

# BMPF7005 UNDERTAKING RESEARCH IN WORKPLACE MODULE 2:

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Critically evaluate a range of methodological approaches, research designs and research methods appropriate to gather data from complex work-based settings. Apply due consideration to research ethics and issues of insider research.

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**Conclusion:** 488

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The scholar seeks, the artist finds.

## **The Counterfeiters - Andre Gide**

### **Introduction**

Gide speaks to the crux of the artist practitioner engaged in research. To begin a journey, a map is needed, for the territory. I will give a brief definition of philosophical terms, examine paradigms which currently form my frames of reference as a practitioner researcher. The question of how research is to be undertaken will require the outlining and definition of, research design and methodologies, which currently, suggest their appropriateness. Lastly, I will consider ethics broadly and particularly, how they will affect my position as an insider researcher in work-integrated Learning (WIL) research (Fleming, 2018).

Voice work is muscular but underpinned by anatomical and pedagogic understanding; the body and the brain, although in the UK it has sat within a Western biomechanical model (McCallister-Viel, 2009). The Cartesian split mirrors my own discomfort in embarking on academic research as a predominant practitioner, I too am “an artist familiar with the status of an academic outsider” (McNiff, 2011). Forbes (2024), Oram (2015), Sansom (2018), Scott (2024a) and Winter (2021) have all elucidated the challenge of voice research in tackling the dichotomy of practitioner and researcher. Oram describes research in voice work as a “nascent” field (Oram, 2015). The lack of spoken voice research is palpable, though changing due to the enveloping of conservatoires into university status, with constituent requirement to research for funding streams.

Two journals that bifurcate voice are, the *Journal of Voice* whose focus is voice medicine and research. The *Voice and Speech Review* contains academic research, but with practical applications. It is currently attempting to bridge the interstitial space of ‘rigour-relevance’ that exists in between practice and research (Winter, 2021). These journals speak to the “know how” and “know what” of voice (Nelson, 2006, Oram, 2015).

Whether it is the research onion (Saunders et al (2016), or tree trunk (Easterby-Smith et al, 2012, p.xv) (see Appendix), externally we may see the ‘onion’, or the ‘tree’, but its’ constitution is complex. The layers research topic, method, methodologies and design will have philosophical underpinnings.

A paradigm, or world view, relates to the researcher's perception of the world and relationship to it (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). They posit that the researcher's beliefs must be accepted on faith, as there is no way to ultimately prove their truth. If it were simple to achieve, the philosophical debates engaged in historically would have been resolved. I acknowledge my ambivalence about asserting a definitive stance with a particular paradigm, when I am still exploring my researcher territory.

### **Critical Evaluation: Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology**

Understanding how my axiology (values), affect my assumptions about what reality is (ontology) and what knowledge is and how it is attained (epistemology), aids definition and focus of which research designs are most efficient (Easterby et al, 2012). Working as a voice teacher in a conservatoire and further education setting, the aim of further study is to deepen and enhance my practice. In approaching this essay, I am confronting my uncertainties in those areas, whether it is the nature of reality, or what knowledge *really* is.

Ontology refers to the nature of reality and what exists (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012). The researcher will have an epistemological position on *how* and *what* they perceive reality to be. As a researcher, am I, a realist? Constructivist? A positivist, post-positivist or pragmatist? Briefly, realism is a philosophy posits that realities exist outside of the mind. Constructivism, that humans make meaning built on their past experiences and learning. A theoretical perspective, closely linked to objectivism is positivism, that knowledge is built through empirical observation and scientific measurement (Bryman, 2016). Whilst post-positivists acknowledge the limitation of our knowledge and that our values and experiences influence what and how we observe (Bryman, 2016). Pragmatists are committed to learners engaging through direct experience to solve problems and discover practical applications.

My ontological and epistemological position is influenced by my axiology. Axiology coming from the Greek *athios* meaning worthy and *logos* meaning science (Killam, 2013), is the philosophical study of values or goodness, these are the values that underpin our everyday life. Therefore, my drive to research is to deepen my practice and holistic, approach to teaching voice. One that is pedagogically underpinned, where the bio-mechanical, scientific teachings on voice can meet the metaphorical and experiential. It is this desire to seek to understand further and deepen my practice, that will hopefully, be practically useful for

participants and deepen understanding of their vocal practice. Therefore, my axiology is informing my ontological stance, which is also influenced by my position as a practitioner, insider researcher, within the construct of an institution.

Crotty (1998) describes epistemology as a way of looking at the world and asking how we know what we know. It comes from the Greek word *episteme*, meaning knowledge and *logos*, the study of that knowledge. What is knowledge and how do we know something (Sol and Heng, 2022), to a stance on what should be acceptable as knowledge (Bryman, 2016). Cresswell uses the term, worldview (others calling it paradigms), that, they define as “a basic set of beliefs that guide action”. (Cresswell, 2017, p.3, citing Guba, p.17). Cresswell (2017) advocates making explicit the world view that the researcher espouses. At this stage, I am leaning more towards constructivist, feminist and pragmatist epistemologies.

## **Paradigms**

Practitioner led research at work is described by Costley et al (2010) as “essential capability”. Any paradigm choice must be weighed against the specific aims of the research, the methodology chosen and consideration of ethics, given potential bias as an insider researcher. Currently, the three paradigms which seem to align with my worldview are:

## **Constructivism**

The constructivist paradigm asserts that learners construct their own notion of what reality is through their cognition and their active role in constructing their knowledge. Crotty (1998) acknowledges that constructivism is the epistemology that qualitative researchers tend to use. In the doing, the learner can construct their knowledge. Honebein (1996) states that the learner in the constructivist learning environment is centred, rather than the teacher. Again, in this paradigm, the teacher might be called an instructor, facilitator, mentor or coach (Honebein, 1996). This feeds into my own desire to move away from any master/guru-student binary and away from Freire’s “banking” (Freire, 2006) model. What the student knows is less central than *how* they know and, the facilitator should encourage explanations of how students have come to their conclusions, to “show their working” which Collins, Brown and Newman (2018) call “articulations”.

Bryman (2016) states that this term has come to mean that researchers' accounts of the social world they are investigating are constructions, as the researcher presents a version of social reality that may not be definitive. Bryman (2016) mentions that it has been seen by some to reflect the "indeterminacy of our knowledge of the social world" (Bryman, 2016, p.30). However, as he uses it, he takes it to mean "the notion that social phenomena and categories are social constructs" (Bryman, 2016, p.29). At this stage, I can engage with the notion that adopting a constructivist paradigm potentially offers a "deeply humanistic and respectful approach to the researched" (Pilarska, 2021, p.64). As it will allow an open dialogue between researcher and participant to move toward observations made together.

## **Pragmatism**

Pragmatism as a research paradigm is based on the philosophy of pragmatism originated in 1870 by the philosopher Charles Peirce, later developed by others including William James and the educational behemoth John Dewey. Its' basic premise being that an understanding of "knowing the world as inseparable from agency within it" (Legg and Hookway, 2008, p.1). However, the early pragmatist scholars rejected the idea that "social science inquiry can access the reality solely by using a single scientific method"(Kaushik and Walsh, 2019, p.255).

In 1994, two new terms were introduced into research terminology mode 1 knowledge which is defined by academic interests and is disciplinary and mode 2 knowledge which is formed in context with application and is transdisciplinary (Coghlan and Brydon-Millar, 2014, p.541). Gibbons (1994) described Mode 1 knowledge as, discipline based, and Mode 2 as transdisciplinary with, a "constant flow back and forth between the fundamental and the applied, between the theoretical and the practical" (Gibbons, 1994, p.12). This seems to align with the pragmatic paradigm as it uses the term flow, which enables the researcher to act according to need (Winter, 2020).

Kuhn describes the success of a paradigm as being a "promise of success discoverable in selected and still incomplete examples" (Kuhn, 1997, p.23-24). Putnam (1994) refers to pragmatism not as a systemic thesis, but a group of theses including: anti-scepticism, fallibilism, that practice is primary in philosophy and that there is no dichotomy between "facts" and values". (Hildebrand, 2000, p.109). To engage in the pragmatic paradigm is to strive for truth, it is just that there may be more than one.

This paradigm engages one to enquire, rather than pursue a single truth, as reality itself is ever changeable (Feilzer, 2010; Winter, 2020; Scott, 2024). This allows a meeting of theory and practice through practitioner-led research. The voice studio is a place, like others, where multiple potential realities are at play, and as such, the resonance with the pragmatic paradigm would appear apposite. As, the strength of this paradigm is that it gives reflexivity and adaptability for what new lines of enquiry, or theories may emerge during the research. This paradigm allows for practice-based problems to be at the core of the research design. The pragmatism paradigm offers the opportunity to bridge the gap, through practitioner-based enquiry, between theory and practice Scott (2024a).

## **Feminist Paradigm**

Within the historically male world of theatre, voice work is unusual in that the main practitioners are female (Berry, Estill, Fitzmaurice, Houseman, Linklater, Rodenburg), because of this and, my own positionality as a woman, it seemed appropriate to consider a feminist paradigm. In my teaching experience, classes have anecdotally been heavily weighted toward female rather male. I am drawn to this description of what constitutes feminist research, it can be

described as when femaleness and maleness and the differences and dominations between and within them are made a central feature of research, questions, conceptualization and analysis (Burns and Walker, 2004, p.66).

A review of the tenets of feminist pedagogy involves dismantling and critiquing systems of oppression, challenging traditional educational methods that feed into power dynamics, giving voice to those who have been previously silenced and creating and equity and equality in and out of the classroom (Currier, 2020). We can be aware that gender (relations) are socially constructed, historically and geographically specific. There is commitment to make visible and audible womens' lived experience. Reinharz and Davidman (1992a) provide an inductive definition of themes in feminist methodology including: it is not a research method but a perspective; research will be guided by feminist theory and will include the researcher as a person and, it aims to create social change, whilst representing human diversity (Reinharz and Davidman, 1992, p.240). Waller (2005) notes that feminist writers tend to refuse definition of what feminist research methodologies are but adds that the individual's narratives and experiences are critical to understand social interaction. That a choice of research question is subjective and political and therefore, no research is

objective, thus there is a rejection of achieving objectivity as a goal. As well as attention paid to the marginalised in a social context, there is a consideration of the ethics of the relationship amongst the people who engage with the research. Research has been done in the areas of nursing and social work using the feminist paradigm (MacPherson, 1993; Webb, 1993; Burns and Walker, 2004; Saulnier, 2014). Oakley (1998) argues that confining the feminist paradigm into the dichotomy of qualitative or quantitative research methods, does not help with bias, subjectivity or respecting the autonomy of those being researched. Kelly et al (1992) state that what makes research feminist is "less the method used, and more how it is used and what it is used for" (Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1992, p.150). Westmarland (2001) argues that feminist issues need different research methods, and that if the feminist perspective is applied, there isn't a need for the dichotomous "us against them", "quantitative against qualitative" debate (Westmarland, 2001).

## **Methodologies**

Two questions should be asked, what methodologies will be used and what is the justification for choice of methodology and methods (Crotty, 1998). Quantitative research uses a set of strategies and techniques to produce data which can then be analysed. Methodologies such as questionnaires, experiments or structured observations may be used, aggregated data once collected, can then be analysed (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). It is the dominant research framework in the social sciences and its focus is on hypotheses and theory testing, through deductive reasoning (Johnson and Christensen, 2007).

Qualitative research is a process of naturalistic enquiry within a social setting, that is more interested in the *how*, than the *what* of the individual's experiences. Qualitative research *describes* and quantitative research *measures* (Yanchar and Williams, 2006). Johnson and Christensen (2007) outline two scientific methods, the exploratory and confirmatory which both use a cyclical method of research. As they explain, the exploratory method could be termed a bottom-up formula, as it begins with observations and data, to a discovery of what is happening, moving from data and patterns to theory, also called the inductive method, it moves from the particular to the general. The confirmatory or deductive method could be described as top down, as it requires the testing of theories and hypotheses with new data. They are clear that both in qualitative and quantitative methods researchers may use both methods as they move through the research wheel of theory, hypothesis predictions, pattern descriptions and data (Johnson, Christensen, 2007). Bryman (1984) notes that qualitative research is "inherently exploratory" as the researcher embarks on a voyage of discovery,

rather than verification. Winter (2000) discussing the validity of both methodologies, states that qualitative research is post-positivist in nature, rejecting a single objective truth enquiring into the meanings contained within the social construct. That 'reality' and negotiation of 'truths' are achieved through subjective accounts. Whereas quantitative researchers endeavour to dissociate themselves from the research process, qualitative researchers embrace their role within the research. For the quantitative researcher this might impair the validity of the test, yet he states for the qualitative researcher "denying one's role within research also threatens the validity of the research." (Winter, 2000, p.8).

A review of current quantitative voice research, although revealing a few on spoken voice itself (Siupsinskiene, 2003; Dallaston and Docherty, 2020), showed that quantitative studies in voice production were weighted more towards biomedical conditions (Ikeda et al., 1999; Ayazi, Pearson and Hashemi, 2012; Silbergleit et al., 2015). One qualitative study (Sadoway, 2021) addressed the language of teaching voice, (Forbes, 2024). Sansom (2014) also used a qualitative approach but was again using a singing context. The lack of articles containing qualitative research on the spoken voice needs to change.

Much of the singing literature was qualitative *and* quantitative in nature. In their article (Meyer and Goss, 2024) state that a quantitative methodology implies adopting a positivist philosophy, whilst qualitative implies a constructivist one, which given that one of my possible paradigms is constructivist seems apposite. Meyer and Goss (2024) argue that if carried out correctly, both methods are rigorous and disciplined. Bryman (1994) calls for an end of the polarisation of these two methodologies and a potential combining that allows the researcher to enjoy the fruits of both.

As possible areas of interest are in the somatic experience of voice and the experiential breath in the student, that qualitative research would seem to resonate. As part of this methodology, research would involve interviews, focus groups, observational research, open ended survey questions as well as a reflective journal to embed the value of honest research. Although Meyer and Goss (2024) are clear that this may lean towards bias, both methods require, as they call it "intellectual humility". It also, as they add, seeks to reveal the truth from the perspective of the participant and not from the perspective of the researcher.

## **Mixed Methods**

It is possible that in the future, given that my research area is not yet formed, that a mixed method research (MMR) approach would be efficacious given that there are elements of both that might be useful. It may allow for a “synergistic combination” of different aspects of these two approaches and perspectives (Plano Clark, 2017, p.2). Both research models contain the capacity for bias, although Sansom (2014) acknowledges that bias is easier to come by in qualitative research, because the researcher may be conducting interviews or focus groups rather than reviewing data.

A MMR approach requires the collection and analysing of data in a qualitative and quantitative manner within the same study. As Plano-Clark(2017) states this approach allows the researcher to integrate aspects of qualitative and quantitative research which utilises their differences and strengths. It is a useful methodology to embrace when choosing one, instead of the other, would not answer the question on its own (Ellaway, 2020). It enables connections and contrasts to be made between the two types of data which can then open directions of study, or answer questions more deeply (Shorten and Smith, 2017). However, it can be more demanding, as it may necessitate additional research training and alternative research paradigms. O’Sullivan et al (2024) cite caution around the use of MMR, that there must be a strong philosophical framework, robust research design and the development of data (Yanchar and Williams, 2006). It is a complex issue and as Ellaway (2020) notes MMR is not a combination of a set of methodologies or paradigms, it is a paradigm in and of itself.

## **Research Designs**

Research design will inform how data is collected, analysed and interpreted. Some examples being: case studies, action research, grounded theory, experimental or quasi-experimental, ethnography, descriptive, correlational. The choice of any of these will be influenced by which approach is taken. Currently, I am leaning more towards a qualitative methodology, some designs that sit within the qualitative method are case study, grounded theory, ethnography, action research and hermeneutic phenomenology. Given the limits of this essay, I will focus on the last three, with a focus on participatory action research.

Action research is solving specific problems in their local schools or communities (Johnson and Christensen, 2007) i.e. NHS Community Participatory Action Research, British Research Education Association (BERA). First introduced by (Lewin, 1946) and as described by Stringer and Aragon (2020) as being an action orientated, systemic approach to investigating and reflective practice to discover practical solutions to issues in organizational or community settings. Participatory Action Research (PAR) comes from a lineage of movements of political and social change (Walsh, 2012; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). It highlights collaborative working with participants, to work towards finding solutions to problems they experience in their everyday lives.

Voice work is a practical thing, which is experienced by the student, felt somatically and reflected on emotionally and psychologically. In the studio, students and I work together, improvise and make new connections and observations in the room, adjusting through feedback to invent new ways of coming at a specific challenge. An action research methodology that was used most effectively in a conservatoire set-up (Welch *et al.*, 2006) had teachers and students in the “formal position of co-researchers” (Welch *et al.*, 2005, p.233) investigating how technology could aid singing teacher and student. This study yielded a wealth of data including field notes, semi-structured interviews, observation, reflective journals. Welch et al (2006) conclude that the action research methodology goes a long way towards “legitimising” the teacher and students’ voice in continuing to develop new methods in the studio. This ultimately is the drive behind my research.

Because qualitative research will involve analysing what participants say, or write, a hermeneutic phenomenology might also be appropriate as it focusses on the subjective experience of individuals or groups. It attempts to uncover the truth as it is experienced through the narrative of their experiences (Kafle, 2013). It focusses on the lived experiences of the participants and can be used as part of a qualitative study which investigates meanings as constructed by participants in a particular setting (Ramsook, 2018). It offers a “radical empiricism, a flexible structure and a dialogical community of support” (Sohn et al., 2017, p.124). It would prove highly useful as a means of analysing interview data from focus group observations, content and narrative, with the addition of McCormack’s (2000) “lenses” utilising narrative process, active listening, language, context and moments (key words or phrases) to encourage an objective, reflective approach to maintain rigour in analysis. I aim to capture both the experiential, somatic and cognitive in voice research. Which is why currently, I would propose the use of focus group, interviews, observations and potentially reflective journals with these designs would offer multiple ‘ways in’, as evidenced by Welch

*et al.*, (2006) With access to reflective journals as well as spoken testimony (interview, focus group) a depth of understanding may be achieved.

Ethnography is a principal method in the social sciences, using collection of qualitative data and may also be useful as a research design. Brewer (2000) describes it as the study of people in their natural setting or field, data collection aims to uncover their social meanings. The researcher may also be involved in activities with the participants but only to collect data in a systematic way that does not impose meaning on them externally (Brewer, 2000). Coming as it does from anthropology, historically, involving complete immersion of the researcher into the community. As a teacher in the conservatoire, I am very embedded with my students, as well as teaching them, I see them individually for a voice tutorial every week. Driven by my constructivist epistemology I am driven to understand the students' reality as they perceive it. However, this also raises challenges for maintaining objectivity and increases the importance of ethical strictures (Walsh, 2012; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019).

### **Ethics and insider research**

An insider researcher is one who shares attributes with the participants of the study (Bukamal, 2022). As Poulton (2023) notes classrooms provide teacher-researchers with the opportunity of local knowledge that can be drawn into wider educational issues. This also introduces complex ethical dilemmas as an insider researcher, as my research will be taking place within the conservatoire, where I work, which will have its' own ethical framework to be abided by. The UK Social and Research Council lists principles for ethics in research:

- Informed consent
- independence of the research is core
- any conflicts of interest must be made explicit and accountability should be clear
- the rights of all participants involved will be respected
- that research should aim to maximise benefit and minimise risk of harm for the participants

(Our core principles – UKRI, accessed 9.3.25)

As Scott (2020) notes we are inside the research and therefore cannot be subjective but, that is potentially offset by our practitioner experience. The project of work to be undertaken

will be to research and develop, to enhance a working practice (Costley, et al, 2010, p.26). A clear rationale and aims, they suggest, should be supported by three standpoints that attend to social, economic and environmental benefits. They also state that the ideology behind the project must be critically reflected on.

Frymier and Houser (2000) acknowledge the importance of the student/teacher relationship with this type of practice-based research. They researched how teachers communicated with students and what relation that had to their learning. The student-teacher meeting point is informed by content and is relational but could be beset by bias. If I use my students at the conservatoire as my research subjects, there is a degree of familiarity which is engendered by the time spent with them. To mitigate this, I would propose that as part of my ongoing process, to avoid bias and aid reflective learning, the use of both the Debrief model (Allan and Vig, 2009), a workplace model that was originally piloted in social work and now used in medical practice and has already been beneficial in module 1. Secondly, bracketing interviews (Rolls and Relf, 2006; Sansom, 2019) which investigate both the personal and professional experiences during research to ensure objectivity. Additionally, the potential application of McCormack's Lenses (McCormack, 2000) which utilise narrative process, active listening, language, context and moments (key words or phrases) to encourage an objective, reflective approach could aid, with the addition of hermeneutics "excellent analysis, discovery and intercommunication in voice studies" (Scott, 2024b, p.156).

## **Conclusion**

I have described ontology, epistemology and axiology and discussed the relative merits of qualitative and quantitative and MMR methodology. My ontological position leans towards a social constructivist epistemology. Although I was drawn strongly towards the constructivist paradigm, the pragmatic paradigm ultimately, because of its reflexivity and adaptability, seems the most appropriate. This module is requiring my own personal reflection into what my values and beliefs are as a researcher.

It would be foolish to say that when it comes to the methodology, just because everyone else has, I will do qualitative too, but Sansom (2019), Forbes (2024) and Sadoway (2021) seemed to find it an appropriate fit, with Forbes and Sansom particularly alert to challenges of bias, with Sansom using 'bracketing' journals (2014) to address his assumptions. I recognise using my conservatoire students will require careful ethical and bias navigation.

As stated, voice study is uniquely intriguing because it intersects the somatic, psychological but pedagogically also embraces science. The wide-ranging nature of voice work also requires careful consideration, so the specificity, practicality and topicality of the research topic is paramount. I would agree with Scott (2024a) that particularly as a beginner researcher, starting my search for the needle in the proverbial voice haystack, a pragmatic paradigm using a qualitative methodology might seem the most sensible option. At this stage action research, potentially participatory action research, intertwining ethnography and a hermeneutic philosophy, seems to offer exciting opportunities in analysing the narratives in the data. Acknowledging my positionality, viewed through the prism of a feminist paradigm, I have a more implicit understanding of how the realm of the researcher's background may be viewed in the context of the research space and for the participants. My position as an insider researcher obviously has implications for conducting the research, analysing data and topic. Shaw et al (2020) say that researchers should be free to choose the method that is most compatible with their own values; the caveat of qualitative research being that one's values are invariably relational, and needs must account for the participants one is studying." (Shaw et al., 2020, p.290).

In negotiating bias as a practitioner researcher, I would use a triangulation method of reflection, 'bracketing' journals' (Sansom, 2014) which give a trackable check-in point for reflection. Schön's reflection 'in action' and reflection 'on action' model (Schön, 1991) and Allan's DEBRIEF model (Allan and Vig, 2009b). This triangulation would be my way of maintaining self-reflection and reflexivity in the set-up, delivery and analysing of the research. As Costley et al (2010) note the practitioner led enquirers must question their position and acknowledge the centrality of that reflection as part of practitioner enquiry. As part of the reflection on self, after the process of reflecting on methodologies, paradigms and insider bias, I can only state that I now have more questions than when I began, but perhaps that's a good place for a researcher to start, with lots of questions.

## APPENDIX

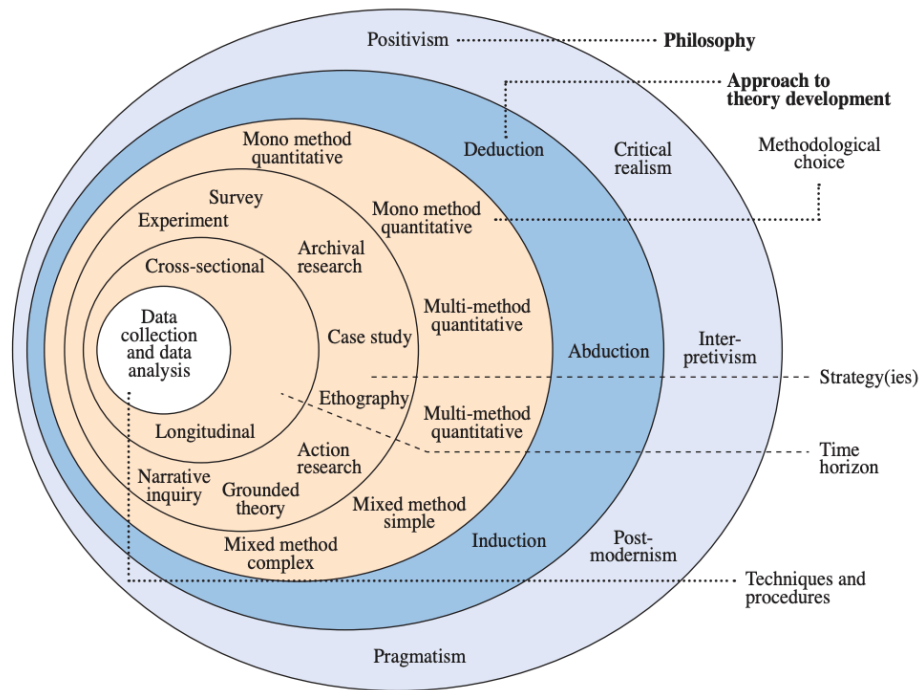
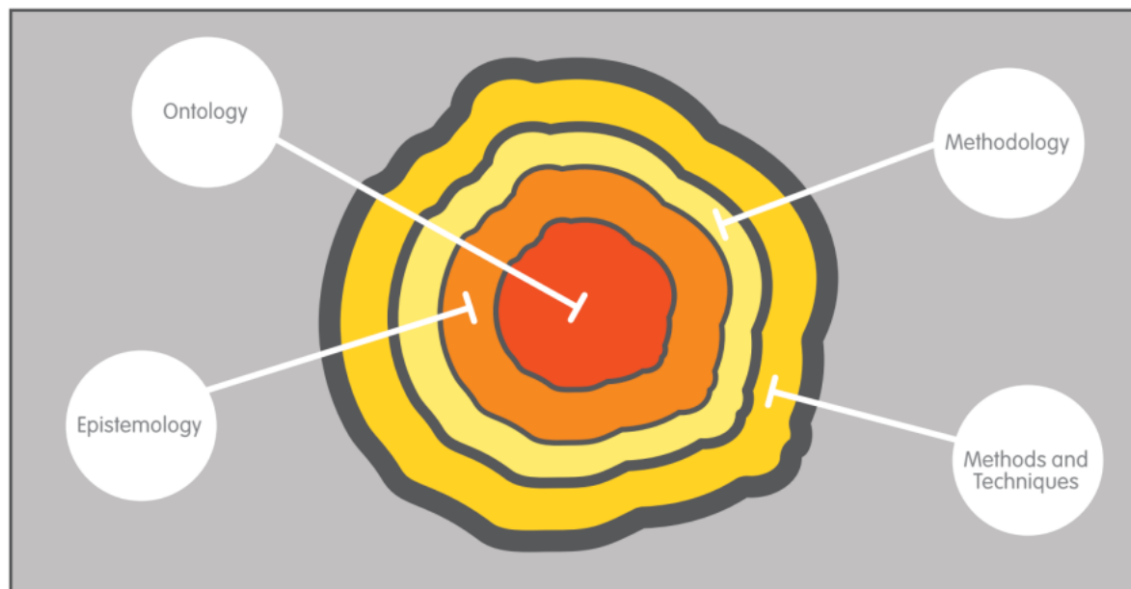


Figure 1. Research onion<sup>1</sup>

(Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, p.108 cited Melnikovas, 2018, p.33)



(Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2012)

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