

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK, EPISTEMOLOGY, PARADIGM, & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

- Is “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research.” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 33)
 - It is your tentative answer to the question “what do you think is going on?”
 - It is broader than Epistemology, Paradigm, and Theoretical Framework
- Is it a visual or written product that “explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied— the key factors, concepts, or variables—and the presumed relationship among them.” (Mules & Huberman, 1994, p. 18)
- Your research problem is part of your conceptual framework. **Why?**
Because it is a statement/explanation of what is going on in the world.
 - Your conceptual framework should NOT be part of your lit review. **Why?**
 - It can lead to a narrow focus only on the “literature, ignoring your personal experience, peoples’ observations, and other conceptual sources.
 - Leads to “covering the field” rather than focusing on specifically relevant studies.
 - You become descriptive when reviewing instead of critical.

Implication – Your conceptual framework is something to be **constructed**, not found.

FOUR SOURCES OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK:

1. Your own experiential knowledge
2. Existing theory and research
3. Your pilot and exploratory research
4. Thought experiments (Maxwell, 2005)

1. **Experiential Knowledge** - your background, identity, technical knowledge, research knowledge, and experiential knowledge
E.g., My sticky note on Maxwell
 - “bias” – NOT feared and avoided, but valued and used
 - **Epistemology**: subjectivity, objectivity, constructivism
- The use of “researcher identity memo” (Maxwell, p. 27)
- A **Researcher Identity memo** is used to examine your goals, experiences, assumptions, feelings, and values as they relate to your research
- Begin by “brainstorming” whatever comes to your mind when you think about your prior experiences that may relate to your site or topic.

1. What prior experiences have you had that are relevant to your topic or setting? What assumptions about your topic or setting have resulted from these experiences? What goals have emerged from these, or have otherwise become important for your research? How have these experiences, assumptions, and goals shaped your decision to choose this topic, and the way you are approaching this project?
2. What potential advantages do you think the goals, beliefs, and experiences that you described have for your study? What potential disadvantages do you think these may create for you, and how might you deal with these?

2. **Using existing theory**- requires CARE from ideological hegemony
Don't underuse or overuse existing theory
Let your concept map evolve through out the study
3. **Pilot and exploratory research** – to understand concepts and theories held by the people you study

4. **Thought experiments** – drawing both on theory and experience to answer “what if” questions.

RESEARCH PARADIGM

- A research paradigm is a set of beliefs, assumptions, and worldviews a researcher brings to the research project.
- Come from different angles with different names:
 - *Positivism, functionalism, interpretivism, post-modernism, constructivism, transformative*
- “A basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17)
- May be compatible and used simultaneously.
 - E.g., Participatory and Constructivist
- They evolve through time (more paradigms are being developed)
- They affect research design, methodology, kind of data collected, method of analysis, interpretation, as well as insights drawn.

ISSUES RESEARCH PARADIGMS DEAL WITH

- The nature of truth
- The means of verifying truth
- What counts as reality
- Objectivity and subjectivity
- Knowledge and its growth/production
- Various forms of Dualisms

- Why is it important for researchers to know the philosophical background (paradigm) of their research?

“Without the explicit formulation of the philosophical background—with implications for verification, explanation, knowledge of reality—researchers may remain innocently unaware of the deeper meaning and commitments of what they say or of how they conduct their research.”

(Pring, 2000, p. 90)

- Good researcher makes his/her paradigm explicit in his/her research report.

TWO CONFLICTING INTELLECTUAL TRADITIONS:

- **POSITIVISM** – an epistemological belief that features of the human environment have an objective reality, meaning that they exist independently of the individuals who created them or are observing them.

e.g., it is assumed that group of students in a classroom are the same regardless of what the teacher is thinking about them

- **INTERPRETIVISM** – the belief that aspects of social reality have no existence apart from the meanings that individuals construct for them.

e.g., a group of students in a classroom might be constructed as “13 boys and 16 girls” or as 29 unique individuals, or as “easier to teach than students I’ve had other years”

FOUR MAJOR RESEARCH PARADIGMS:

1. Postpositivism
2. Social constructivism
3. Advocacy/Participatory
4. Pragmatism

1) **POSTPOSITIVISM**

- Just like Positivism, uses scientific methods to conduct research
- Commonly practiced by researchers who have quantitative background
- Common in disciplines which are only recently moving to qualitative approach (e.g., psychology, health)
- Logical, interrelated steps, rigor, empirical data collection, cause-and-effect oriented, deterministic, computer-assisted data analysis, scientific report of study
- BUT, acknowledges multiple realities, different perspectives of participants

2. **SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM**

- Also called “interpretivism” and “phenomenology”
- Individuals give subjective meaning to their lived experiences
 - These meanings are varied and multiple—causing **complexity** of views
 - Researchers are interested in the complexity rather than coherence and unity of meaning (they use very open ended questions to engage the participant in revealing his/her subjective experience)
- These meanings are imprinted in individuals **socially** and **historically** (through interaction with others and through cultures and social orders)

3. **ADVOCACY/PARTICIPATORY**

- Holds that Postpositivists often impose structural laws and theories that do not apply to marginalized groups

- Advocacy/Participatory paradigm seeks to introduce an agenda for reform that improves the lives and works of marginalized groups
- Issues often studied include oppression, domination, suppression, alienation, and hegemony
- Researcher provides “voice” for these participants; seeks to “liberate” or “emancipate” them from dominant views/practices, and “empower” them
- Study is conducted “with” participants rather than “on” or “to” participants.

4. PRAGMATISM

- Different forms of pragmatism
- Focus on actions, situations, applications and outcomes, instead of antecedent conditions (theories)
- Concern with “what works” (here and now, in this context)
- The problem being studied and the questions asked are given more emphasis than the method or the theoretical assumptions
- Creswell (2005) says:
 - Pragmatism is not committed to any one system of philosophy or reality
 - Individual researchers have a freedom of choice. They are “free” to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purposes.
 - Pragmatists do not see the world as an absolute unity. In a similar way, mixed methods researchers look to many approaches to collecting and analyzing data rather than subscribing to only one way (e.g., quantitative or qualitative)
 - Truth is what works at the time; it is not based in a dualism between reality independent of the mind or written within the mind.

- Pragmatist researchers look to the “what” and “how” to research based on its intended consequences—where they want to go with it.
- Pragmatists agree that research always occurs in social, historical, political, and other contexts.
- Pragmatists have believed in an external world independent of the mind as well as those lodged in the mind. But they believe that we need to stop asking questions about reality and the laws of nature. “They would simply like to change the subject”

PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS

- In terms of philosophical assumptions, a researcher makes choice along **five philosophical assumptions**:

- Ontology axiology methodological
- Epistemology rhetorical

1. **Ontology** – is what the researcher believes about the nature of reality

- Qualitative researchers embrace the idea of multiple reality
- Different researchers embrace different reality
E.g., Using quotes from participants to show different perspective, interpreting similar quote from participants in different ways (“layers of meaning”)

2. **Epistemology** – is the researchers’ belief about how the researcher knows what he/she knows

- Qualitative researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants in the study (they try to minimize “distance” and “objective separateness” from participants)

- Qualitative researchers conduct their study in the “field” and spend more time with participants to get to know them
- Qualitative researchers try to become “an insider” to be in the context to better understand what the researchers are saying

3. **Axiology** – is the role of values in the research

- Qualitative researchers make their values explicit in their study
- Also called “researcher positionality”
- The researcher discusses his/her interpretation of the phenomena/data side by side with the participant’s views.

4. **Rhetoric** – the language of research

- Many qualitative researchers assume that research writing needs to be personal and literary in form
- May follow chronological and narrative style
- They use personal pronoun “I” in the research
- Vocabularies are less technical (e.g., “trustworthiness” rather than “validity”, “dependable” rather than “reliable,” “understanding” rather than “results,” etc.)
 - There is no “operational definition of key terms” section in qualitative research.

5. **Methodological** – the methods used in the process

- Qualitative researchers use inductive logic—from the ground up—rather than from a prior theoretical perspective
- Research questions may change in the middle of the study

- Data gathering tools may be modified both before data collection and on the spot
- Data analysis follows a path of producing increasingly detailed knowledge on the topic#

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