

Generating Research Ideas



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Importance of Stupidity

- The value of knowing that you do not know
- Good Ideas are hard to find
- Good ideas come from areas other than accounting
- Let's not forget
- Good Ideas need good communication
- Questions



Knowing that you do not know

- Knowing or finding expected outcomes
 - Beyond replicating prior literature, it is unlikely to be an interesting or good idea.
- Leads to additional work to build a good story
 - A good theory reduces possibility of missed alternative explanations
- ...and it builds your expertise in the area beyond that of readers
 - Increases confidence in your story telling and a good story teller draws a crowd
- When in doubt Google, Wikipedia, while not resources one can cite they can provide the basis for further discovery. After all research is journey to discovery and not a lock step process of checking the box.



Good ideas are hard to find

- Be challenged!
 - Nothing sparks ideas more than being confronted with contradiction, confusion, or criticism
 - Some of my ideas arise from listening closely to stories told in workshops
 - Others are prompted by trying to understand a new situations or results in a working paper or published article
- Be curious!
 - Ideas come from unresolved problems in the literature.
 - In this case curiosity is unlikely to kill the cat (or PhD student). However, lack of curiosity can be dangerous.
- Knowledge of the literature
 - Know or learn the literature, find what is currently missing. Read review papers (Hanlon and Heitzman 2010, Shackelford and Shevlin 2001), search for ideas in articles, blog posts or discuss with peers and faculty who have experience in the area.
- Good Ideas may arise from unexpected sources
 - "The most exciting phrase to hear in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not "Eureka!" but rather, "hmm... that's funny..." — Isaac Asimov
 - One paper arose because my colleagues and I could not believe results presented in a workshop
- The first requirement for a good idea is that it is interesting to you
 - Nothing is harder to convey to an audience than an idea you think is uninteresting
 - Be careful, do as I say not as I do, my interests are too broad for an assistant professor who must establish their expertise



Good ideas come from others

- Theories abound almost everywhere but in Accounting
- Read broadly
 - Disciplines
 - Management
 - Economics
 - Finance
 - Marketing
 - Law
 - Network Theory



Let's Not Forget

- Serendipity

- Being in the right place at the right time

- Interactions with business, practice, mentors and colleagues

- Building networks outside your university increase this source of ideas

- » Look around you, your next idea could come from someone at your table or someone else in the room.

- Stokes D., 2013. Generating Innovative Research Ideas, *Accounting and Management Information Systems* 12 No 2. 144-154

- Researcher Type

- Idealist, technician, passionate researcher

- Idealist, values outcomes and contributions
 - Technician values process of research (i.e., methods)
 - Passionate researcher, values ideas and content researched

- Be a combination of these, too much focus on one dimension reduces the opportunity for generating good research ideas

- » Stokes D., 2013. Generating Innovative Research Ideas, *Accounting and Management Information Systems* 12 No 2. 144-154



Let's not forget

- Maybe too much technician bias
 - “ I checked it very thoroughly,” said the computer, “and that is quite definitely is the answer. I think the problem, to be quite honest with you, is that you’ve never actually known what the question is.”
 - *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* -Douglas Adams
 - *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion*. Angrist and Pischke (2009)



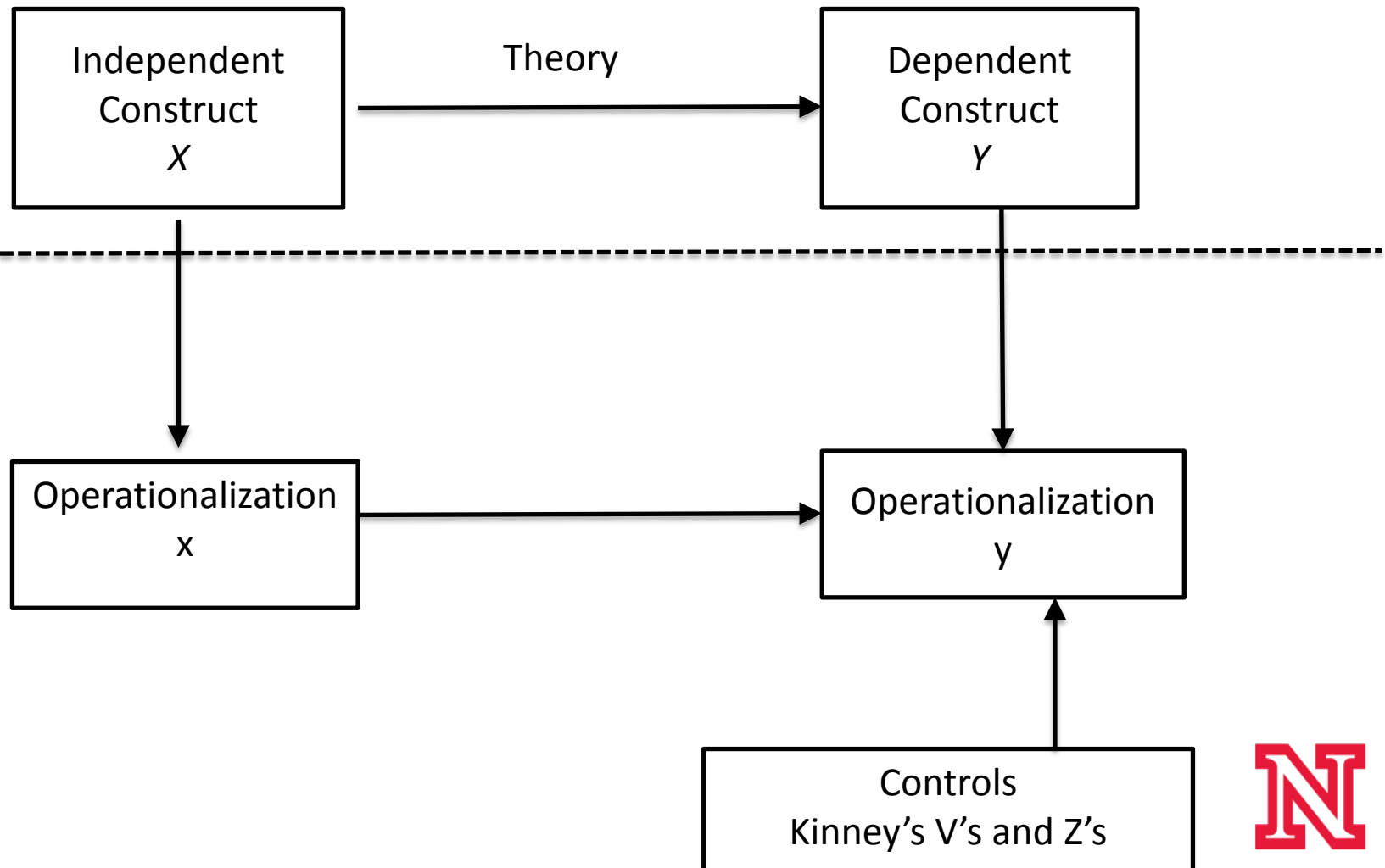
Good ideas need good communication

- Assume you have an idea
 - How do you improve the chances others think its good
 - Hint, do not immediately download data from Compustat and run regressions!
 - Work harder on your story before your analyses
- Communicate your idea
 - Professor Kinney's 3 paragraphs (1 page)
 - Research Question
 - Why is this important?
 - What are you going to do about it?
 - Research question should be clear and concise
 - This is harder than you think
 - Professor Kinney taught my first PhD seminar and I still remember the frustration of my first 3 paragraph assignment



Libby Boxes

We should be able to tell what the research question is from this top set of boxes



Good ideas need good communication

- Libby Boxes
 - Short hand display of research question, design, and operationalization of important variables
 - They provide insights to potential design or operational problems
- Ask for comment from peers and faculty that are not in your area of expertise
 - I find that talking to faculty who conduct experiments is helpful in clarifying my thoughts and polishing my story
 - One colleague once said, "why not ask somebody if this is plausible"
 - Several of my papers contain the fruits of this advice, Michelle also has numerous examples of fruitful conversations, Ken also has a working paper using a survey.



Good ideas need good communication

- Why versus how
 - We are doing a better job of indicating why something happens
 - However, reviewers and editors have indicated a greater need for how it happens
 - Network theory and information flow
 - Unfortunately researchers cannot be flies on the wall to hear what was said. We have to rely on inferential statistics
 - Archival data limitations should be acknowledged, but part of good communication is making sure the reader is aware of the data limits and the attempts to provide evidence of the how.



- QUESTIONS?





Thank you!