



# **Fellowships**

## Introduction to Practitioner Research

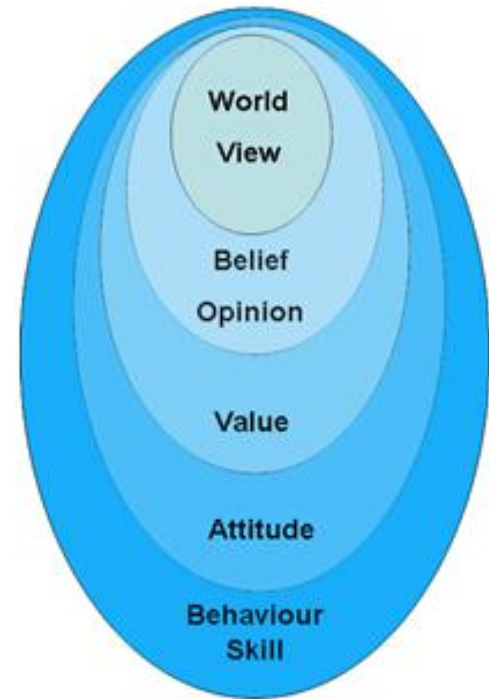
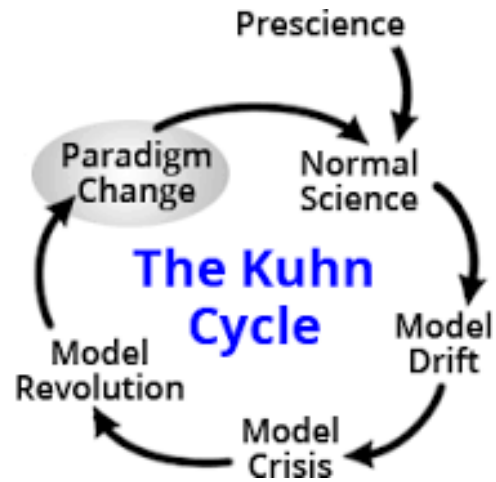
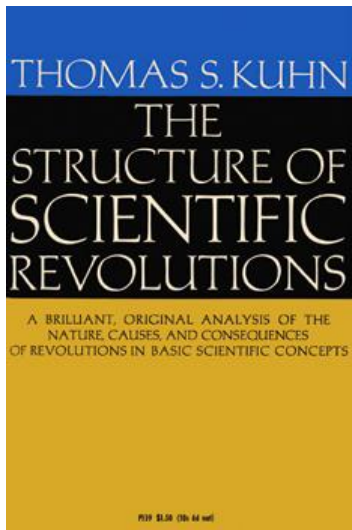
# What is research?

**Systematic investigation in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions:  
to seek the truth.**

But! It is underpinned by *Paradigms* – belief system or ways of thinking.

Important for all researchers to **think about their thinking**, particularly so for practitioner researchers to ensure you are not too 'close' or **presuming** at your starting point.

# Paradigms



# Series of key principles

1. Ontology
2. Epistemology
3. Methodology
4. Methods

# Think of it as a way of seeing things

What we LOOK at and what we all SEE may be different

Different lenses can change appearances of things.

'Lenses' can include our philosophical outlook.



When we see a spider we may think 'uugh', when a lizard sees a spider it thinks 'yum yum'. Same spider, different views, different positions.



# Health Warning

Some of what follows may seem a bit heavy.  
It may even feel like you're getting more confused and  
going backwards!



You are going backwards in a way  
because it's about retracing some fundamental stuff that  
*you may* just assume but have never thought about.

Sorry in advance. Sue me.



# Brace yourself!

- Ok, so we're going to discuss **ONTOLOGY** and **EPISTEMOLOGY** next, don't they sound *nice*?
- Well, before we do let's just try and pin down what a **'philosophical' theory** has to do with research...
- Consider TRUTH and FACT. A person who did not commit a crime goes to court and because of whatever is found GUILTY. What is the truth and fact of the situation? Courts DECIDE the truth = TRUTH is a DECISION = TRUTH is a SOCIAL CONSTRUCT= FACT is a FACT. Right?
- Are 'FACTS' and the 'TRUTH' just sat out there in space?

# Theoretical Perspectives

...seems a bit heavy? Don't lose sleep over it. But if we build a house on sand...

We need to challenge assumptions, or presumptions, even if we didn't know we had them, to be ready to **seek the truth(s?)**

There are decisions about what **approach** we use to get knowledge – and we need to be conscious of that – there are philosophical stances out there, like it or not and we may even be part of all that!





# 1. Ontology

**Philosophical study** of the science of existence

**What is reality?** How do we understand existence?

Controversial discussions

What we believe is social reality

What's out there to 'know'?

System of belief reflecting an interpretation of what constitutes a fact – ontological position

#Objectivist / realist ontology

#Subjectivist / interpretivist / anti-realist ontology

“How do we know a thing is **real** – what is ‘realness’? You may think this is silly but remember people were convinced the Earth was flat for hundreds of years. We have to be open to our own ignorance, which may go much deeper than we care to be comfortable with. **It’s comforting to think we know** lots of things, but is that so? What does that mean, exactly? It’s like ‘knowing’ the Earth is flat – how will we *know* we know it when we *think* we get there – otherwise we’re just be like those people back then.”



*Ontology influences research methods.  
Objective ontology pops up again in positivist  
methods – ‘facts are facts’.  
Subjectivist ontology pops up in interpretivist  
methods – ‘people are people’.*

## 2. Epistemology

What counts as 'acceptable' knowledge?

How do you 'know' something?

What and how can we know about it?

The relationship between the knower  
(the researcher) and the know(able).

Origin, nature, method and limits of knowledge.

“so we need a **way** of working out what is knowledge. We need to be conscious about trying to structure a way of getting a grip on the origin, nature, method and limits of knowledge. It’s like a form of discipline of an approach, how to contemplate or measure something, as an alternative to pure chaos”



# Positivist / Objectivist Paradigm

World is external & objective

*Explaining*

Science is value free

Natural sciences as model

Focus on facts ('facts are facts')

Deductive (top down)– theory testing –

Use observation to test hypotheses

Reduce phenomena to simplest elements

Look for causality and laws

Hypothesise and test

Look, this is dead **simple**. It is the way it is. Things are the way they are. There's only the right way and the wrong way. The world can only be understood through **facts**. Everything can be broken down into a unit that we can analyse. The ruler doesn't lie – things can be measured and it's not good enough to guess or estimate. If we're you're not sure you need to test it until it is right. Everything can be understood by reducing it down to basics and facts. It's dead simple I don't see why you can't see that."



# Interpretivist / Subjectivist Paradigm

## *Understanding*

Observer part of what observed

Focus on meanings ('people are people')

Inductive (bottom up) or theory building -

builds generalisations out of observation

Develop ideas through induction

“Everything is about understanding, especially with people. The ruler to measure, like many things is a social construction - it's something we made – the 'metre' is a social construction. It's there to help us make sense of things. We can come to broad conclusions or generalisations about things by listening to or and watching them. We're observers and we're part of what we're looking at. We are interpreting things that's all”







# Next, a play on words?

We're going to cover **Methodology** and **Methods**.

Duh?

OK.

**Methodology** is about the **principles** that guide your research & where we explain **why** an approach is being taken – this informs your method.

**Method** is **way** you do it – which tool, technique or process you choose to use.

# 3. Methodology

## Qualitative research

To **understand deeper meanings**, look at, describe and understand experience, ideas, beliefs and values.

*Often about views, insights & perceptions.*

# Methodology

## **Quantitative research**

To measure variables and verify existing theories or hypotheses or question them. Data used to generate new hypotheses based on the results of data collected about different variables.

Data must be collected in accordance with certain processes to ensure validity.

*Often large samples of numbers, like statistics.*

# Methodology

## **Mixed methods**

Approach to help 'triangulate' i.e. to back up one set of findings from one method of data collection underpinned by one methodology, with another very different method underpinned by another methodology.

*2 heads are better than one.*

# 4. Methods

**Interviews**

**Questionnaires**

**Data analysis**

- What will your methods enable you to discover?
- What might they prevent you from discovering?
- What kinds of research methods would be best suited to the kind of research you are undertaking and the research questions you are pursuing?
- What sort of problems do you envisage in setting up these methods?
- What are their benefits?

# So, remind me, what is research?

**Systematic investigation  
in order to establish facts  
and reach new conclusions:  
to seek the truth.**

**For research practitioners this is often about  
how to make improvements in what and  
how we do things in professional practice.**

**Go to it!**