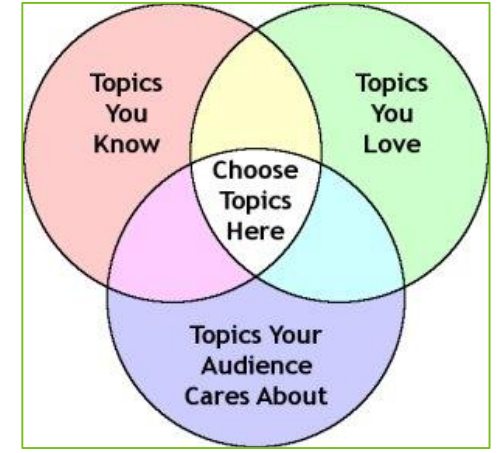


Choosing a topic and formulating research questions

Saija Katila

Choosing the topic

- **Topic relevant for your area/programme**
- **Your own interest is key**
- **Topic/contribution does not have to be “entirely novel”**
 - *New context/industry, new aspect/perspective, combination of different perspectives, methodological contribution*
- **Think about potential data collection & its feasibility right from the start (e.g., where, how, access)**
- **You can still change / modify the topic (always negotiate with your supervisor)**



Types of research questions (1/2)

Descriptive (first order question)

- **What makes up a phenomenon**
- **For example, what it is, how it does and why it has certain characteristics**

Comparative (second order question)

- **Knowledge about the relations between phenomena**
- **For example to what extent phenomena are related to each other, similar to each other, different from each other**
- **Presuppose descriptive questions**

Types of research questions (2/2)

Explanatory (third order question)

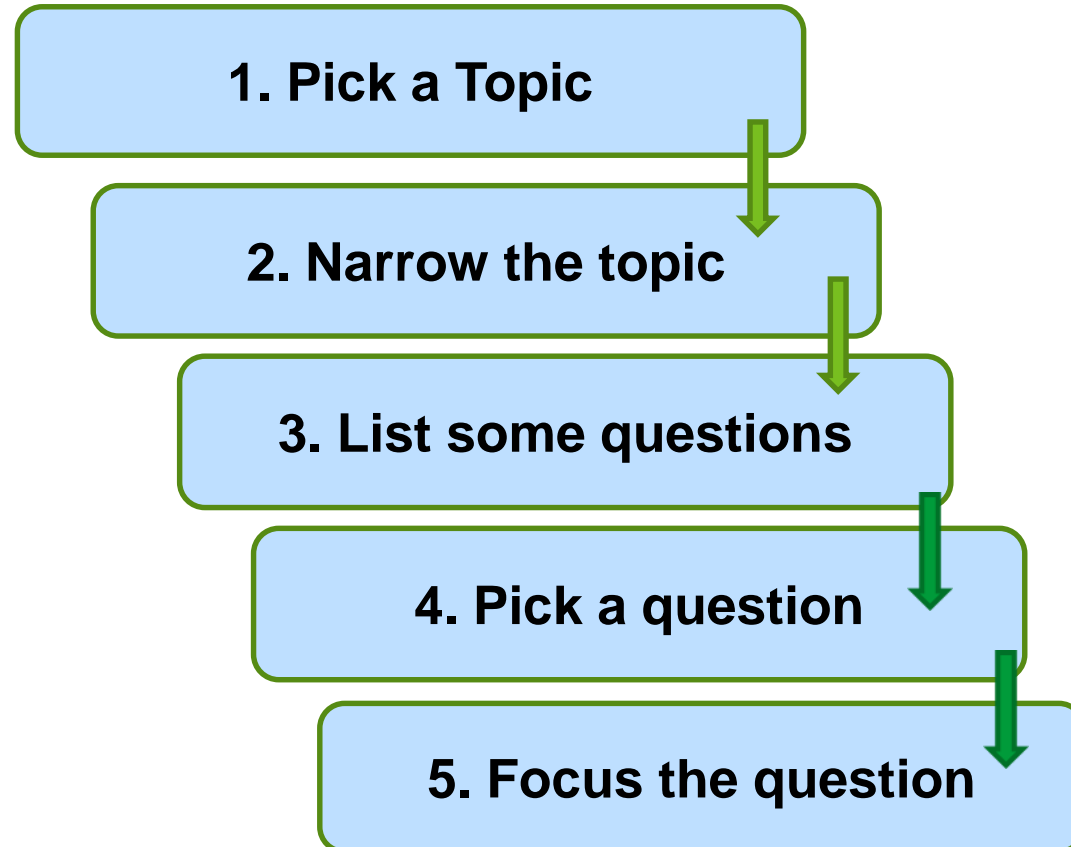
- Generates knowledge about contingent relations between phenomena and their attributes
- Pursue correlations, conditionality, and causality
- Presupposes knowledge about comparative attributes
- Often used in quantitative research but can also be done in qualitative research

Normative

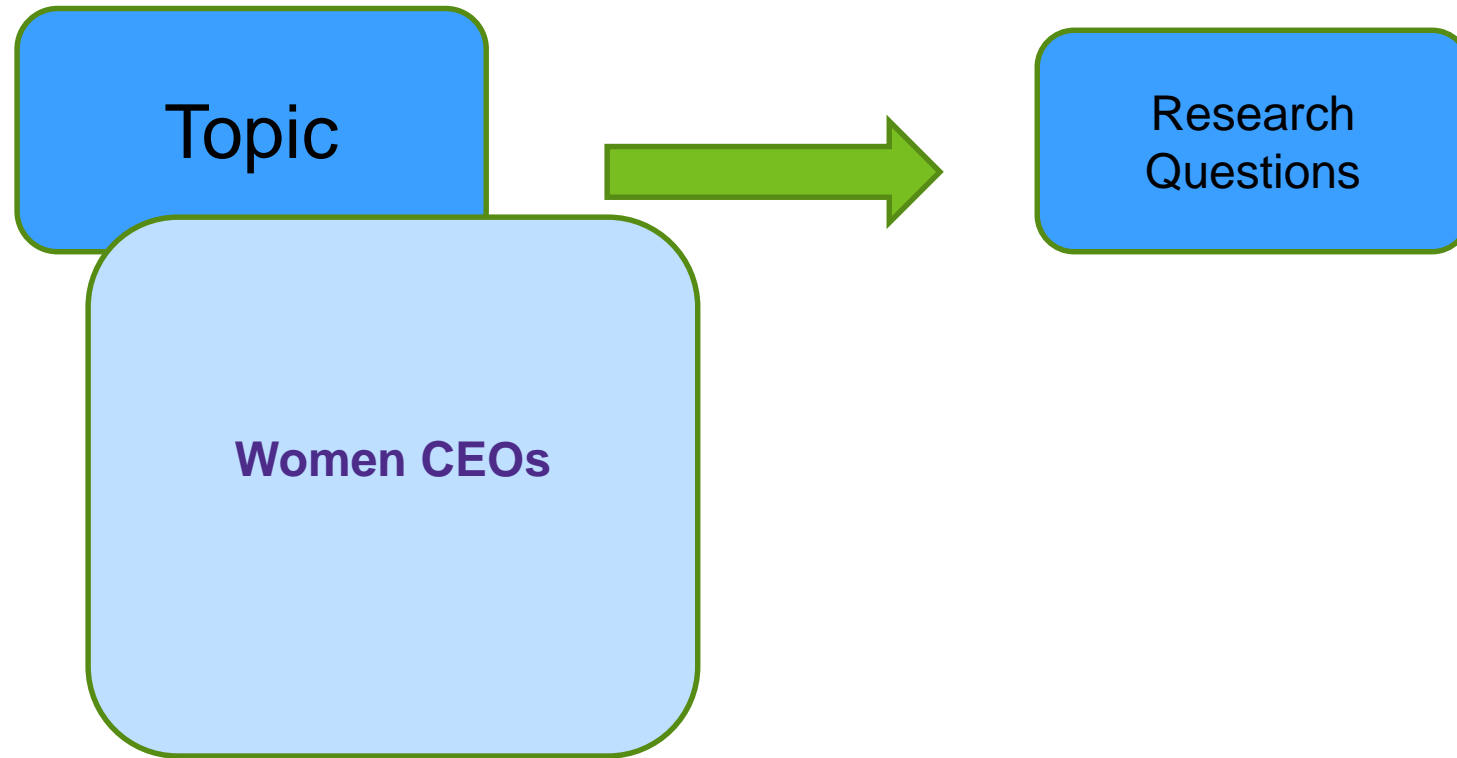
- Produce knowledge about how something should be done ... in order to improve something.
- Requires answers from the previous types of knowledge

Dillon (1984), Alvesson and Sandberg, 2013

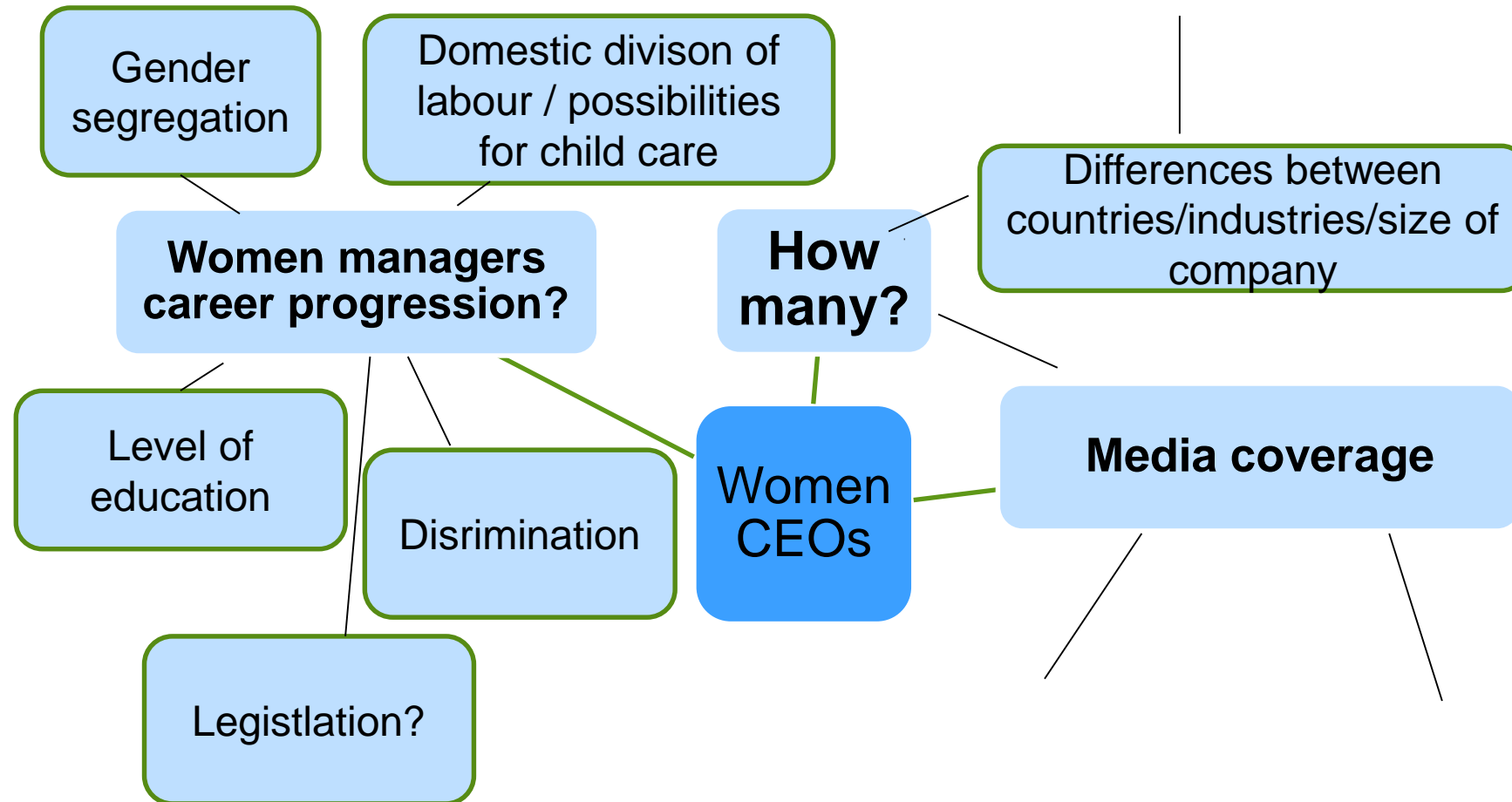
The process of developing a research question



Developing Research Questions



Narrowing down the topic



List some questions

2. Narrow the topic

3. List some questions

What factors influence women managers career progression?

How are women CEOs discussed in the media?

Why there are more women CEOs in the USA compared to Finland?

Other questions inspired by your mind map

Focusing the question

4. Pick a question

5. Focus the question

Who, what, where, when?

- How are women CEOs discussed in the media?
- How are women CEOs of listed companies discussed in the media?
- How are women CEOs of listed companies discussed in the Finnish media?
- How are women CEOs of listed companies discussed in the Finnish media in the 1990s' compared to 2010s'.?

Criteria for good research questions

- **Clear – There is no ambiguity what you mean**
- **Defined scope – You have drawn boundaries on the phenomenon and the question you try to address concerning the phenomenon**
- **Reasonable – The question can be resolved by one person in a reasonable period of time**
- **Focused – Tries to solve one problem rather than multiple**
- **Based on a clear problem – Will create interest**