


Chapter 5

Paradigmatic Foundations of Mixed Methods Research: The Incompatible Thesis of Mixing Belief Systems

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ABSTRACT

Mixed methods research (MMR) has gained traction among scholars owing to its ability to allow researchers to investigate a phenomenon with the lens of both qualitative and quantitative strands. However, the mixed methods field has been grappling with the challenge of demonstrating its foundation in philosophical or paradigmatic terms. To interrogate this subject of the MMR foundation, this chapter begins by tracing the evolution of MMR and then discusses why researchers find it attractive to use. The chapter moves to present the paradigmatic dilemma associated with the use of MMR. It also debates pragmatism as a philosophical position and questions whether pragmatism is an opportunistic paradigm for MMR. It produces a picture that shows the resultant logical challenge associated with MMR in practice. The chapter concludes by taking the position that it is not logically possible to carry out a study from the standpoint of a fence sitter. A researcher needs a stable disposition from which to think logically. The chapter adds weight to the growing body of MMR literature.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8844-4.ch005

INTRODUCTION

Mixed methods research (MMR), has rapidly become popular in the social and behavioural sciences such as sociology, psychology, knowledge management; economic and management sciences, education, and health sciences (Timans et al., 2019; Archibald et al., 2015; Creswell, 2015; Ngulube & Ngulube, 2015; Molina Azorín & Cameron, 2010) and it has been recognised as the third major research methodology. Romm and Ngulube (2015) note that MMR is “sometimes called a new paradigm” by scholars (p. 178). The rise of a new breed of researchers who were not prepared to perpetuate the antagonism between the positivist and constructivist worldviews saw the affirmation of MMR as a third research paradigm along with quantitative and qualitative worldviews. In spite of its widespread popularity and use, Hall (2013) points out that “paradigmatic issues are a major concern in MMR” (p. 5). Hall (2013) observes that no paradigm in existence presently can encompass the wide range of MMR currently employed in research (p. 4). Be that as it may, pragmatism has been recognised by scholars as the philosophical foundation and/or partner for MMR. Following this line of reasoning, this chapter interrogates the paradigmatic logic behind the use of MMR and whether it makes sense for a researcher to really place trust in data generated through subscribing to diametrically contradictory paradigms as promoted by the pragmatism philosophy. Thus, the chapter debates how logical it is to use MMR from a paradigmatic point of view. Given the nascence of MMR in general, the present scholarship adds to the discursive literature and discourse on MMR which seemingly has and continues to win the hearts of novel and seasoned researchers and methodology scholars. The chapter does not question the legitimacy of MMR and its utility to researchers; rather, the holy grail of this discussion is the paradigmatic predicament of MMR. Thus, the paper discusses pragmatism as the purported foundation for MMR.

THE BIRTH AND EVOLUTION OF MMR

Ngulube (2012) cited in Romm and Ngulube (2015) indicates that contention exists concerning the origins of MMR. However, the history of MMR can be traced in five major historical epochs, as explained by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) in Timans et al., (2019). The first stage is the formative period in the late 50s which is a precursor to the MMR approach, consisting of rather “atomised attempts by different authors to combine methods in their research” (Timans et al., 2019, pp. 197-198). The second one is the emergence of MMR as an identifiable research strand in the 80s when “researchers in various fields began to combine qualitative and quantitative methods” (Timans et al., 2019, p.198). The third, according to Timans et al. (2019), is the “procedural development period emphasis on developing more hands-on procedures for designing a mixed methods study” (p.198); the fourth stage is the advocacy and expansion epoch involving the convening of conferences on the subject, the establishment of journals and writing of books on MMR. According to Creswell & Plano Clark (2011) cited in Ngulube (2020), the years 2000 to 2009 were the advocacy and expansion phase in the development of MMR (p. 426). The last is “the reflective stage in which discussions about the unique philosophical underpinnings and the scientific position of MMR emerged” (Timans, et al., 2019, p.198). The present chapter is preoccupied with the fifth epoch of MMR, given that its thrust is on the philosophical paradigm of this methodology. The paradigmatic wars of the 1980s gave the much-needed impetus to the development of a methodology that will cool down the vituperations by methodological scholars who were operating from the positivist (quantitative) and interpretivist (qualitative) paradigms. Thus, between the 1980s and the 1990s, there

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