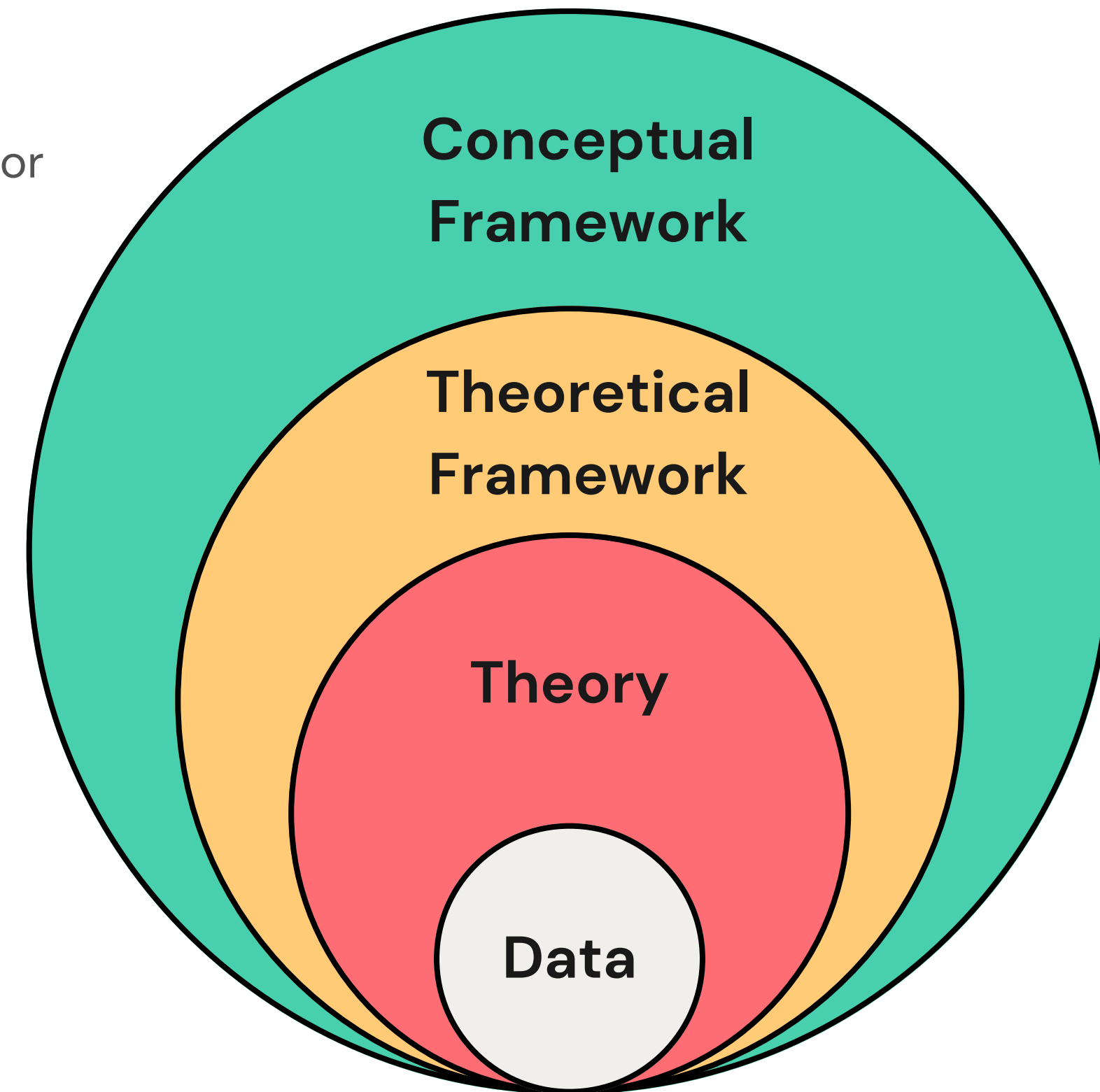
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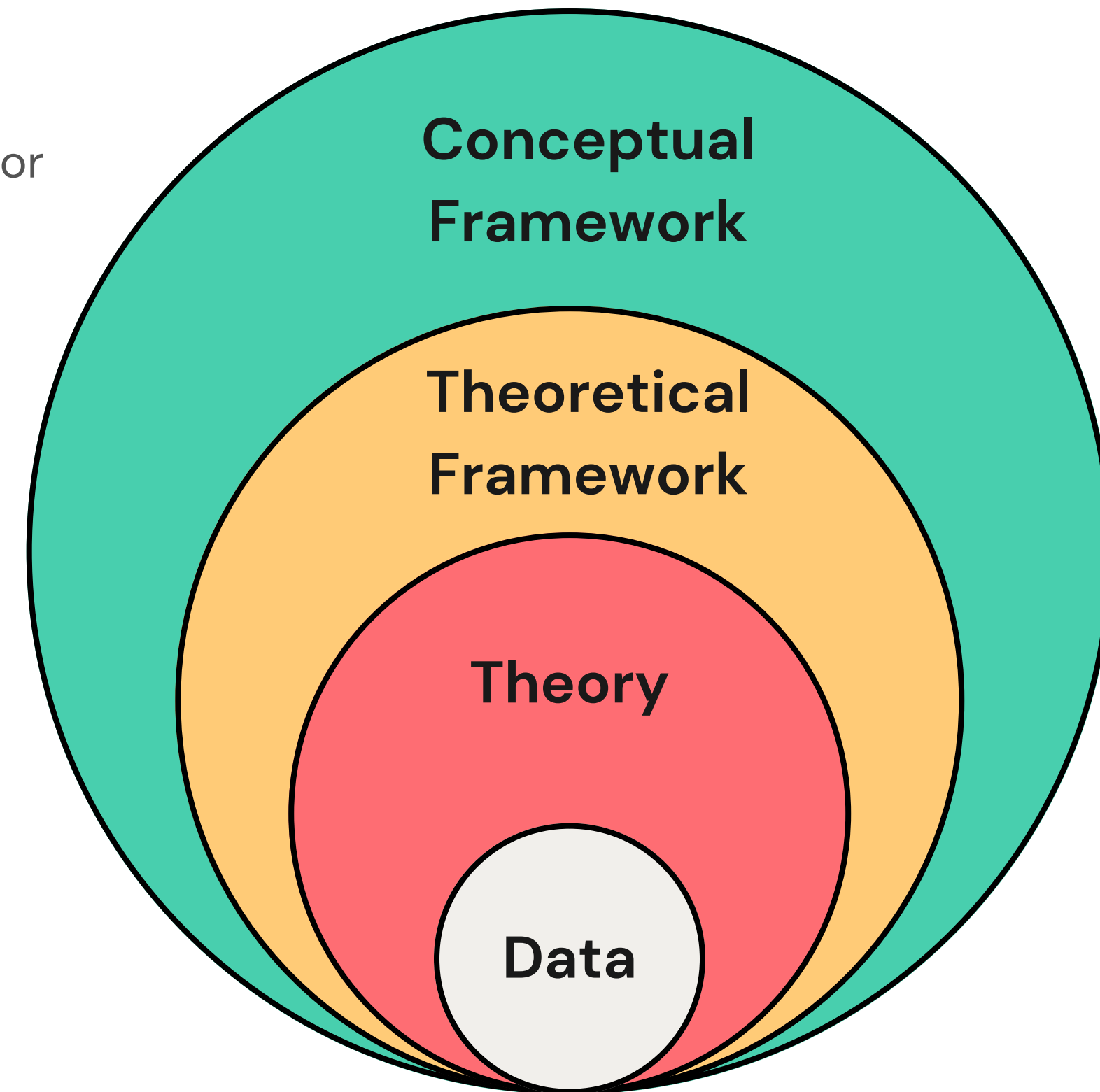
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# COMMONLY USED THEORIES ACROSS DISCIPLINES

University of Colorado-Denver, Grant, C., Osanloo, A., & New Mexico State University. (2014). Understanding, Selecting, and Integrating a Theoretical Framework in Dissertation Research: Creating the Blueprint for Your "House." *Administrative Issues Journal Education Practice and Research*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.5929/2014.4.2.9>

- Transformational/relational theories
  - Transactional/management theories
  - Servant leadership/moral theories
  - Trait theories
  - Situational theories
  - Behavioral theories
  - Systems theory
  - Cognitive theory
  - Sense of community theory
  - Behavioral theory
- Queer theory
  - Feminist Theory
  - Critical race theory
  - Self-efficacy theory
  - Functionalist theory
  - Relational theory
  - Gender theory
  - Change theory
  - Identity formation
  - Community of Inquiry
  - Transformational theory

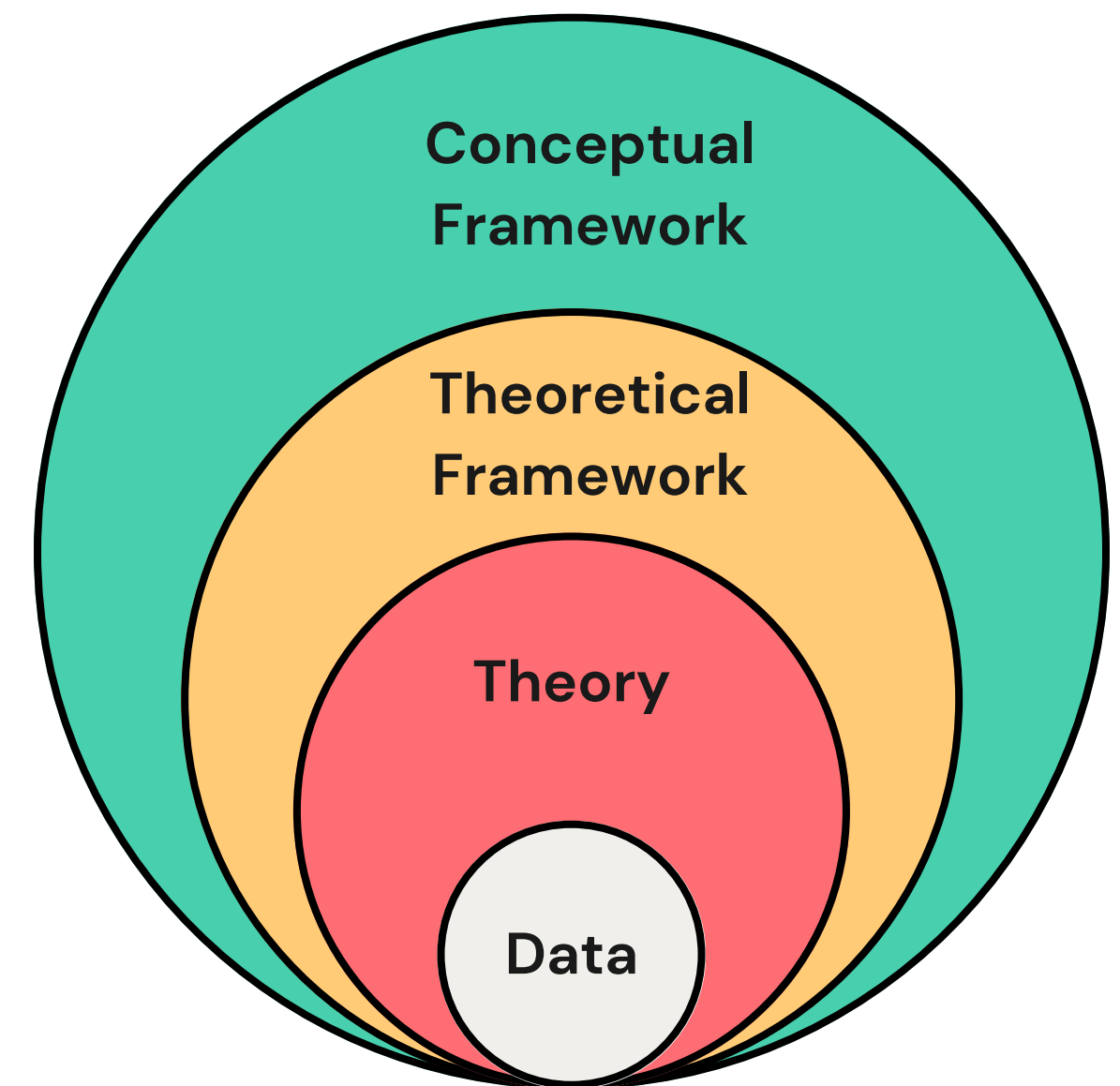
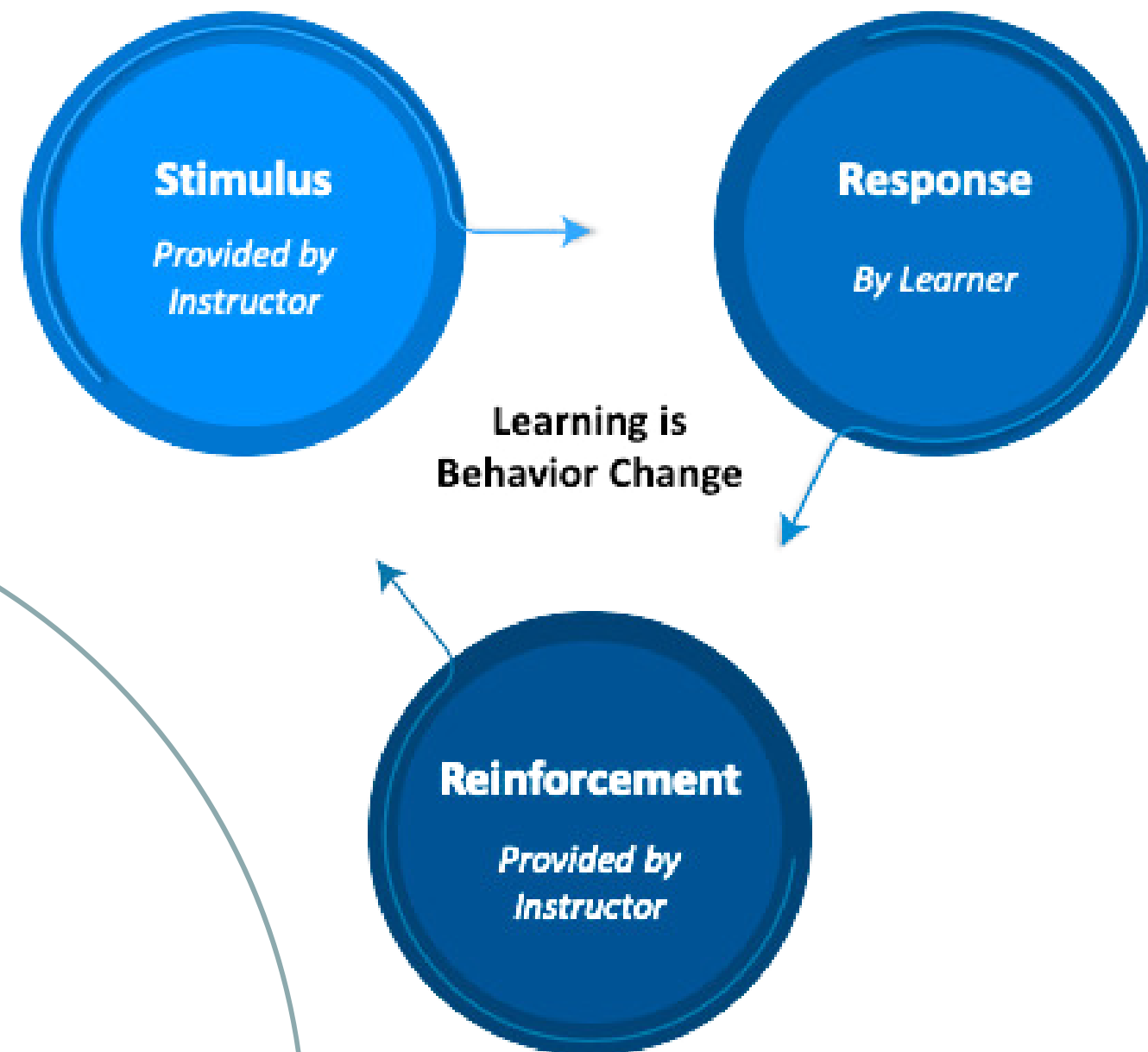


# GROUNDING YOUR RESEARCH DESIGN

## THEORY

Example: Behaviorism:

- All learning occur through interactions with the environment
- The environment shapes behaviors



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## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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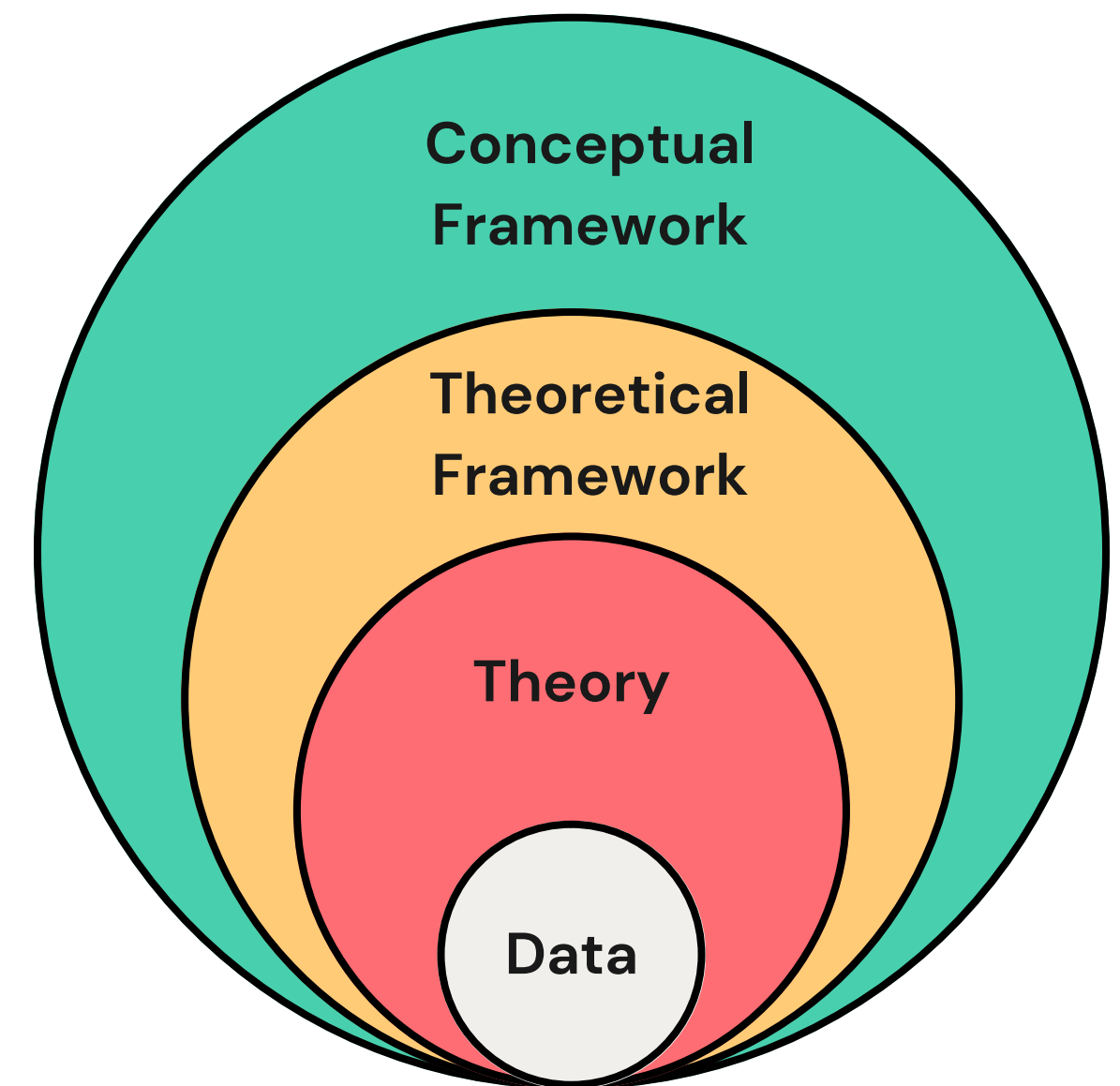
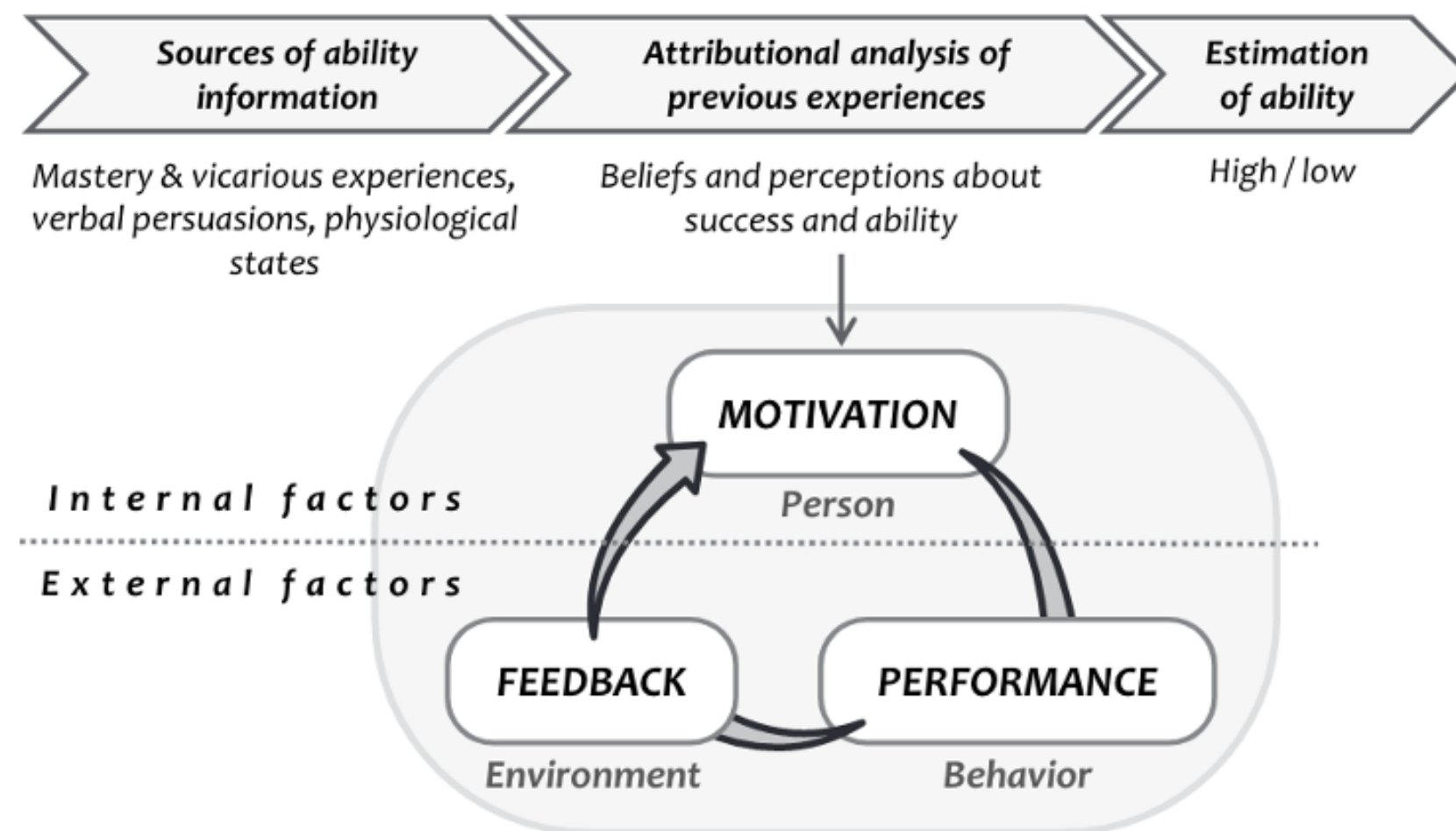
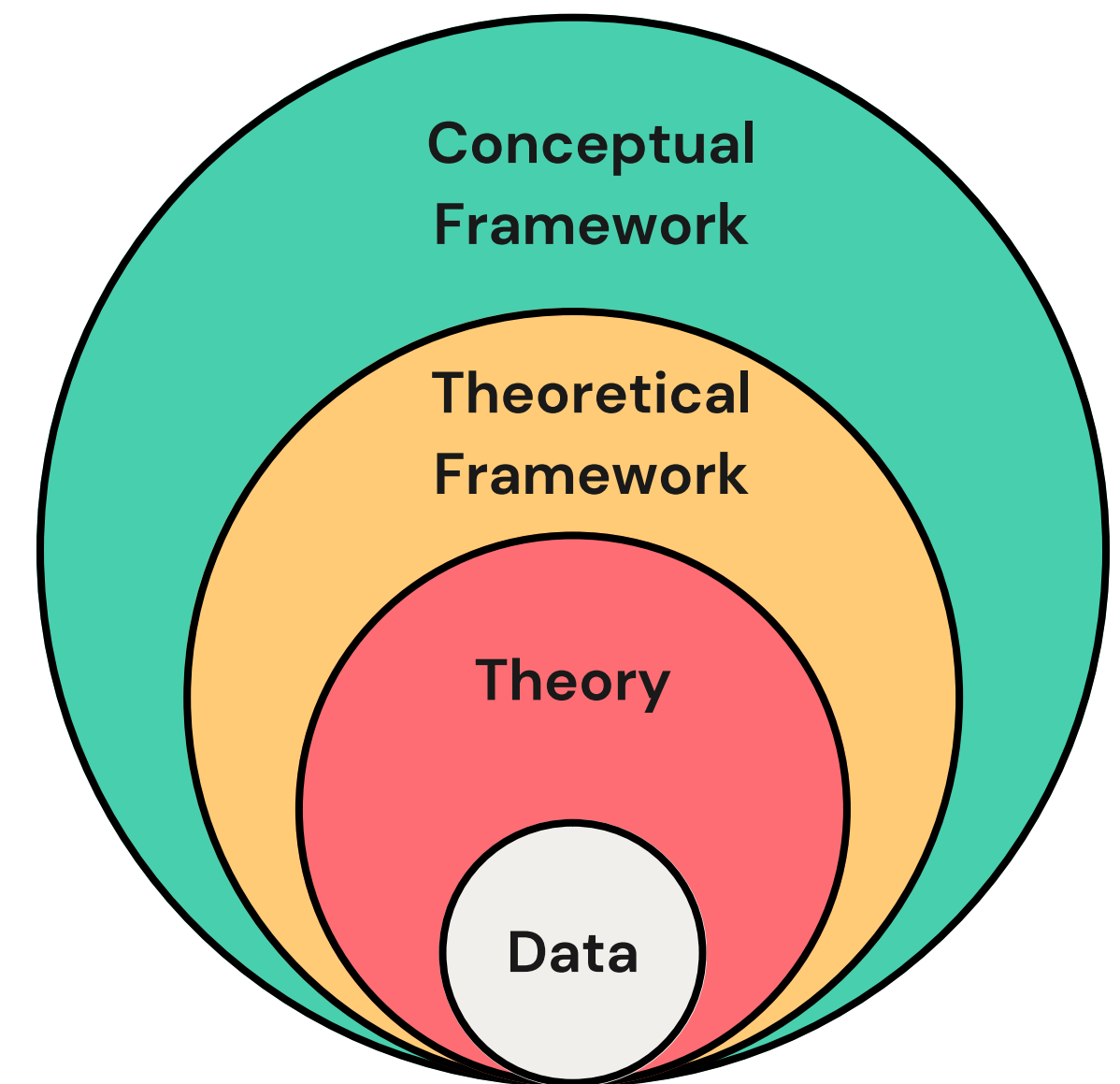
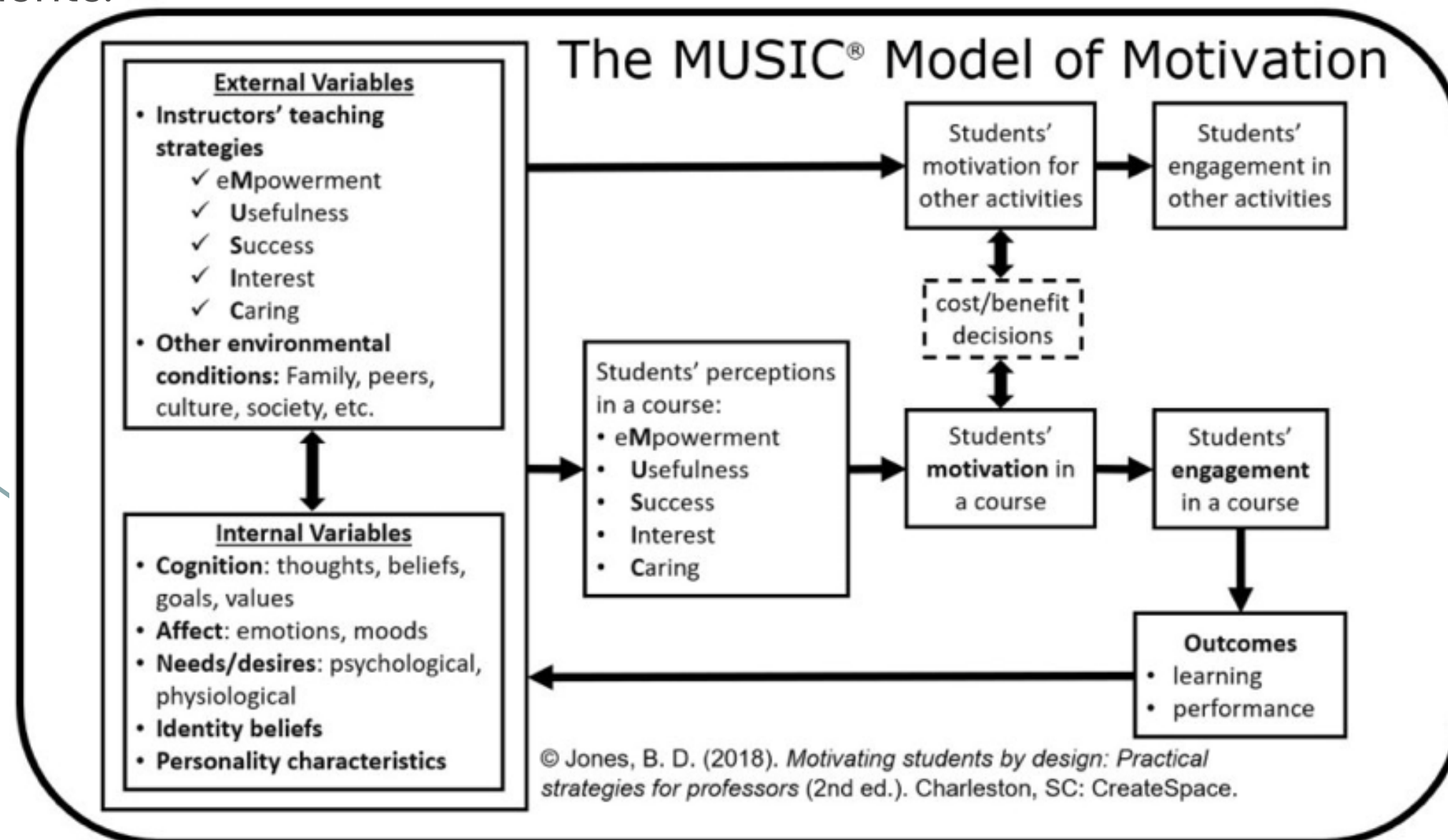


Fig. 1. Summary of the theoretical framework: Interplay between motivation, performance, and environment.

# GROUNDING YOUR RESEARCH DESIGN

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The MUSIC Model of Motivation was developed by Dr. Brett D. Jones ([2009](#), [2018](#)) as a research-based model to explain factors in the motivational climate that affect people's motivation to engage in activities, such as courses and class assignments.





# WRITING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

## QUALITATIVE

1. Try to evolve during the research and be open-ended without referencing the literature
2. Begin with "How" or "What". Avoid "Why" [this is a quantitative term that implies cause and effect]
3. List the central phenomenon you plan to explore
4. Specify the research site and participants
5. Avoid using words such as "impact" or "effect" and directional phrases

What is (the central phenomenon) of/for (participants) at/in (research site)?

What is the process of the curriculum committee in making decisions about courses?



# WRITING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

## QUANTITATIVE

1. They Begin with “How”, “What”, or “Why” and can NEVER be answered by a simple Yes or No
2. Specify the independent and dependent variables
3. IF your questions deal with connections among multiple variables, you will again – use relate or compare – just as you did in the purpose statement

### **General Descriptive Examples:**

What factors positively impact (phenomenon) of (participants)?

### **Relationship Script:**

How does (Ind Var) relate to (Dep Var) for (participants)?

### **Comparison Script:**

How does (group 1) compare with/differ from (group 2) in terms of (Dep Var) for (participants)?



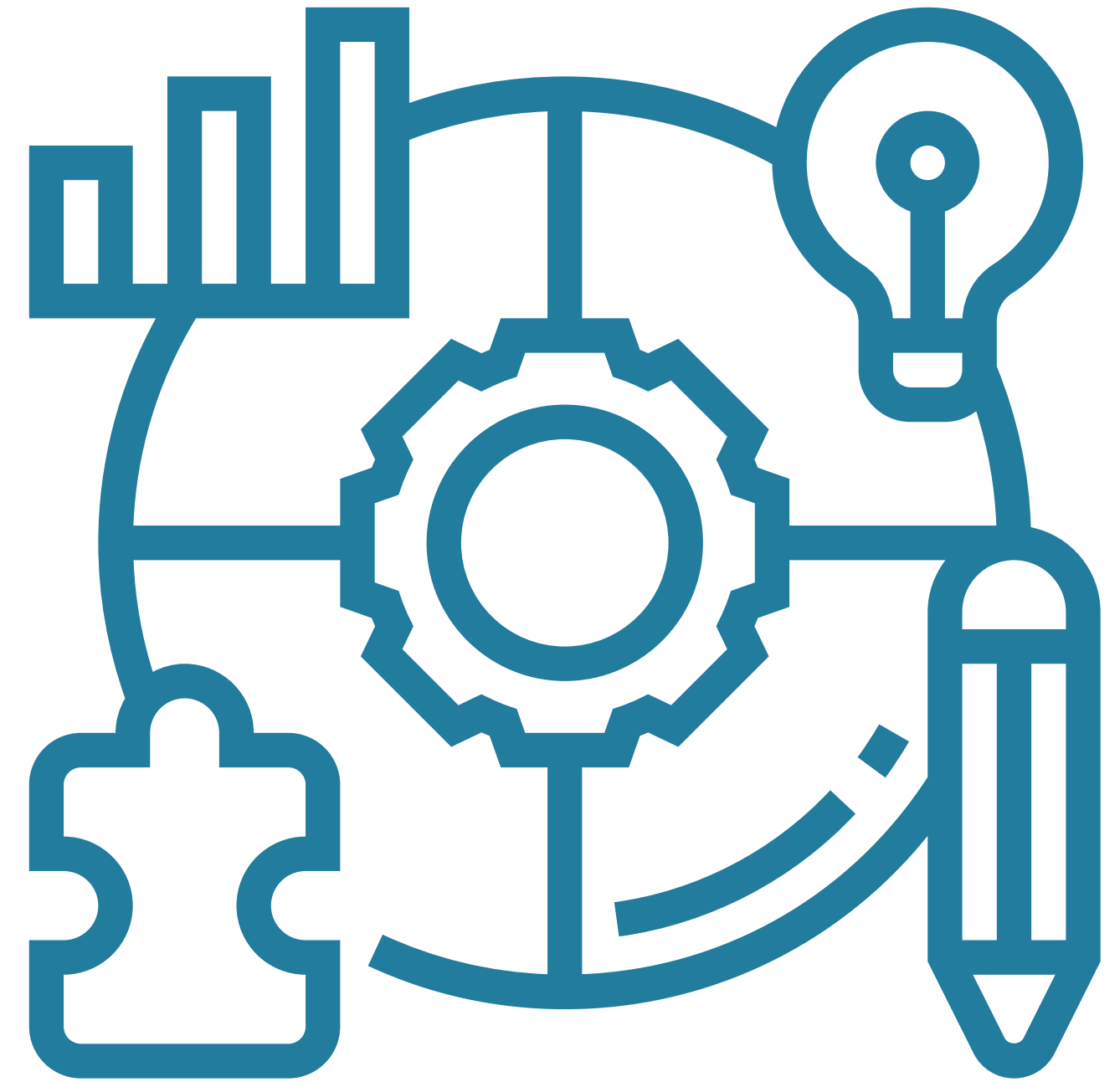
# TYPES OF DATA COLLECTION

The type of methods that are using should be connected to your research question and theoretical framework.

**01 - QUANTITATIVE**

**02 - QUALITATIVE**

**03 - MIXED METHODS**





# QUANTITATIVE METHODS

Utilizes numbers to test hypotheses and make predictions by using measured amounts, statistics and ultimately describe an event by using figures.

## Advantages

- Can collect and analyze a lot of information.
- With good design, that means you can make general statements about what is likely to be true overall.

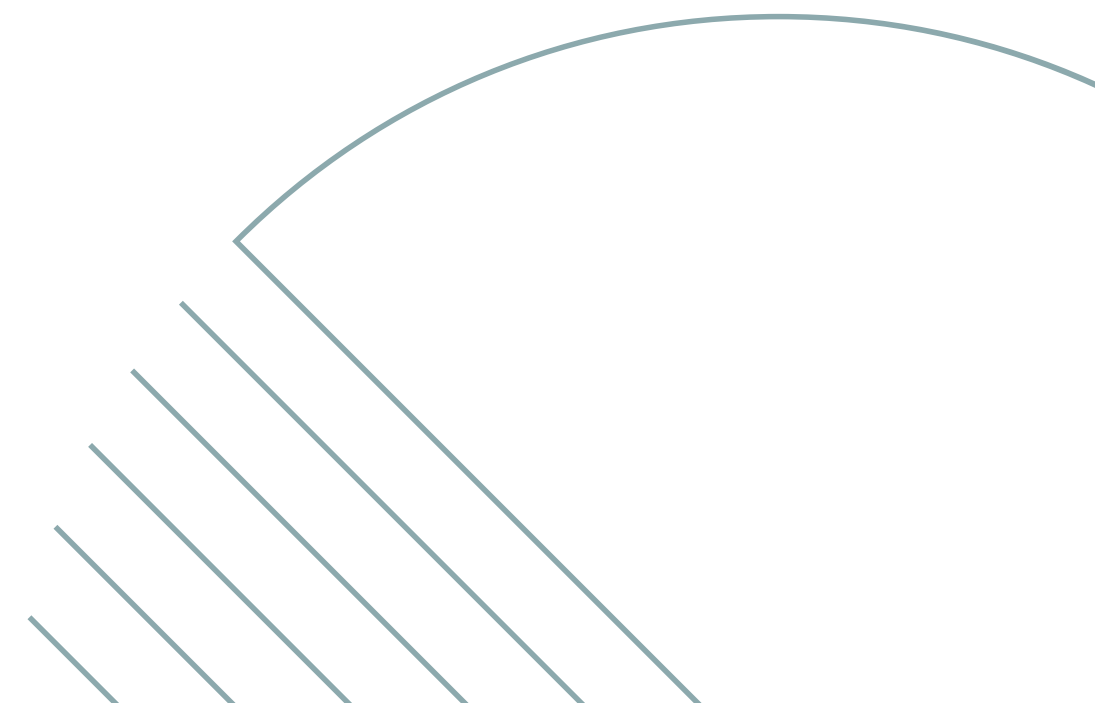


## Disadvantages

- Lack of depth in understanding (e.g. reasons why, context, emotions or feelings).
- It requires mathematical and/or statistical knowledge to be able to analyze the data effectively.
- Measurement instruments (e.g., surveys) must be properly validated through a time-consuming processes before using it.

## Important considerations

- All measurements must be validated: Use instruments that others have developed!
- Must know required sample sizes for desired statistical methods



# QUALITATIVE METHODS

Utilizes words to understand people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions

## Advantages

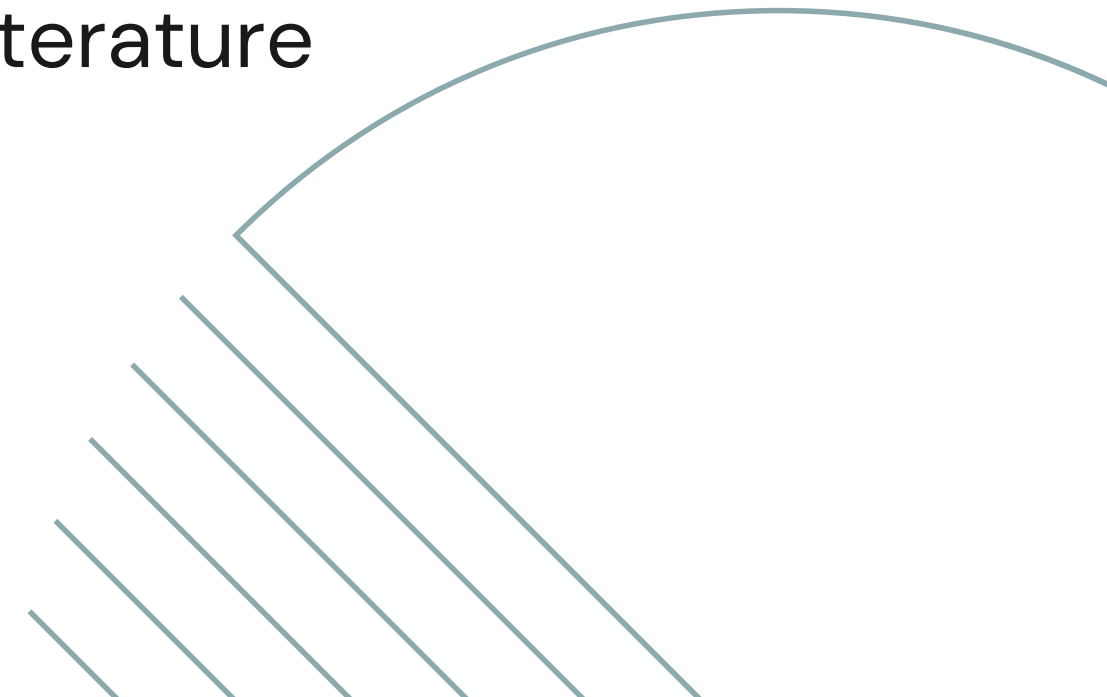
- Provides significant detail about specific cases, people or group
- Allows for understanding of the driving forces behind a phenomena

## Disadvantages

- Can't make general statements due to small sample sizes
- Analysis is time consuming
- Some argue that the analysis is very subjective, but this depends on your approach.

## Important considerations

- Sample sizes must be considered and matched to the type of qualitative analysis
- Be careful about generalizing findings that aren't supported by the literature



# MIXED METHODS

Combines quantitative and qualitative methods to provide deeper context into the phenomenon

## Advantages

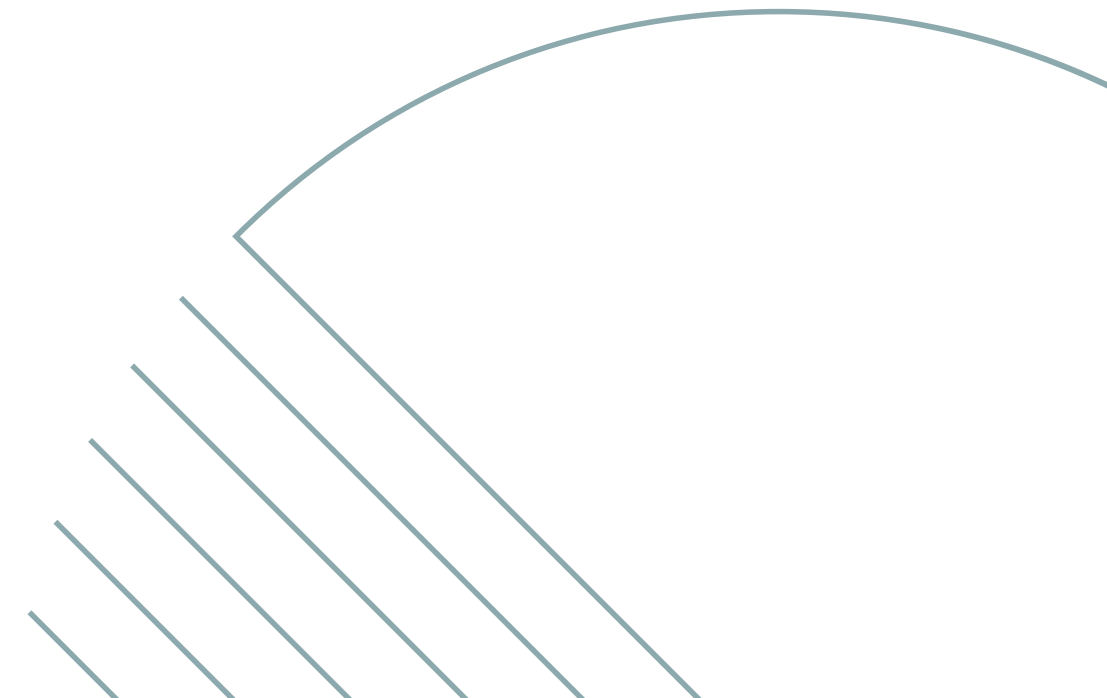
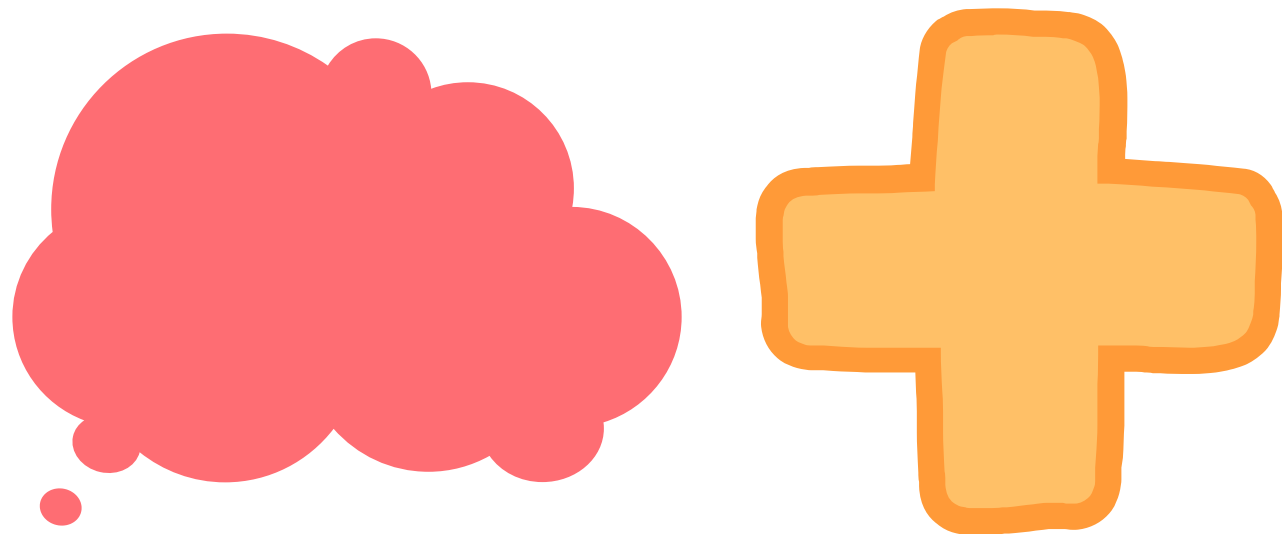
- Amplifies understanding of the phenomenon through combining different data types together

## Disadvantages

- Can be significantly time consuming to apply both quantitative and qualitative methods
- Requires expertise in both quantitative and qualitative analysis techniques

## Important considerations

- Important to consider the ordering of your quantitative and qualitative approaches
- Mixed-methods should be used to strengthen understanding

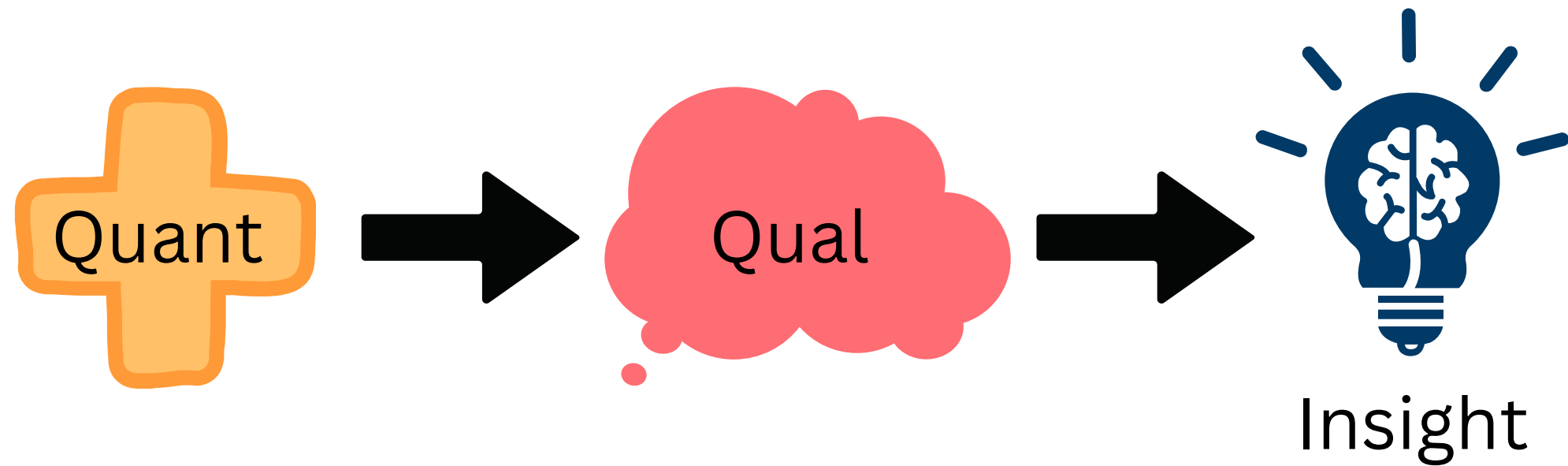




# MIXED METHODS

Applications of mixed methods

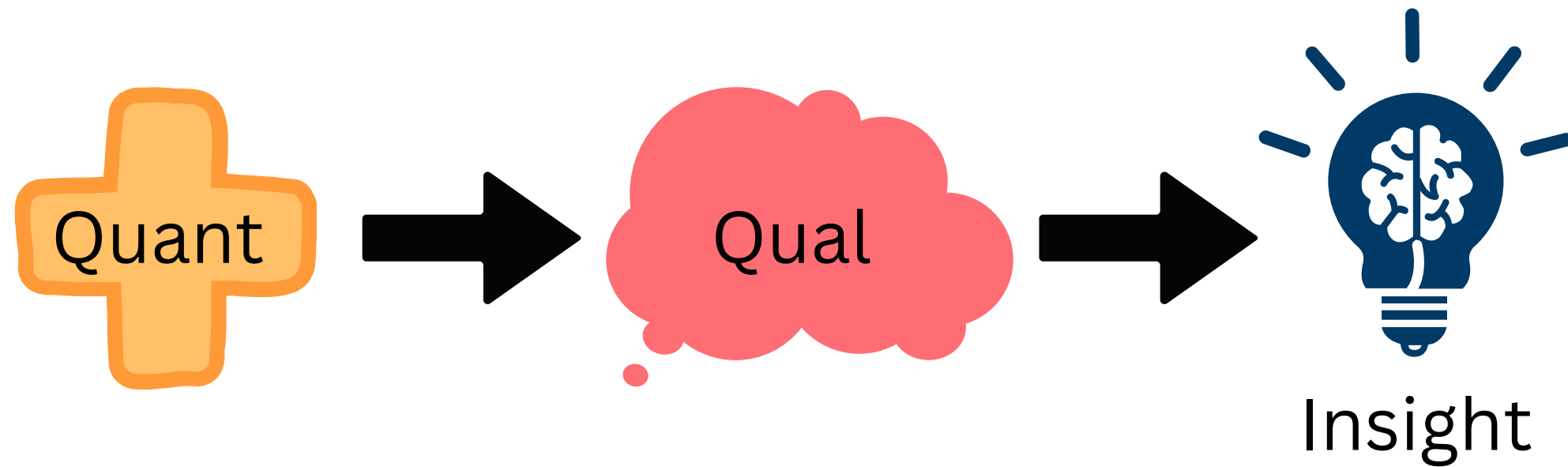
## Exploratory Research



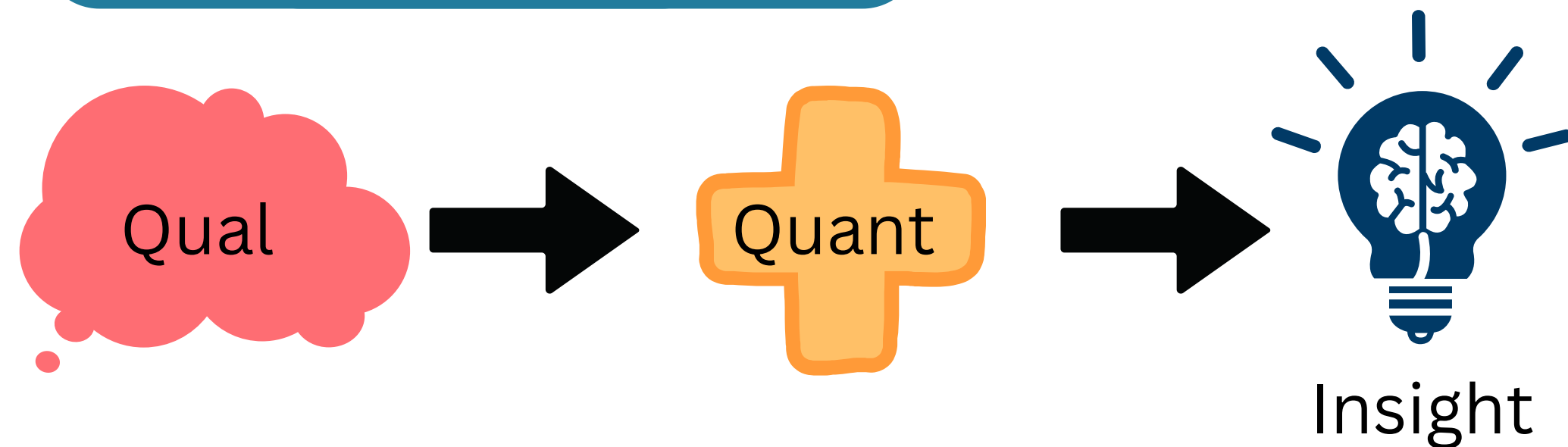
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## Exploratory Research



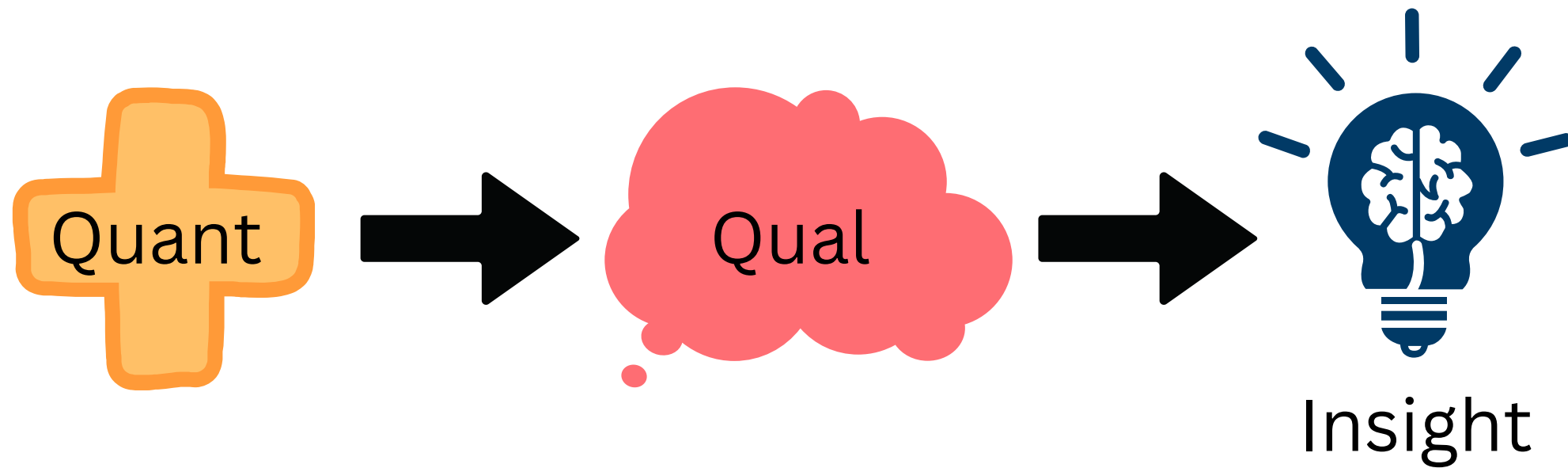
## Explanatory Research



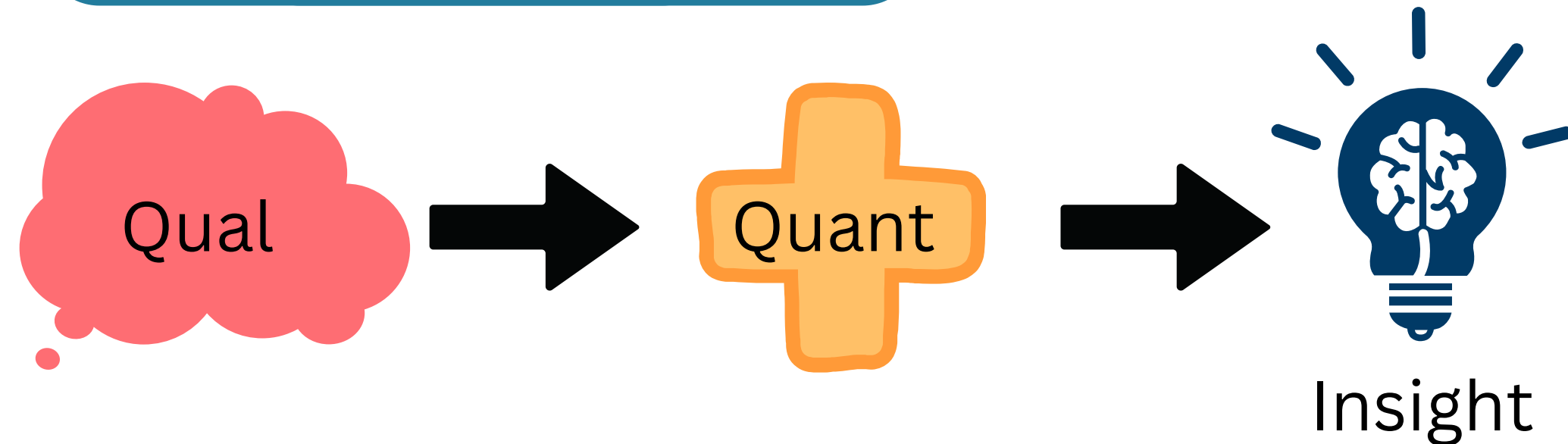
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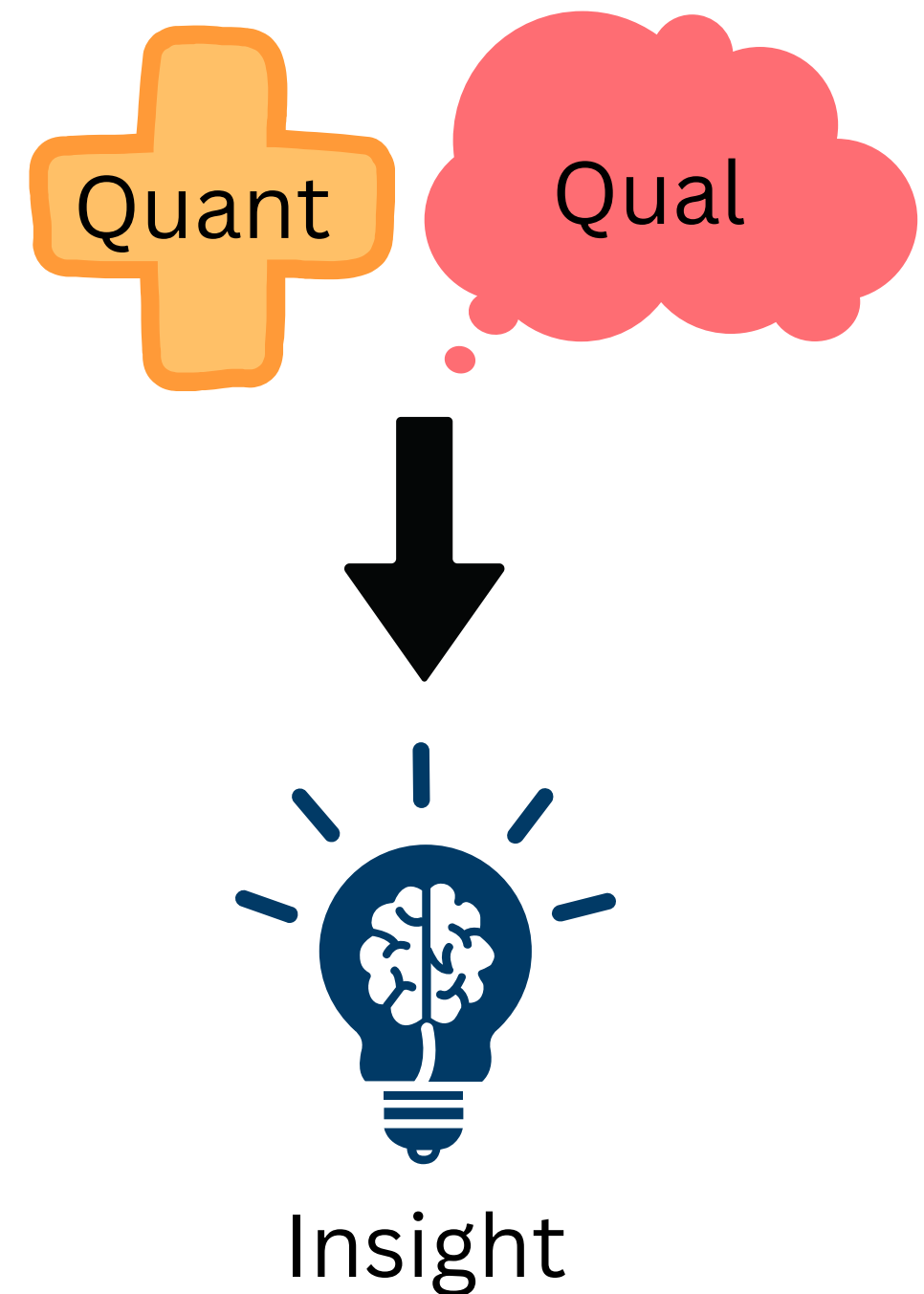
## Exploratory Research



## Explanatory Research



## Dynamic Research





# ACTIVITY #2: THINKING ABOUT DATA

## What is the phenomenon?

- Problem solving: a process, used to obtain a best answer to an unknown, or a decision subject to some constraints.

## What does the literature says?

- Problem solving is not the same as exercise solving
- Students who train mostly in exercise solving tend rely heavily on solutions they have seen before, rather than working directly from first principles.
- Thus, a problem with brand new context presents a formidable challenge to them.



# ACTIVITY #2: THINKING ABOUT DATA



Find your group



Brainstorm

15 m

1. **Identify the research question(s) that make the most sense to you and ask your colleagues to review them.**
2. **Given your question(s), do you have access to existing data/artifacts that you're aware of that can help you address your research question?**
3. **What other types of data/artifacts/information and methods (e.g., student reflections, assignments, interviews, focus groups, questionnaires/tests, observations, quasi-experiments) might you need to collect to best address your research question? What do you hope to learn from each?**
4. Given your question and the information you are seeking to collect; what strategies or methodologies might you use to analyze data/artifacts you plan to collect as part of your study?
5. Might it be a good idea to use multiple/mixed methods to address your research question?
6. What time frame is optimal for your study? Multi-institutional? Longitudinal? Short or long-term? One semester or multiple semesters? How many data points do you need to best answer your question? How many participants?



Discussion

3-5 m

# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Educational research = studies on human beings. Therefore, you must consider the ethical impact of the research that you are conducting.

- All studies that you plan to publish must be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of your institution
- The IRB considers the ethical impacts of your research and ensures that your research participants are protected.

## Important ethical considerations:

- Positionality: how does your own worldview impact your research and interpretation of the data?
- Consent: How will you ensure that participation in your research is voluntary and informed?
- Do no harm: How will you ensure that your research participants are protected and valued through the research process?

**Example IRB documents can be found on the resources page.**



# DISSEMINATION

When designing your research, you want to think about the end goal. Dissemination allows you to share your findings but also helps to improve rigor in research methods.

Increasing expectations for rigor •----->  
Disciplinary  
conferences



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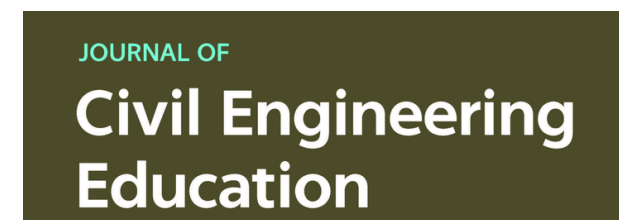
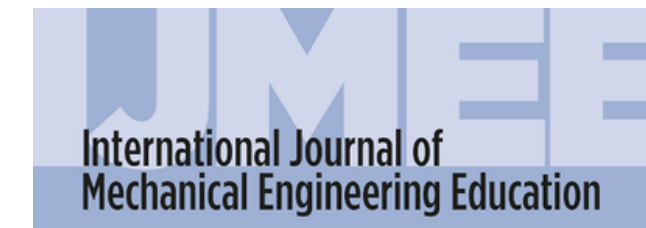
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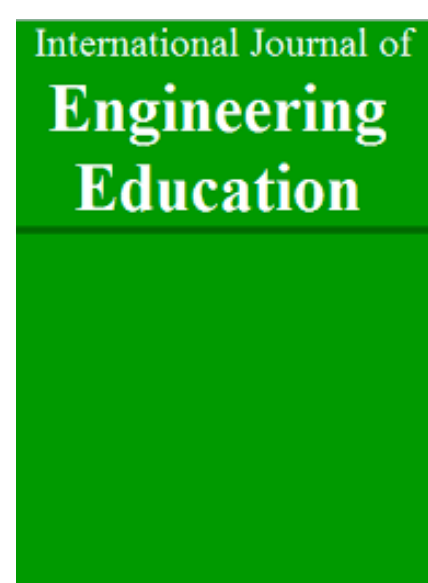
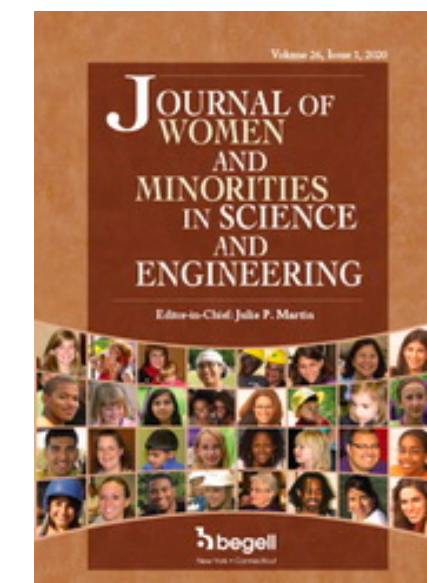
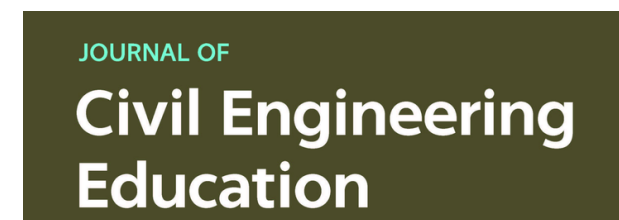
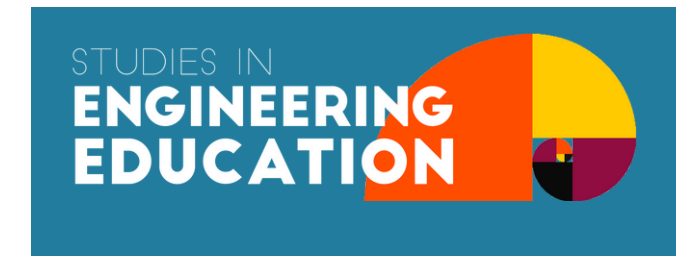
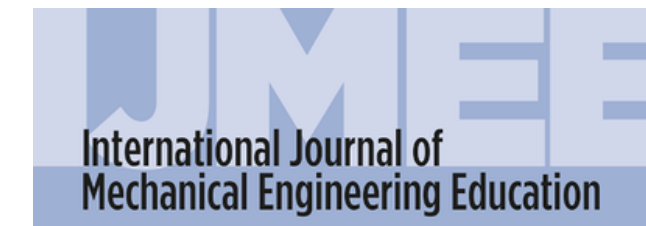
Increasing expectations for rigor •----->

Disciplinary  
conferences

Educational  
conferences

Disciplinary  
journals

Educational  
journals



# DISSEMINATION

When designing your research, you want to think about the end goal. Dissemination allows you to share your findings but also helps to improve rigor in research methods.

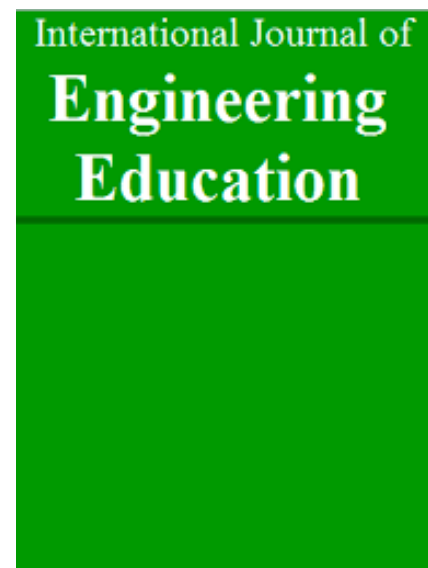
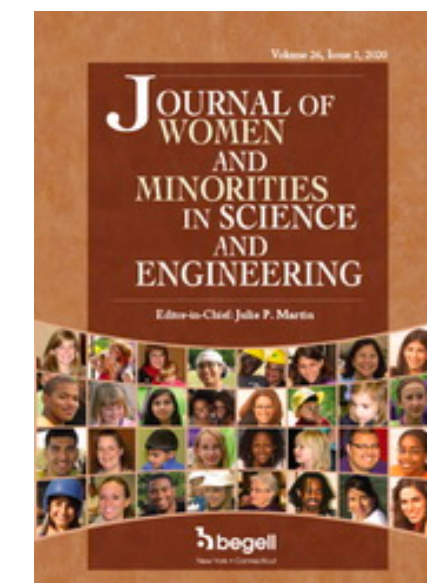
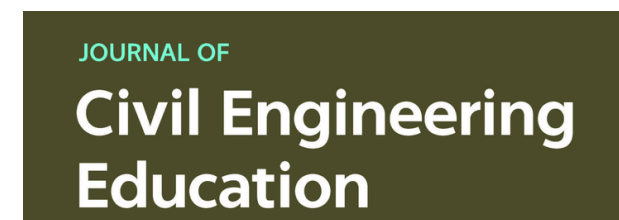
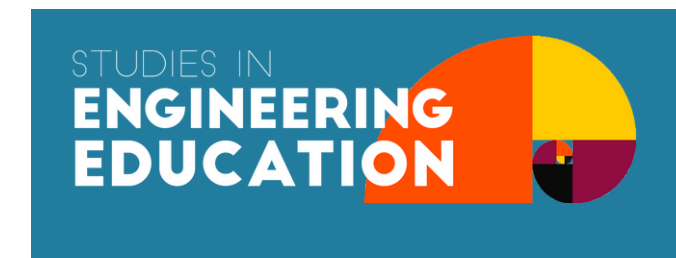
Increasing expectations for rigor •----->

Disciplinary  
conferences

Educational  
conferences

Disciplinary  
journals

Educational  
journals



# LESSONS LEARNED TODAY

- ① RESEARCH IN  
ENGINEERING EDUCATION
- ② IDENTIFYING YOUR  
RESEARCH AREA
- ③ DEVELOPING YOUR  
RESEARCH METHODS

**"Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose."**

Zora Neale  
Hurstun



# THANK YOU!



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## RESOURCES

<https://bit.ly/43Qiace>

## QUESTIONS?



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