


Chapter 1

Implications of Mixing Methods: Balancing Paradigmatic and Validation Distinctives

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ABSTRACT

Much like a jigsaw puzzle box top guides one in how to connect the pieces, a research paradigm operates as a conscious or subconscious influence in conducting a research project. The promise—and challenge—of mixed methods research is that it involves the use of two box tops, and this chapter discusses the subsequent implications on the researcher. The first effect is through the need to balance the paradigmatic distinctives, requiring the researcher to identify one of four broad ways to address the paradigm divide at the heart of qualitative and quantitative research. The second effect is through the need to balance the validation distinctives. Making research credible is an essential component of any study, and the issues magnify given the stark differences between qualitative and quantitative validity orientations. Both implications reveal the level of sophistication required for the researcher when conducting a mixed methods project.

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INTRODUCTION: WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT RESEARCH PARADIGMS?

Consider the question: What is the most important part of putting a puzzle together? The most obvious answers always come first – start with the corner pieces, followed by locating the edges, and then grouping pieces of similar color. While you may consider yourself in command of the puzzle, a neutral observer would note something quite different: that the placement of those corners, edges, and colors was dictated in part by the image on the cover of the box top. The importance of that box top was so implicit and inherent that most do not identify it as an essential answer to the initial question, even though it controls most of our actions. You may be thinking that a puzzle *could* still be completed without a box top. A *simple* puzzle, perhaps. But what of advanced puzzles? The infamous Ravensburger puzzle with 32,000 pieces? 3D puzzles that do not fit within the confines of corners and edges? Or the set of “Impossibles” puzzles that are borderless, have irregular edges, and come with five extra pieces? Our perception of what the puzzle looks like will always influence our work to complete it.

Not significantly different from a puzzle box top, a research paradigm is a significant force in how one considers and conducts research. Before answering questions regarding potential data collection methods, or research designs (methodologies) to govern those methods, one must first consult the theoretical perspectives at hand (Crotty, 1998). The broader research *gestalts* are not a new phenomenon, and have their origins in the ancient debates among the Sophists, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle about what constituted the pursuit and meaning of knowledge (Johnson & Gray, 2010). In this sense, “mixed methods” is not about the simple merger of words and numbers; it is the process of potentially balancing seemingly opposing paradigms, or attempting to fuse them to create a new, coherent idea. The “how” of that process is the focus of this chapter, with an emphasis on comprehending the nature of research paradigms, their role in the qualitative-quantitative debate, and how the researcher understands their function in a mixed-methods project. To pursue mixed-methods research without this foundation is akin to constructing a puzzle with no box top; and without that framing image to guide your hands as they move about the top of the table, you’re lost. And there is nothing worse than an incomplete puzzle.

BALANCING PARADIGMATIC DISTINCTIVES

Tension: The Qualitative-Quantitative Debate and the Paradigm Divide

\ten(t)-shən\ noun ~ *a state of latent hostility or opposition between individuals or groups*

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