

# Testing of concepts

## - Trust as an example

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## Why to test concepts?

- The origin of the (well-established and standardised) questions is often a bit unclear
- The questions are adopted on the basis of they have been used in previous surveys elsewhere
- The phase of operationalising is failed & theoretical concept to be investigated is left without an elaboration.
- To achieve quality improvements, helping to interpret statistics.

## Why to test the concept of trust (in other people, in institutions)?

- ...doubts about the validity of the trust measurements
- ...no operational definitions can't be traced or if found they are blurry
- ... nor explanation why current questions are a good indicators of social trust
- ...Researchers are not unanimous about the definition of trust
- ... Helping to interpret the results.

## The project in Finnish Cognitive Laboratory

- Assignment received from the Statistic's Finland's Leisure Survey
- ...doubts about the validity of the trust measurements
- ...aim: to outline a recommendation to test the concepts in general
- ...aim: to create a good practice on substance and process quality in statistical processes (in Statistics Finland)
- ...aim: to produce information for interpretation of statistical results ('what have we actually been measuring') and for publication quality
- Timetable:
  - Theoretical work, literature reviews (May, June 2009)
  - Interviews (June, August 2009)
  - Analysis (August, September 2009)

## Theory of social capital and trust

- no universal definition exists on social capital
- The roots of the concept of 'social capital': the welfare and the economic situation of society can't be explained without taking into account the social dimension
- Trust is considered to be a key indicator of social capital
- Trust is considered as either a source or an outcome of social capital

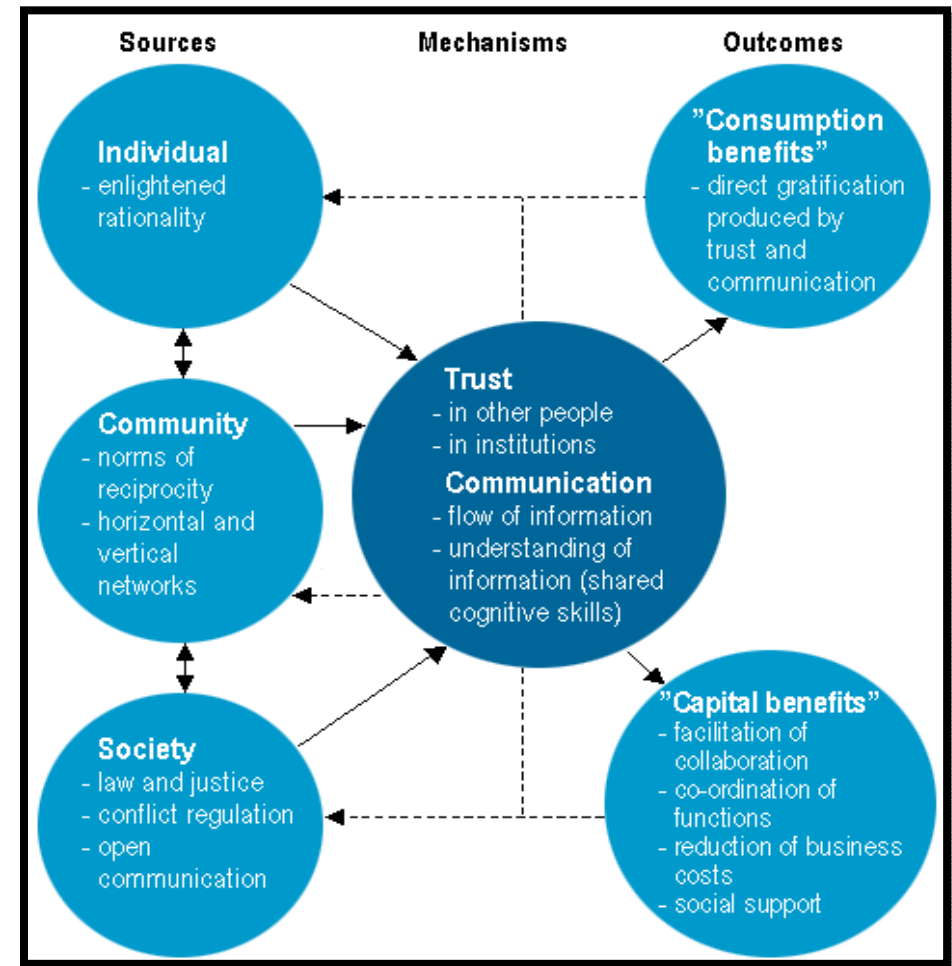


Figure 1. The sources, mechanisms and outcomes of social capital (Ruuskanen 2001)

## The Leisure Survey questions on trust

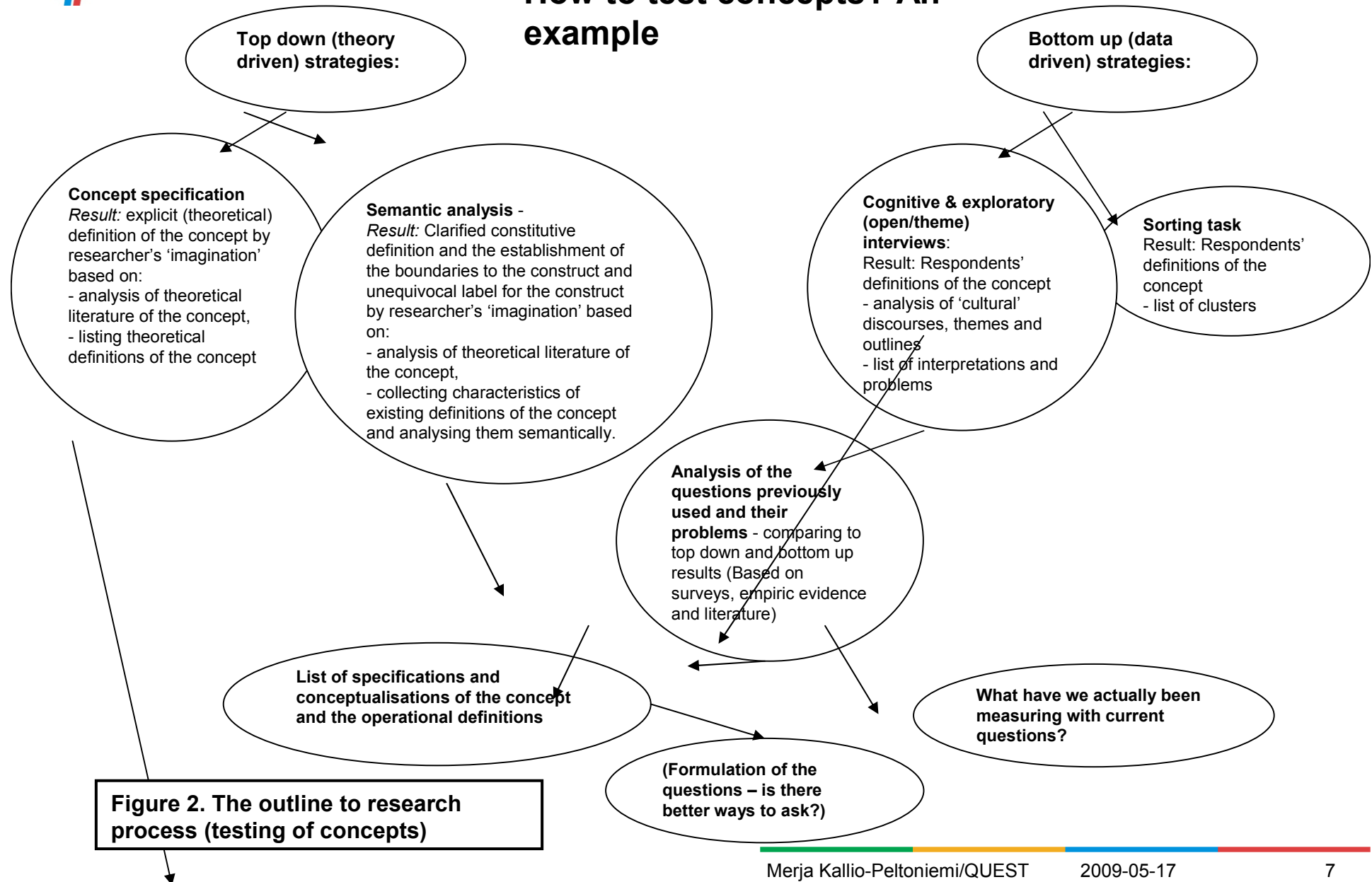
(4-point scale from totally agrees to totally disagrees)

- **Generalised trust** concerns also other people than one already knows.
  - I can mostly be sure that other people want what is best for me.
  - If I am not careful, other people will take advantage of me.
  - People can generally be trusted.
- **Informal trust** is defined as trust in a particular group of people.
  - There are only a few people in whom I can trust completely.
  - I trust most people living in my area.
- The Leisure Survey included only one item on **institutional or governmental trust** (or confidence)
  - A person like me does not have say in what the powers that be do.

## Quality perceptions in survey research

- Substance quality
  - concept testing
- Process quality
  - process validity: the nearest possible description about all the relevant stages involving validity (that is concept analysis, operationalisation and measurement instruments)
- Method quality
  - operationalisation, questionnaire design pre-test methodology
- Publication quality
  - 'interpretation' of the statistics, 'what have we actually been measuring'

## How to test concepts? An example



## Interview protocol

- Cogn. interview, an example:

**I can mostly be sure that other people want what is best for me.**

*General think-aloud encouragement:*

- What were you thinking about the question when you heard it?

*Verbal probes:*

- What, to you, do the question precisely means?
- Who, to you, are the 'other people' mentioned in the question? Who did you think is meant by 'other people' mentioned in the question?
- What does the term 'mostly' mean to you in this context?
- What does the term 'want what is best for me' mean to you in this context?
- How did you arrive at that answer (and that response alternative)?
- Was that easy or hard to answer? Why?



## Interview protocol (2)

- **Explorative open interview (spontaneous probes allowed)**
- I have now asked you many questions that are about to measure trust. Now we could discuss more informally about the thoughts that came to your mind when I was asking the questions.
- In general, what kind of thoughts came up to your mind, when I asked the questions?
- Do you consider yourself as a trusting person?
- What kind of characteristics do you consider to include in trustfulness? Do you think that trust is a bad or a good characteristic?
- Do you think that trust is a personal trait or do you think it is conditional to external things?
- Do you have anything else in your mind about the questions on trust presented to you? Why do you think these kinds of studies are asked or researched?

## Challenges and Questions

- Whose task the concept testing is?
- How to translate into practice the concept testing as an standardised method in pre-testing?
- And regarding the already standardised questions: how to standardise the concept testing as a method to help interpret the statistical information?
- How to attach and establish the concept testing to quality framework?
  - How is the information from conceptual testing made available for the users of the statistics?
  - How to contribute to publication quality?
  - How to establish the perspective of process validity, including concept testing, in statistical processes?