Resource generator how-to

How to compose your set of Resource Generator items?

Some sources:

- The SSND version published in Van der Gaag & Snijders, 2005 or studies having adapted a version from this for their own population (see studies mentioned on www.xs4all.nl/~gaag/work).
- Theoretical resource classifications; see Van der Gaag & Snijders, 2004 and Foa & Foa, 1974.
- Older social capital and social networks studies, and other datasets that contain items referring to social resources. Especially studies using multiple name generators can be considered as resource generators. For an elaboration of this idea see Van der Gaag, 2005, chapter 8.
- Check whether the population you will study exist as a subpopulation in an earlier collected dataset containing social capital items (for example: low income groups, age groups, geographical regions, etc) and investigate distributions of the items for these subgroups. this will give you a feeling for how your sample may respond to your questions.
- Qualitative interviews with experts or members of your study population. This method was used as an exercise by several groups of organization studies MSc students at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam in 2004-2009 with results of varying quality, through producing several argumented lists of social resources supposedly useful for members of occupational groups.
- Focus groups; see Webber & Huxley, 2007. For both qualitative methods a question remains how likely it is that non-experts can realistically identify which (sometimes very abstract) resources may be actually helpful for them.
- Introspection and your own experience – list resources people have helped *you* with and consider them applicable for your study population.
- Your own observation – what would you say are typically helpful resources people exchange in the population you study? Try and look at your study material (interviews,documentaries, documents, etc.) through 'a resource perspective'.
- Finally, try and list some resources for items from which you strongly doubt there are helpful or – more strongly – are convinced they aren't. By including a couple of these, you can test with your data whether there they have any predictive validity.

How to improve the quality of your item set?

- Make sure to include enough items in your instrument to enable dimensional analyses and investigations of goal specificity questions. Think of at least 20 items if you have such analyses in mind.
- A problem with Resource Generator items tends to be that people say 'yes' too easily or – alternatively phrased – their popularity tends to be high. This results in problems when trying to construct sub scales for social capital dimensions. Therefore, explicitly include items you expect to have a low popularity (e.g. "do you know anyone in parliament?" or even "do you know any member of the presidential/royal family?").

- The dimensions and scales reported in the works of Van der Gaag & Snijders (2004, 2005, 2009) are specific for the Dutch population and should *not* be used as an exactly primer for your study. Rather, compose a set of items roughly as varied as earlier studies (preferably including some exactly similar ones for comparison)and adjust these for your study population. Investigate which dimensional social capital structure *your* study has.
- Check all items in terms of clarity, normative acceptability and reasonability. The resources referred to must be
    - o generally understandable and clear to your respondents, and precise. Knowing "someone who can work with computers" is rather vague; "someone who can build a website / install a virus scanner / make an excel sheet" etc. may be an improvement. In the Netherlands, "knowing someone who is a real 'networker'" (referring to enthusiastic, entrepreneurial social relationship investors and –users) appears to be properly understood by the higher educated only.
    - o accepted as a topic of conversation. Asking whether you know "someone with whom you can discuss whom to vote for" is perfectly acceptable in one population, but not in the next.
    - o memorable for the respondent. Knowing "someone who owns shares" is realistic in one population, and rather speculative in another where people do not tend to discuss personal finances.

For each of these point, testing then in a small pilot study may be best.

All the best with the construction of your instrument!

Martin van der Gaag
gaag@xs4all.nl