



Prifysgol Cymru
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
University of Wales
Trinity Saint David

Converting Research into Practice (CRP)

LCDB 7010

Research Paradigm

Basic set of beliefs that guide action

Week 5

Amare Desta (Prof)

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Contemporary Society / Organisation

Robots Replacing Workers

<https://futurism.com/robots-and-machines/amazon-replace-workers-robots>

Amazon & AI

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/yourmoney/article-15234631/amazon-layoff-ai-robotics-corporate-jobs.html>

E or Death!



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Why Paradigms Matter

Your Paradigm Shapes Everything

A research paradigm determines how you conduct research.

- Guides your research questions
- Determines methodology choices
- Influences interpretation of findings

Key Point: Without paradigms, research lacks philosophical coherence. Paradigms provide a guiding philosophical structure; without them, research becomes fragmented, inconsistent, and lacks theoretical and methodological alignment.

What is a Research Paradigm?

A set of beliefs and assumptions about the nature of reality and how we can know about it

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994)

A paradigm is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" and represents a worldview that defines the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world.

The Four Pillars of Research Paradigms

Pillar	Question	Focus
Ontology	What is reality? (As Doctoral candidate what is the reality about your intended R?)	Nature of existence and being
Epistemology	How do we know? (Again, what do you know about your own DBA R Topic?)	Nature and sources of knowledge
Axiology	What is the role of values? Any thoughts about ethics & values regarding your R?	Ethics and values in research
Methodology	How to research? How then will you be able to embark on your R?	Research strategies and methods

Understanding Research Paradigms

Pretorius (2024) provides a practical definition:

"Research paradigms are philosophical frameworks that encompass ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology, shaping how researchers design, conduct, and interpret their studies."

This definition is particularly useful for researchers seeking coherence between their worldview and research design.

Demystifying Research Paradigms: Navigating Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology in Research

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Thomas Kuhn: What is a Paradigm?

The 1970 definition after Margaret Masterman's criticism

"A paradigm is what members of a scientific community share - their beliefs, values, and techniques"

— Thomas Kuhn (1970)

After Margaret Masterman identified 21 uses of "paradigm" in his 1962 book, Kuhn clarified in 1970: a paradigm is what a research community shares.

Key point: You work within your research community's shared assumptions.

Kuhn's Classical Definition of Paradigm

Thomas Kuhn (1970) defined a paradigm as:

"Universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners."

In business and management research, this implies a shared framework of theories, methods, and standards that guide inquiry within a scholarly community. Paradigms shape what is studied, how research is conducted, and how results are interpreted.

Paradigms in Action

What "shared beliefs" means with concrete examples

Ontology Explained

What is Reality?

Ontology addresses fundamental questions about existence and reality:

- What exists in the world?
- What is the nature of reality?
- Is there one reality or multiple realities?
- Does reality exist independently of our knowledge of it?

What is your own Ontology regarding your R?

Ontology Terms Simplified

What the jargon actually means in plain English

Epistemology Explained

How Do We Know?

Epistemology examines the nature and scope of knowledge:

- What counts as knowledge?
- How do we acquire knowledge?
- What is the relationship between the knower and what is known?
- Can we be objective, or is knowledge always subjective?

Epistemology Terms Simplified

How we know things - in words that make sense

Axiology Explained

The Role of Values

Axiology addresses the role of values in research:

- Can research be value-free?
- Should researchers remain neutral?
- How do researcher values influence the research process?
- Should research aim to change the world or just understand it?

Methodology Explained

How to Research

Methodology is the strategy and process of research:

- What methods are appropriate for this paradigm?
- How should data be collected and analysed?
- What constitutes rigorous research?
- How do we evaluate research quality?

How These Connect

Philosophical Coherence

- Your ontology (reality) influences your epistemology (knowing)
- Your epistemology shapes your methodology (methods)
- Your axiology (values) pervades all aspects
- These must align for philosophical coherence
- Mixed paradigm research requires careful justification

The Six Paradigms

Overview of Major Research Traditions

- **Positivism:** One true reality, measure it objectively
- **Postpositivism:** Reality exists but imperfectly known
- **Interpretivism:** Multiple realities, understand individual meanings
- **Social Constructionism:** Groups construct shared social realities through collective meaning-making
- **Critical Theory:** Power structures shape reality, research liberates
- **Pragmatism:** Whatever works! Focus on practical results

We are back to Pretorius

Paradigm Comparison: Constructivism, Social Constructionism, Interpretivism

Paradigm	Interpretivism	Social Constructionism
Focus	Understanding subjective meanings that individuals attach to experiences	Understanding how groups construct shared social realities through collective meaning-making
Ontology	Reality is subjective - multiple realities based on individual interpretations	Reality is constructed by groups through ongoing social processes and shared agreements
Epistemology	Knowledge comes from understanding individual experiences and perspectives	Knowledge is socially constructed by groups through collective sense-making
Unit of Analysis	The individual	Social groups and their interactions
Key Process	Individual interpretation and sense-making	Collective meaning-making through social processes
Methodology	Interviews, observations, phenomenology	Examining how groups construct shared meanings; analyzing differences across groups

Key Understanding

Social Constructionism = "Understanding how **groups** construct shared social realities through ongoing social processes and collective meaning-making."

Examines how different groups make sense of the same phenomena in distinct ways and how social realities vary across groups.

Reality is constructed by groups through shared agreements about what counts as 'real'

Positivism

There's one true reality, and we can measure it objectively

- **Ontology:** Naive realism - one objective reality exists
- **Epistemology:** Objectivism - knowledge through hypothetico-deductive method
- **Axiology:** Value-free research, facts separate from values
- **Methodology:** Experimental and quantitative methods
- **Goal:** Discover universal laws and predict phenomena

Postpositivism

Reality exists, but we can't know it perfectly

- **Ontology:** Critical realism - reality exists but imperfectly known
- **Epistemology:** Modified objectivism - knowledge is fallible
- **Axiology:** Value-aware - values acknowledged and managed
- **Methodology:** Multi-method triangulation, mixed methods
- **Goal:** Get closer to truth through multiple perspectives

Interpretivism

Understanding meaning from the inside

"Reality is socially constructed through shared meanings and interpretations"

What does this actually mean?

- **Multiple realities exist:** Your experience of "good leadership" differs from mine - both are valid
- **Meaning through interaction:** People create shared understanding through conversations, relationships, culture
- **Context matters deeply:** You cannot understand behaviour without understanding the situation and culture
- **Researcher as instrument:** You bring your own interpretations to understanding others' interpretations

Social Constructionism

Groups construct shared social realities

Core idea: Reality is constructed by groups through ongoing social processes and shared agreements

What does this mean?

- Groups of people collectively create and maintain shared understandings of reality
- What we take as "real" is socially constructed through collective agreement
- Different groups experience the same phenomena in distinct ways
- Social realities vary across groups based on their collective meaning-making

Key point: NOT primarily about language or discourse – about how groups create shared social realities.

Critical Theory

Power structures shape reality and oppress groups

- **Ontology:** Historical realism - reality shaped by power structures
- **Epistemology:** Ideologically mediated - knowledge shaped by power
- **Axiology:** Explicitly value-laden - committed to social justice
- **Methodology:** Participatory action research, critical ethnography
- **Goal:** Expose oppression and liberate marginalised groups

Interpretivism

Understanding how people make sense of their business world

Core idea: Reality is socially constructed - focus on individual meanings

What does this mean? Take "good customer service" - there's no objective standard sitting somewhere. Your manager has an idea of it, customers have different ideas, your colleagues have their own understanding. All these interpretations exist simultaneously - they're all "real" to the people holding them.

Research example: "How do employees in this company understand 'innovation'?" You interview 10 people, you'll get 10 different understandings. That's the point - you're capturing the multiple realities that exist in that workplace.

Methods: Interviews, observations, phenomenology - anything that helps you understand people's interpretations and experiences in their specific context.

Interpretivism: Why "Socially Constructed"?

Explaining what this actually means with examples

Pragmatism

Whatever works! Use any methods that solve real problems

- **Ontology:** Practical realism - reality is what is useful
- **Epistemology:** Pluralistic - multiple ways of knowing are valid
- **Axiology:** Value-pluralistic - values judged by consequences
- **Methodology:** Mixed methods, action research
- **Goal:** Solve practical problems with workable solutions

Positivism in Detail

The Scientific Method Applied to Social Research

Key Assumptions:

- Universal laws govern social phenomena
- Reality is objective and measurable
- Researcher can be detached and neutral
- Replication and generalisation are possible

Strengths:

- Rigorous and systematic approach
- Facilitates prediction and control
- Findings can be generalised

Constructivism

Individuals AND groups construct reality through interaction

Core idea: Reality is constructed through social interaction and individual sense-making

Both individuals AND groups actively construct their understanding through interactions with others and the world. Knowledge is co-created between researcher and participants.

Research example: You work WITH employees in collaborative workshops to understand workplace change. Through dialogue and joint inquiry, you and participants together construct understanding. You're not observing - you're co-creating knowledge.

Methods: Participatory action research, co-operative inquiry, dialogic methods - where researcher and participants jointly create knowledge.

Constructivism: Why Participatory?

Understanding co-creation of knowledge

Social Constructionism

Groups construct shared social realities

Core idea: Social realities are constructed by groups over time through social processes

Groups of people collectively create and maintain shared understandings of reality through ongoing social processes, institutions, and shared practices. What we take as "real" is socially constructed through collective agreement.

Example: "Childhood" as we understand it today (innocent, needing protection, separate from work) was constructed over centuries through social processes. Medieval societies had different constructions of childhood. Neither is "true" - both are social constructions by different groups in different times.

Methods: Examining how different groups construct shared meanings, studying social processes that maintain or challenge constructions, analyzing how groups experience phenomena differently.

Social Constructionism: Groups Creating Reality

How social processes construct what we accept as real

Interpretivism vs Constructivism vs Social Constructionism

Three different approaches to "socially constructed"

Positivism Continued

Limitations and When to Use

Limitations:

- May oversimplify complex social phenomena
- Ignores context and meaning
- Difficult to apply to human experience
- Assumes researcher objectivity is achievable

Best Used When:

- Testing causal relationships
- Measuring and predicting behaviour
- Large-scale quantitative analysis needed



Postpositivism in Detail

Critical Realism and Triangulation

Key Assumptions:

- Reality exists but is imperfectly apprehendable
- All observation is theory-laden
- Triangulation improves understanding
- Research findings are probabilistic

Strengths:

- More realistic about research limitations
- Embraces methodological pluralism
- Acknowledges complexity



Postpositivism Continued

Limitations and When to Use

Limitations:

- Can be resource-intensive (multiple methods)
- May lack clear guidelines for integration
- Still emphasises prediction over understanding

Best Used When:

- Complex phenomena require multiple lenses
- Seeking robust, defensible findings
- Mixed methods research is appropriate

Interpretivism in Detail

Understanding Lived Experience

Key Assumptions:

- Reality is socially constructed
- Meaning is created through interaction
- Context is essential to understanding
- Researcher is part of the research process

Strengths:

- Rich, detailed understanding
- Captures insider perspectives
- Respects complexity and context



Interpretivism Continued

Limitations and When to Use

Limitations:

- Findings not generalisable
- Time-consuming and resource-intensive
- Researcher bias difficult to eliminate
- Quality criteria different from positivism

Best Used When:

- Exploring new phenomena
- Understanding meanings and experiences
- Context-specific insights needed



Social Constructionism in Detail

Groups Creating Shared Social Realities

Key Assumptions:

- Reality is constructed by groups through ongoing social processes
- Different groups construct different social realities
- What counts as "real" reflects collective agreements within groups
- Social realities are maintained through shared practices and institutions

Strengths:

- Reveals how groups construct shared understandings
- Examines how different groups experience phenomena differently
- Attends to collective meaning-making processes



Social Constructionism

When to Use

Best Used When:

- Examining how groups construct shared social realities
- Understanding how different groups make sense of the same phenomena in distinct ways
- Revealing that social realities vary across groups
- Studying how shared agreements about "reality" are created and maintained

Limitations:

- Can seem abstract when focused too heavily on theory
- Requires careful attention to which groups are constructing which realities
- May be complex to apply to practical problems



Critical Theory in Detail

Research for Social Justice

Key Assumptions:

- Power structures shape reality
- Research should expose oppression
- Knowledge is never neutral
- Research aims to liberate and empower

Strengths:

- Explicitly political and ethical
- Gives voice to marginalised groups
- Links research to social change



Critical Theory Continued

Limitations and When to Use

Limitations:

- Can be seen as biased or ideological
- May struggle with academic legitimacy
- Difficult to maintain participant agency
- Risk of imposing researcher's politics

Best Used When:

- Researching inequality and oppression
- Seeking to empower marginalised groups
- Action and change are research goals



Pragmatism in Detail

Focus on What Works

Key Assumptions:

- Truth is what works in practice
- Multiple methods are legitimate
- Context determines appropriate approach
- Practical outcomes matter most

Strengths:

- Flexible and adaptive
- Focuses on solving real problems
- Avoids philosophical rigidity



Pragmatism Continued

Limitations and When to Use

Limitations:

- Can lack philosophical coherence
- May be seen as atheoretical
- Risk of methodological opportunism
- Unclear quality criteria

Best Used When:

- Solving practical problems
- Action research or design science
- Multiple stakeholder perspectives needed



Amazon Example: Positivism & Postpositivism

Shopping Cart Abandonment Research

Positivism Approach:

A/B testing with 500,000 customers, random assignment, tests universal psychological triggers, assumes generalisability

Postpositivism Approach:

Multi-phase study combining transaction data, customer interviews, eye-tracking, and cross-platform comparison

Amazon Example: Interpretivism & Social Constructionism

Shopping Cart Abandonment Research

Interpretivism Approach:

In-depth interviews with 40 customers exploring what carts mean to them (wishlist, price tool, etc.), thick description

Social Constructionism Approach:

Examining how different groups construct different shared understandings of online shopping carts and their purpose across demographics and cultures

Amazon Example: Critical Theory & Pragmatism

Shopping Cart Abandonment Research

Critical Theory Approach:

Participatory action research with consumer advocacy groups documenting exploitative practices and producing policy recommendations

Pragmatism Approach:

Iterative partnership with Amazon using multiple methods to reduce abandonment by 30%, measured by business outcomes and user satisfaction



Choosing Your Paradigm

A Decision Framework

- **Consider your research question:** What are you trying to understand?
- **Consider your worldview:** What do you believe about reality?
- **Consider your field:** What paradigms are legitimate in your discipline?
- **Consider your purpose:** Description, understanding, prediction, or change?
- **Consider your training:** What methods do you know well?
- **Be explicit and consistent:** Justify your choices throughout

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

Learn from Others' Mistakes

- Mixing paradigms without justification
- Using methods inconsistent with your paradigm
- Failing to state your paradigm explicitly
- Judging quality using inappropriate criteria
- Confusing methodology with paradigm
- Treating paradigms as 'better' or 'worse' rather than different

Key References

Essential Reading for Doctoral Students

- Guba & Lincoln (1994) - Competing paradigms in qualitative research
- Lincoln & Guba (2000) - Paradigmatic controversies and emerging confluences
- Bhaskar (1975) - A realist theory of science (critical realism)
- Creswell & Plano Clark (2017) - Designing and conducting mixed methods research
- Burrell & Morgan (1979) - Sociological paradigms and organisational analysis
- Berger & Luckmann (1966) - The Social Construction of Reality