

Laying the Foundation for Good Survey Questions

Some Thoughts and Examples related to Observation, Conceptualisation and Operationalisation

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How it all started

At Statistics Norway our job as survey methodologists usually starts *after* the questionnaire content is supposedly decided upon and defined

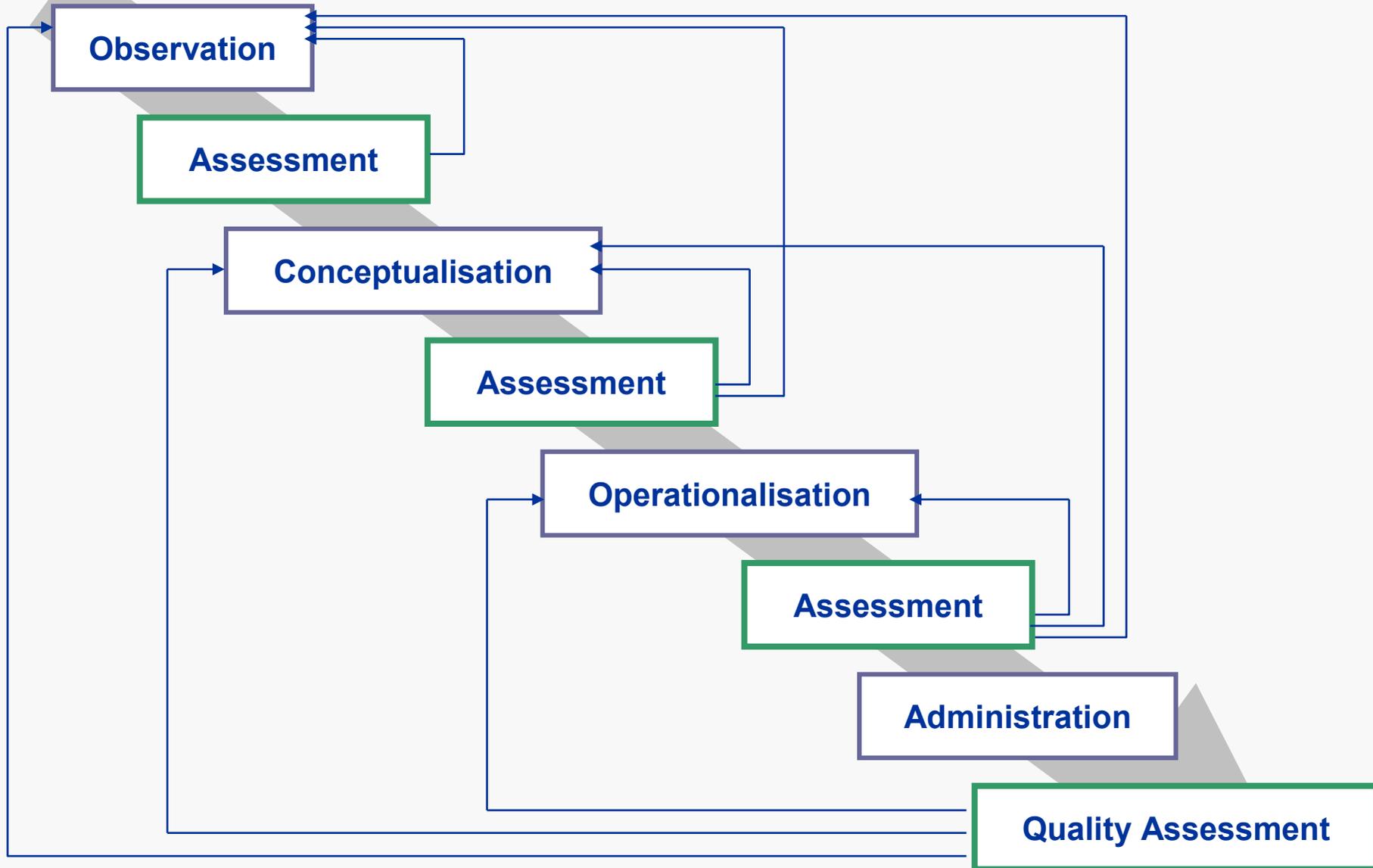
Quite often we evaluate, test and redesign existing questionnaires

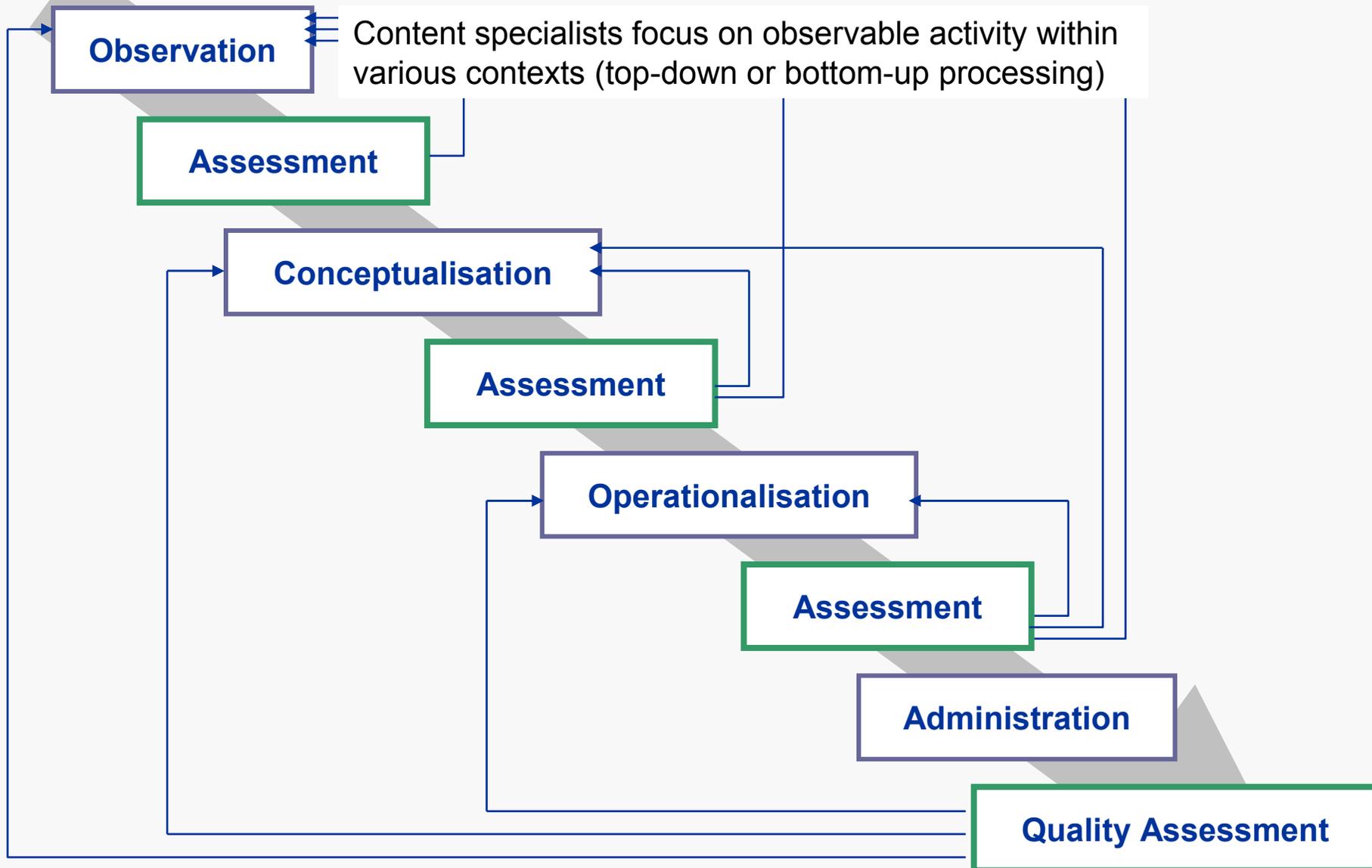
Still, we almost always end up “bugging” the subject matter people with content-related questions

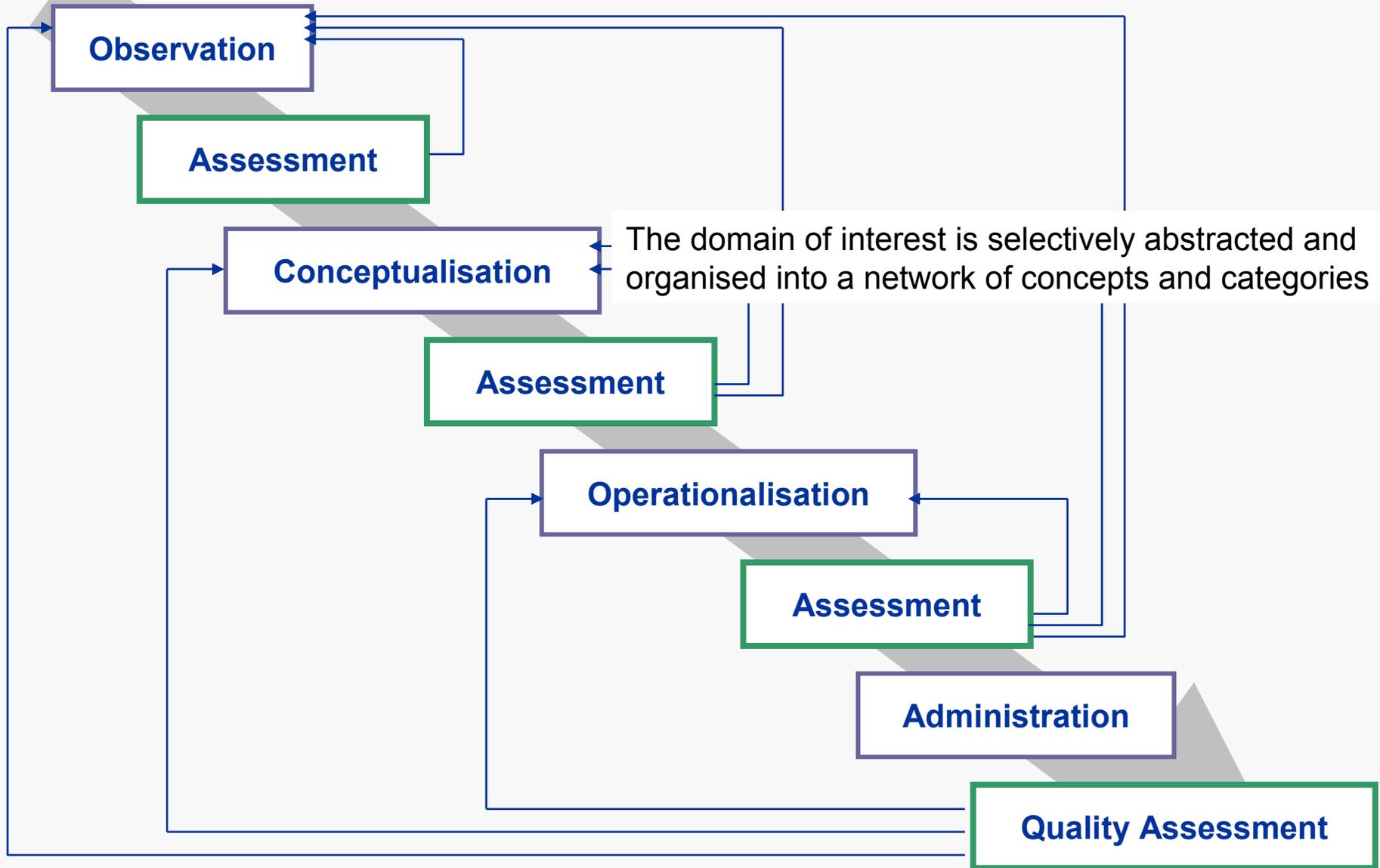
Relevant literature

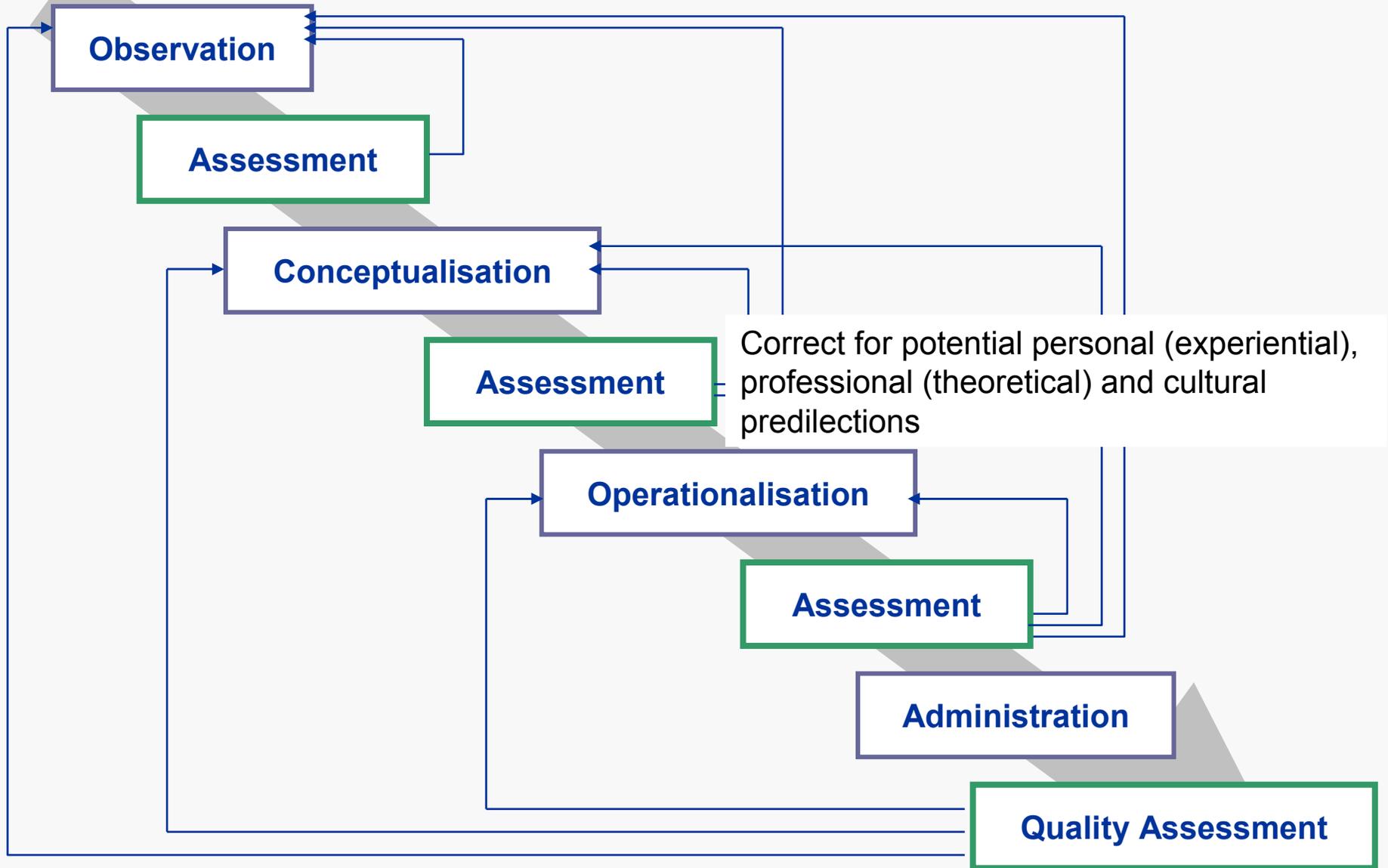
- James L. Esposito (2002): *A Framework Relating Questionnaire Design and Evaluation Processes to Sources of Measurement Error*
- Joop J. Hox (1997): *From Theoretical Concept to Survey Question*, ch. 2 in Lyberg et.al.: *Survey Measurement and Process Quality*
- Blalock, Carnap, Oosterveld & Vorst, Heath & Martin, Fiske, Kerlinger

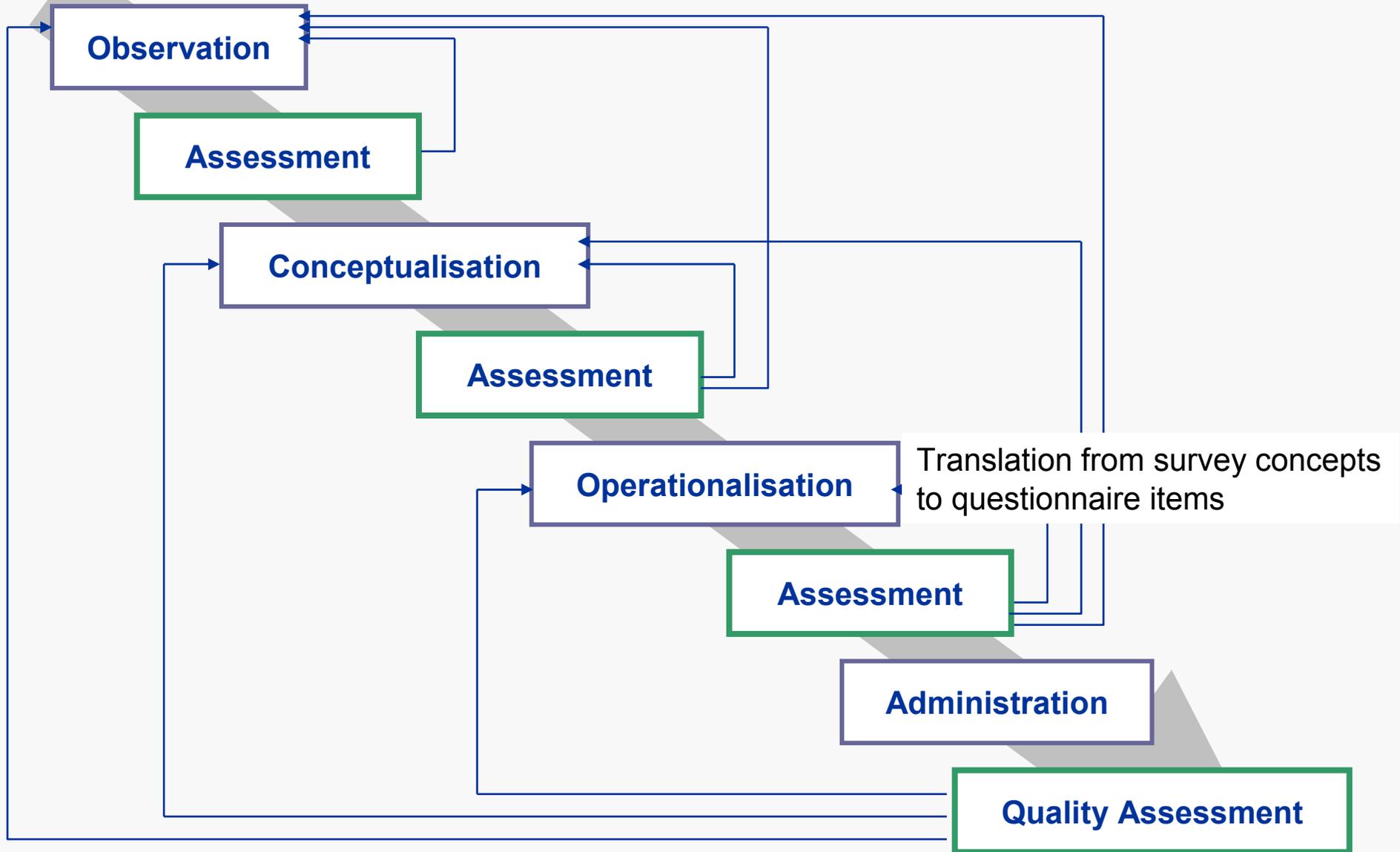
A model of the questionnaire design and evaluation process

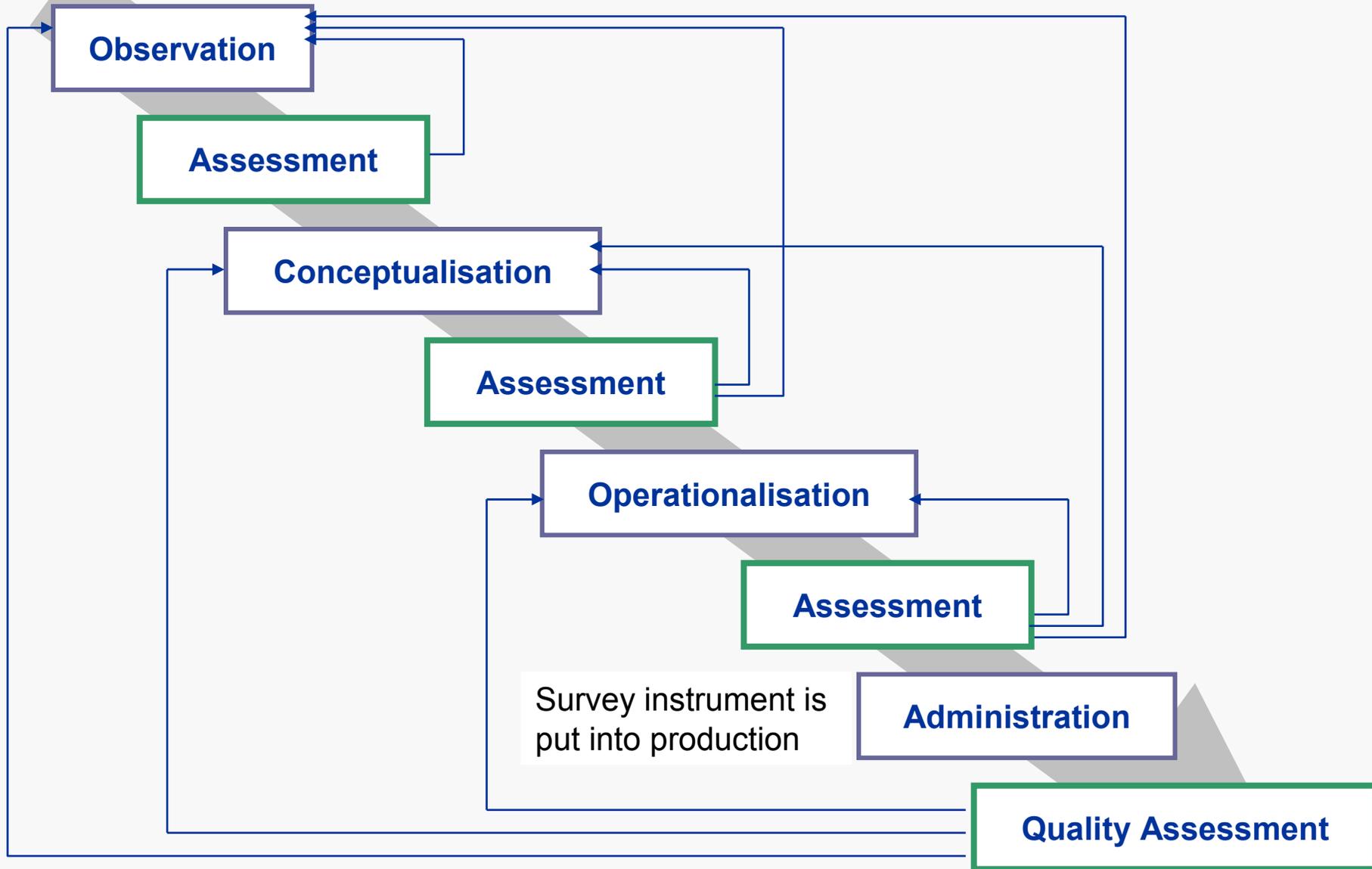


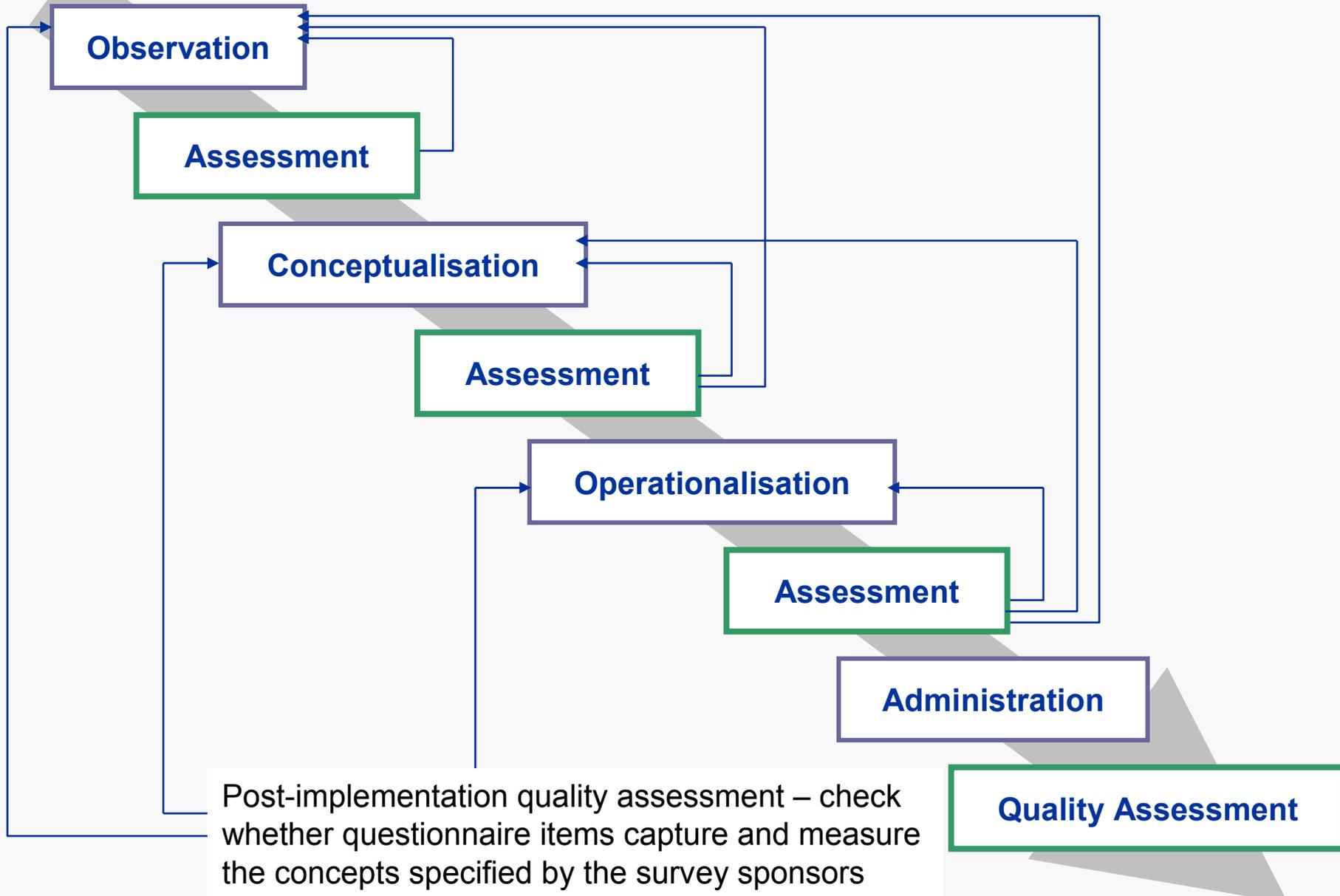




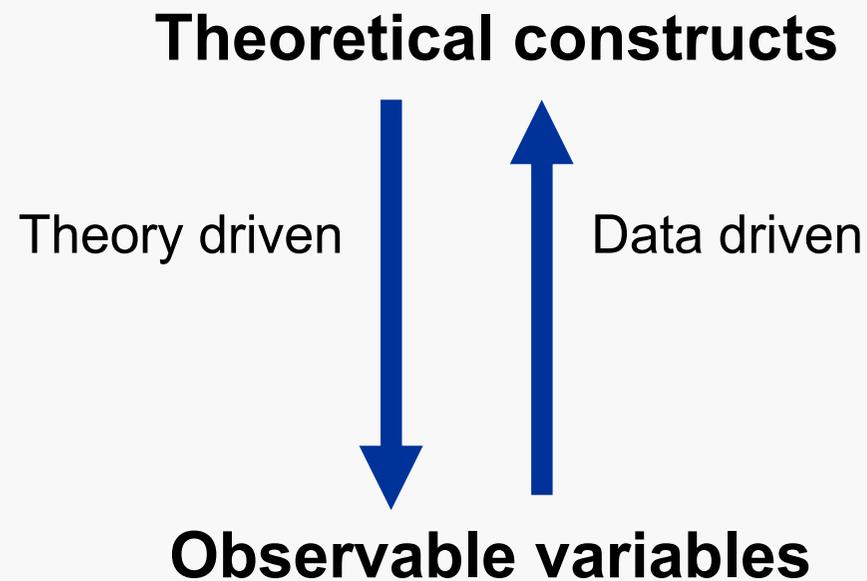








Top-down or bottom-up?



Experiences from different questionnaire evaluation and (re)design projects

- An agricultural survey, a municipality survey on public housing and a national survey on homeless people
- All involve redesign/reuse of existing questionnaires or survey questions (longitudinal data)
- The different parties involved:
 - Survey sponsors
 - Information users/consumers
 - Content specialists
 - ◆ Subject matter experts
 - ◆ National and international advisory committees (working groups)
 - ◆ Respondents
 - Survey methodologists
 - Design specialists
- Different methods: Focus groups, exploratory interviews, cognitive testing, piloting

The agricultural survey

- Objective: the societal value of agriculture
 - How much work does it generate, for how many?
 - Industries related to farming
- Many different parties involved
 - Different farmer organisations/agricultural societies
 - Researchers/scientists
 - Eurostat
- Different regulations, demands and needs, both on a national and an international level
- Longitudinal data – a challenge in itself
 - Take into account that the world does change in 10 years
- Exploratory interviews, cognitive testing, pilot

Some conclusions

- Mix of top-down and bottom-up approaches is often fruitful/necessary
- Make room for an iterative process and testing at different stages (enough time to go back and forth between the different phases a few times)
- Subject matter specialists and survey methodologists should collaborate from phase 1
 - Use of focus groups, exploratory interviews and cognitive testing from phase 1
 - Crucial to know, precisely, what the survey's objective is
 - Describe in words what the respondents is intended to do

Some more conclusions

- Vital to be interrogative, explorative, inquisitive/curious and creative
- Survey methodologists can represent a neutral approach to gathering observational data/information