



University of
South Australia

Epistemologies and Methodologies in Qualitative Research

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Outline

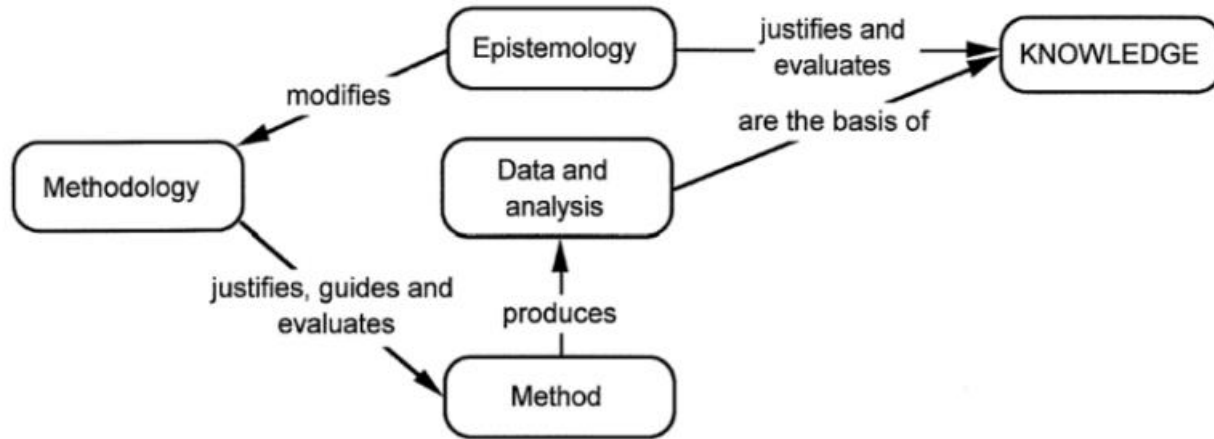
This presentation aims to outline in a simple manner the relationship between epistemology and methodology.

The importance of axiology as part of the epistemology is introduced.

Understanding is provided on how epistemology and methodology combine as a framework.



The Simple Relationship between Epistemology, Methodology and Method



Definitions Epistemology

Epistemology – influences the methodology

The study of the nature of knowledge and justification of beliefs held to be true, can be thought of as justification of knowledge and the theory of knowledge is inescapable as it is impossible to engage in knowledge creation without tacit assumptions about what knowledge is and how it is constructed

Influences:

- relationship between the research and participant
- way in which quality of methods will be demonstrated
- how the researcher will communicate with the intended audience



Epistemology is Axiological

Epistemology has ethical weight and therefore is axiological in relation to values

Axiology relates to epistemology in two ways; it is an epistemology itself and it is in the cultural context that informs epistemology

The axiology of epistemology can be expressed as the values within that are normative

Basis for explaining the rightness or wrongness, the admissibility or inadmissibility of types of knowledge and sources of justification of that knowledge underpinning the epistemological approach

Epistemology is surrounded by axiology in that the knowledge generated by a project will be discussed, evaluated and justified in relation to broader cultural values



Choosing an Epistemological position

The first starting point as epistemology is foundational and will directly influence the methodology and methods

This decision matters as some epistemologies and methodologies are incommensurable

Different variants of methodologies will be linked specific epistemological positions (mainly by theoretical and disciplinary roots)

Underpinned by the axiological statement on what will constitute trustworthy knowledge



Definitions: Methodology

Methodology: justifies the methods

A theory and analysis of how research should proceed

Analysis of the assumptions, principles and procedures in a particular approach to an inquiry

A description, explanation and the justification of the methods used

Methodology connects research to theory and discipline

Each variant of each methodology has risen from particular academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, philosophy, cultural studies and psychology

Methodologies can proscribe or encourage the use of existing or formal and substantive theories at two stages

1. In the determination of objectives, research questions and study design
2. During analysis and in interpretation of findings
3. Different methodologies can encourage or discourage the development of substantive theories in the conduct of empirical work



Select a variant of methodology

The answer to this question will be determined by the researchers chosen epistemic position

May also be shaped by the discipline they have chosen to immerse themselves in

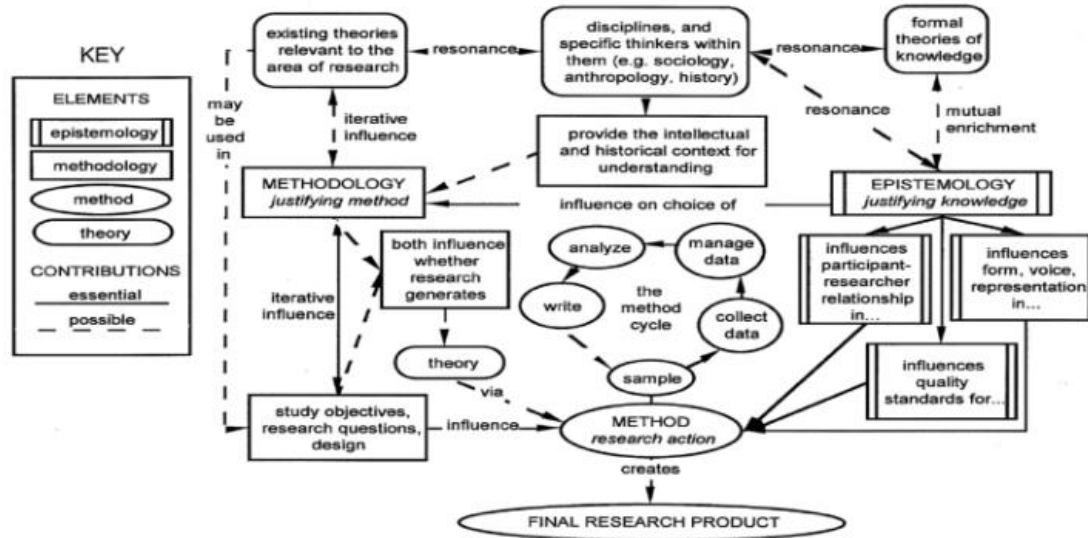
The methodology will provide a primary source of justification for the projects relationship to theory

Methodologies can be combined or altered provided the researcher retains a coherent epistemological position and can justify the choices made, preferably in relation to both the theoretical context of the methodology, the axiological underpinning and impact of the change on method/s and the final research product



Applying the framework epistemology, methodology and methods

The contributions of Method, Methodology, and Epistemology to Qualitative Research



Justification

Epistemological justification depends on the internal consistency of the arguments put forward to support a knowledge claim based on the fit between the evidence, social theory and existing knowledge

Needs to include critical reflection on the social roles and values of the research team, the social processes of generating evidence and the role of substantive social theory in conceptualising the evidence and how it fits with background theory

Methodological justification concerns the rationale given for the characteristic techniques used in the production of empirical evidence within a particular research tradition

Established methodological theories provide some conventional ways of handling some issues, but they are limited in the scope they can offer for critical reflection on the role of social theory in the production of evidence and are limited in the extent to which they can provide for new or unusual forms of research technique

Methodological theory cannot be used to justify the research methods, more so when the internal consistency of the epistemological argument is obscured and/or there is a failure to locate knowledge claims within a wider system of beliefs

Therefore when constructing an epistemological justification for a claim that the findings of qualitative inquiry have contributed to knowledge, it is not sufficient to state, “This study used grounded theory to generate its findings” or “This study employed phenomenological methods.



References

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