

# PHILOSOPHICAL ASSUMPTIONS IN A QUALITATIVE STUDIES

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The research design process of a qualitative study begins with the philosophical assumptions that the inquirer makes (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (2007) discusses five philosophical assumptions. The first five assumptions are related to ontology assumption (what is the nature of reality); epistemology assumption (what is the nature of knowledge); axiology assumption (what is the role of values); rhetoric assumption (what is the language of research); and methodological assumption (what is the research process). In general, compared to other concepts, the idea of research questions aligns with a broader range of ontological and epistemological presuppositions (Mason, 1997). All methods of conducting social science research, according to Burrell and Morgan (1979), which are referenced in Morgan and Smircich (1980), argue that all approaches to social science research are based on interrelated sets of assumptions regarding ontology, human nature, and epistemology.

Ontological assumptions deal with the nature of existence and are concerned with discerning what is 'real' (Ryan, Scapens, & Theobald, 2002). It is about the views that different people hold about human beings and their world (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Chua (1986) defines ontological assumption as the belief about social reality within the continuum of the subjective-objective dimension (Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Hassard, 1991). From the objective approach, reality is considered a concrete structure, as argued by Morgan and Smircich (1980), "the social world is a hard, concrete, real thing 'out there', which affects everyone in one way or another" (p. 495), and the activities are assumed to be governed by the general law of nature. It suggests a tangible, observable reality that can be studied through empirical means. From this perspective, researchers may prioritize methods such as structured observations or statistical analyses to uncover underlying patterns and regularities in social phenomena. In contrast, from a subjective approach, reality is considered a projection of human imagination, which exists only in the individual consciousness (Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Hassard, 1991). This approach does not permit the possibility of empirical research but rather requires the researcher to try to capture the imagined events of the practitioners' world. Hence, to understand and gain insights into the phenomena, the researchers need to communicate or should have a social interaction with the people in the organizations who are the actors of the social world. For qualitative researchers adopting a subjective stance, the focus shifts towards capturing the diverse perspectives and meanings attributed to phenomena by different individuals or groups (Chua, 1986). This approach may involve methods such as in-depth interviews or participant observation, which aim to explore the lived experiences and subjective realities of research participants (Ryan, Scapens, & Theobald, 2002).

Meanwhile, epistemological assumptions broadly refer to the nature of knowledge. The epistemological assumptions underlying knowledge acquisition and generation (Bryman, 2001). While Plato's theory of knowledge as "justified true belief" provides a foundational framework for understanding epistemology (Gettier, 1966), contemporary scholars continue to grapple with questions regarding the nature, acquisition, and validity of knowledge in qualitative inquiry. Similarly, Chua (1986) emphasizes that knowledge is not only produced by people but also inherently about people and their social and physical environments. This perspective highlights the intricate relationship between knowledge production, human agency, and the socio-cultural contexts in which knowledge is situated. Meanwhile, Ladyman (2007) defines epistemology as the theory of knowledge and its relationship to belief and truth, highlighting the complex interplay between researcher perspectives, methods, and the construction of knowledge.

There are three questions commonly associated with epistemological approaches (Waller, Johnston, & Milton, 2006). First, what is knowledge? Second, how is knowledge acquired? Third, what do people know? Generally, epistemological assumptions deal with the parameters of knowledge.

In conclusion, qualitative research is shaped by ontological and epistemological assumptions that influence how researchers conceptualize reality, approach data collection and analysis, and interpret findings. By recognizing the diversity of ontological perspectives and engaging with debates surrounding epistemological complexities, qualitative researchers can enrich their understanding of social phenomena and contribute meaningfully to knowledge production in the social sciences.

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