Research paradigms and conceptual frameworks

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Outline

Paradigm proliferation

Recognition that science is not the same in all paradigms in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology

The following are visual representations of paradigm mapping and can assist the student to recognise their ontological and epistemological ‘home’
Paradigm

The following tables provide a visual representation in a linear sense the mapping of paradigms

They deliberately hold together the necessary incompatibilities in order to provide visualisation of the variety of approaches to research

When a proliferation of research approaches within multiple paradigms are proposed the result can be a communication breakdown in relation to epistemic incommensurability (i.e. a fatal flaw in your ontological approach that flows into your epistemological and methodological design leading to use of inappropriate methods)

Be mindful of disciplinary paradigmatic approaches that are historically structuring your thoughts (or your supervisors) and be aware they are increasingly being displaced by greater differentiation out of the shifting forces

The following tables are a good starting point to have a conversation with your supervisor on where they, and you locate yourselves. You might be surprised at how different seemingly similar paradigmatic viewpoints can be
# Paradigms

## Table 1. Revised paradigm chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predict</th>
<th>Understand</th>
<th>Emancipate</th>
<th>Brk</th>
<th>Deconstruct</th>
<th>Next?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Positivist Mixed methods</em></td>
<td><em>Interpretive Naturalistic</em></td>
<td><em>Critical Neo-Marxist</em></td>
<td>Poststructural Postmodern</td>
<td>Neo-positivism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructivist Phenomenological</td>
<td>&lt; Feminist &gt;</td>
<td>Critical race theory</td>
<td>Queer theory</td>
<td>&lt; Discourse analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnographic</td>
<td>Freirean participatory</td>
<td>Praxis-oriented</td>
<td>&lt; action research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic/interaction</td>
<td>Postcolonial</td>
<td>Post-Fordism</td>
<td>Post-humanist</td>
<td>Neo-pragmatism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpretive mixed methods</td>
<td>Post-critical</td>
<td>Participatory/dialogic</td>
<td>Policy analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay and lesbian theory</td>
<td>Postparadigmatic diaspora (John Caputo)</td>
<td>Post everything (Fred Erickson)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical ethnography</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Patti Lather & Bettie St Pierre, 2005)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Positivist</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interpretivist</strong></th>
<th><strong>Critical Theory</strong></th>
<th><strong>Deconstructivist</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>If this research paradigm were a game, it would be:</em></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Monopoly</strong> (a world constituted by economic struggles)</td>
<td><strong>Candyland</strong> (unconcerned with reality; played either by children or the extremely sophisticated)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tetris (exacting, quantitatively oriented, uses computer)</td>
<td>Clue (exchanges with other players inform decisions)</td>
<td>midnight basketball (collaborative, intended to change society; oppressed participate in self-empowerment)</td>
<td>professional wrestling (is it real? non-reality disguised as reality; simultaneous acceptance and denial of what is real)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>If this research paradigm were a sport, it would be:</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>golf (boring, individual, fastidious, exacting)</td>
<td>tennis (interactive, interdependent, labor intensive)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>If this research paradigm were a celebrated figure, it would be:</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anita Bryant</td>
<td>Florence Nightingale</td>
<td>Susan B. Anthony</td>
<td>kd lang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napoleon</td>
<td>Dag Hammarskjöld</td>
<td>Karl Marx</td>
<td>Woody Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(sure of their position; calculating)</td>
<td>(receptivity to others; ability to entertain in multiple viewpoints)</td>
<td>(activists; concerned with oppressed groups)</td>
<td>(self-contradictory; quirky; they carve out their own space)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The researchers in this paradigm would drink:</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotch on the rocks</td>
<td>Californian white wine</td>
<td>Vodka (the revolutionary’s drink; fiery, subversive)</td>
<td>Zima (defies categorization; neither wine, nor beer, nor hard liquor; trendy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(conventional, “hard” liquor for “hard science,” hegemonic)</td>
<td>(natural, convivial, social, interactive)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conceptual frameworks

Miles and Huberman defined a conceptual framework as the current version of the researchers map of the territory being investigated.

Conceptual frameworks may evolve as the research evolves:

- Accommodates purpose (boundaries) with flexibility (Evolution) and coherence of the research (plan/analysis/conclusion)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understandings</th>
<th>Misunderstandings</th>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarifying the research issue(s)</td>
<td>Omitting paradigm(s) which locate, and critique, research issues</td>
<td>Focus upon research methods at the expense of concepts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying concepts from a ‘survey of the literature’</td>
<td>Not visualising linkages between various concepts</td>
<td>A framework was not devised nor its function appreciated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing research, and explaining methodology</td>
<td>Overlooking strategic and guiding roles for conceptual</td>
<td>Lack of explicit and cohesive relationships throughout the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why do you need a conceptual framework?

Is a tool as opposed a totem to worship, provides a set of general signposts

Provides a structure for organising and supporting ideas, a mechanism for systematically arranging abstractions

Provides a theoretical overview of the intended research and order within that process

As opposed to a paradigm which provides establishes or defines boundaries

Provides structure for organising and supporting ideas, a mechanism for systematically arranging abstractions, sometimes revolutionary or original and usually rigid

Allows the connection of theory with practice by allowing the data observed to be tied with a conceptual framework which then leads to the elucidation of further research questions and implications for additional study
Disciplinary focus for research proposals

Conceptual frameworks often have a disciplinary focus - this is to make sense of the data and allows systematic exploration of a particular phenomena.

A disciplinary focus allows a picture to develop, or a mapping to occur of the territory you wish to study, but not of the study itself, provides a visual display of the students current working theory and allows them to begin to abstract on what they think is going on with the phenomenon they are studying.

Conceptual frameworks offer a general framework for developing research proposals and by implication how research maybe conducted.

Can provide an answer to the ‘what’ questions, before the ‘how’
Where to derive your conceptual framework from

1. The works of writers and researchers
2. Own experience and observations and
3. The act of reflecting on reading, experience and developing research assumptions

In unfolding inductive research the conceptual framework may appear following a critique of theoretical perspectives in the literature

Or alternatively may emerge as a conceptual model after fieldwork to provide theoretical cohesion to the evidence

Will precede the research design chapter

The type of research approach determines the location and function of the conceptual framework
What are the benefits of a conceptual framework?

Introduce explicitness with research processes by:

- modelling relationships between theories;
- reducing theoretical data into statements or models;
- explicating theories that influence the research;
- providing theoretical bases to design, or interpret, research;
- creating theoretical links between extant research, current theories, research design, interpretations of findings and conceptual conclusions

The critical tests of conceptual frameworks are for them to demonstrate:

- unity within appropriate theories;
- direction to research design and accompanying fieldwork;
- coherence between empirical observations and conceptual conclusions

Thus, conceptual frameworks offer a self-audit facility to ensure cohesion and appropriate conceptualisation for research conclusions
How did you arrive at your conceptual framework and other examiner questions

Where is your conceptual framework?

What led you to select these models?

What are the theoretical components of your framework?

How did you decide upon the variables to include in your conceptual framework?

How did concepts assist you to visualise and explain what you intended to investigate?

How did you use your conceptual framework to design your research and analyse your findings?
Conceptual frameworks provide examiner answers to questions such as:

What was the wider theoretical significance of that reading

Why was your research designed in that way?

What is the conceptual significance of the evidence

Why does this thesis make a contribution to knowledge
References

