


de Vaus: Developing Indicators For Concepts

Workshop 10

Eeva Seppä



- 
- Concepts need good indicators to be useful for the purposes of research
 - Difficulty: to make good and reliable indicators for concepts

Imaginary study and hypothesis: religiousness is a response to deprivation (de Vaus, 2002, 47)

Concepts and their indicators:

- deprivation = income
- religiousness = church attendance

Results: only 15% of people with low incomes attend church regularly, while 50% of those with higher income do so.



Problems of this research would be:

- concepts 'deprivation' and 'religiousness' are not clarified, what is their meaning?
- are the indicators adequate, does income really measure deprivation, or church attendance religiousness?

Three steps to make creating indicators easier:

- Clarifying the concepts
- Developing initial indicators
- Evaluating the indicators

Clarifying the concepts

- Concepts are abstract summaries of a whole set of behaviours, attitudes and characteristics which we *see as having something in common*
- Concepts are terms which people *create* for the purpose of *communication and efficiency*

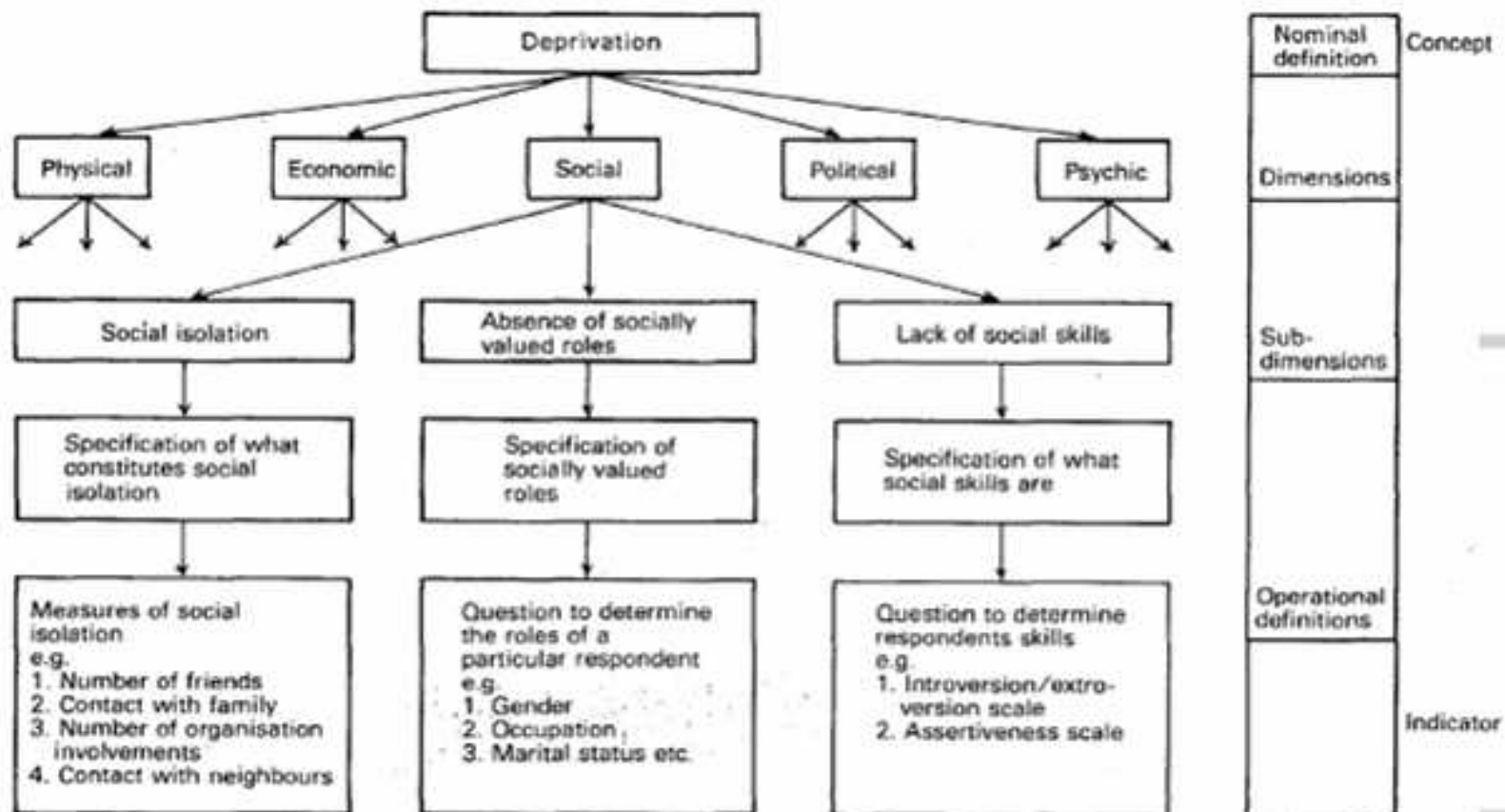
Three steps which help in clarifying process:


- **Obtain a range of definitions of the concept**
 - classify definitions into a number of categories
- **Decide on a definition**
 - choose a definition and justify the decision
- **Delineate the dimensions of the concept**
 - distinguish between dimensions of concept, decide to use only one, or create indicators for each dimension

Developing indicators

- Firstly researcher has to "descend the ladder of abstraction"
 - before concepts can be measured researcher has to move down from theories to more everyday issues, 'translate' concepts into more easily understandable language
- This begins already while clarifying concepts

Clarifying concepts: descending the ladder of abstraction (de Vaus, 2002, 53)





When researcher gets to the point where he has to start to develop indicators he has two problems to deal with:

1. How many indicators to use?
2. How to develop the indicators?

How many indicators to use?

- develop indicators to a range of definitions and see what difference this makes to the results and interpretation
- consider if all the dimension of the concept are relevant to the research
- ensure that all the key concepts are thoughtoutly measured
- make enough questions to measure complex concepts, and this way capture the scope of of them
- do pilot testing to indicators to eliminate unnecessary questions

How to develop indicators?

Three main approaches to develop initial indicators:

- use measures developed in previous researches, and if necessary update them
- use less structured approach (observation or unstructured interview) in surveying special groups to understand things through their eyes
- use 'informants' from the group to be surveyed, such people can provide useful clues about meaningful questions



In the end researcher has to:

- decide which indicators to use and how to word them
- be as informed as possible about the group he studies
- to know clearly what he wants to measure
- compare and **evaluate** his own indicators