1
Framing Research

Practitioner researchers use a range of research paradigms as a basis for practice. Underpinning these research paradigms are different ways of looking at what is 'real'. These lead to different ways of researching reality and defining what is good research. Practitioner researchers need to integrate the strengths, and acknowledge the weaknesses, of different research paradigms especially when working in a collaborative way with colleagues from different disciplines. In particular, the chapter deals with:

> ⇨ Identifying areas to research
> ⇨ Research worlds
> ⇨ Different research paradigms
> ⇨ Good quality research
> ⇨ Combining different research methods

1.1 IDENTIFYING AREAS TO RESEARCH

The starting point for practitioner researchers is to formulate an answerable question for a service issue. This seems quite simple but actually it highlights some of the fundamental complexities of undertaking research.

Case Study:
Sam – Clarifying the issues

Sam has been referred to a practitioner in a local service. She is an adolescent girl. She spends most of her time in her bedroom at home watching the TV. She will speak to her parents only under great duress from them. She is very thin.

> Different practitioners will have different ideas about Sam and whether she has a problem or not. What are your immediate responses to Sam?

Different practitioners will focus on different aspects of the situation and have different suggestions about how Sam can be helped.

- Some practitioners may think she is depressed. They may want to treat her with drugs, or talking therapy, or working with her family.
- Some practitioners may think she is socially isolated and want her to stop watching TV and to go out more and make friends.
- Some practitioners may think that she is on drugs. They may want to treat her by getting her off the drugs and stop her spending time with her friends.
- Some practitioners may think that it is a developmental stage she is going through. They want the other professionals not to worry and leave her alone.

How practitioners react and the hypothesis that they come up with will at least partially depend on their professional background, training and experience. It will also depend on which service they work for – her school, children's services, the primary care trust or a voluntary organisation. The organisation they work for will also have views on what an appropriate response should be.

Gathering Information

The next stage for many practitioners is to gain more knowledge about Sam by gathering more information. In this way they are researching the problem. The information gathered depends upon the initial hypotheses. The focus here is not on *how* information is gathered but just on *what* is gathered.

For some practitioners gathering more objective facts about Sam is important. Facts can be: how old she is; what school she attends; what she weighs; are there traces of drugs in her body; how many brothers and sisters she has; what is her reading age? These are objective facts.

There are other aspects of Sam's life that it may be important to find out about but that are not considered facts. We may want to know how she relates to her sisters or how many friends she has. But the answer to this depends on how 'a friend' is defined. We may want to know more about her self-esteem. These things are socially constructed. Much of the information that practitioners work with is socially constructed.

There is a further type of information. Sam may have a view of friends that is different from what the practitioner means by 'friendship'. The practitioner may define it in a way that she does not accept. Sam may consider everyone
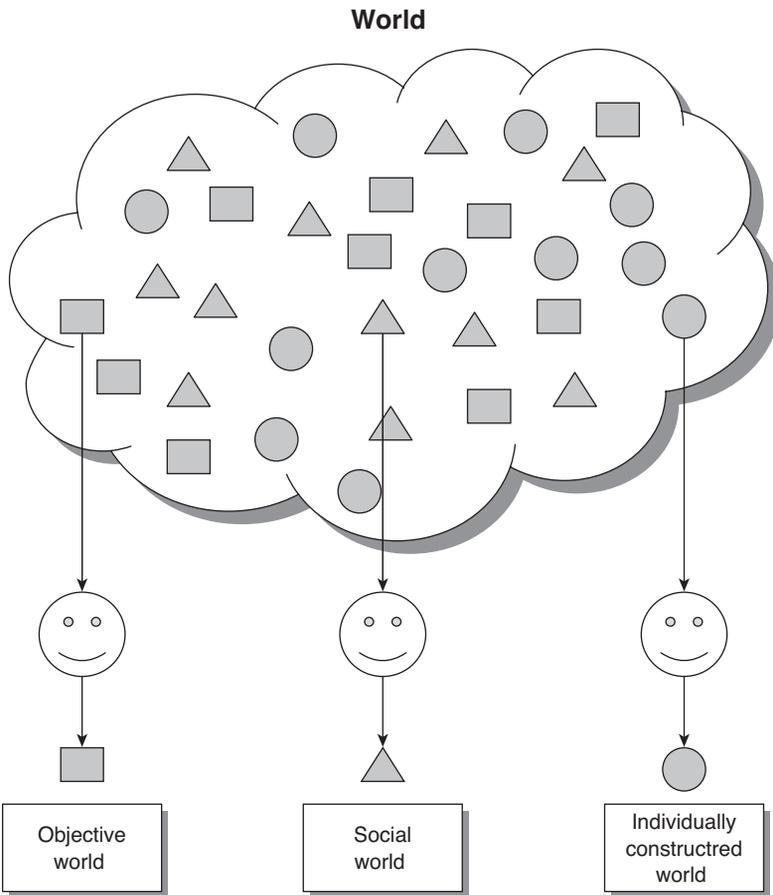
World

FIGURE 1   *Areas to research*

in her class that talks to her as a friend whereas the practitioner may have a
different definition.

Different types of information are required to begin to understand Sam.
The types of knowledge are based on different understandings of 'reality'
and for each reality there are different ways of researching it.

1.2   RESEARCH WORLDS

One of the fundamental questions in philosophy is about the nature of the
world. This is known as ontology or the nature of reality. Some practitioners'
disciplines are closely allied to one particular view. For example, most medical
practitioners are closely allied to an objective world-view. On the other hand,
social workers are allied to the idea of a socially constructed world. Some
disciplines seem to move between the various models.

The Objective World

Realists take the view that there is a real objective 'world which exists independent of human belief, perception, culture and language we use to describe it' (Hart, 1998: 85). This world is observable and research can be used to verify, using reliable measures, the existence of something. This thinking developed from the nineteenth-century philosophical position known as positivism that later became known as logical positivism (Popper, 1959). The term 'positivism' originally meant progressive in the belief that knowledge needed to be value-free and not affected by the philosophical or cultural beliefs of the day.

The Socially Constructed World

Another research world is the shared meanings about the world constructed by groups of people. In this area there is not one objective or true reality but a shared social reality constructed through language. Reality is socially constructed by different groups of people or cultures. There are multiple realities and groups construct a reality to make sense of their world. The classic example of this is Benjamin Lee Whorf's description of how Eskimos have 45 different words for snow (Whorf, 1956). He argues that because they have 45 different words for snow they see 45 different kinds of snow. The focus of the research is on how groups of people use language to construct a social reality.

In the same way professions develop their own elaborated language, which gives them a distinct view of the world that may be different from that of a person outside this profession. The language people use and how they construct the world is connected to a particular point in time and social perspective. So the way that medical practitioners construct depression is located within a particular time (early twenty-first century) and place (Britain, or at least the Western world). This would be very different from the understanding of depression in different centuries or in different areas of the world. Therefore Sam's behaviour is given meaning by particular practitioners within a particular context.

The Individually Constructed World

The final research world is how an individual constructs or experiences his or her own reality (Watzlawick, 1978). This area for research is interested in how even within a small community, for example a family, there is no shared construction and understanding of a past event. Instead, each individual holds a unique story about what has happened in the past – an aspect of life brilliantly exposed by the plays of Harold Pinter. This stems from a phenomenological

approach that accepts there is nothing more fundamental than experiences (see Smith, 2003 for a fuller explanation). Reality is what a person experiences and this is what should be researched. Phenomenology celebrates what is unique about an individual. The importance of understanding the individual construction of the world is supported by cognitive biologists who have shown that there is not a straightforward correspondence between an external stimulus and the reactions of the senses. Instead, it appears that each individual selects how they are going to respond to the same stimulus (Maturana and Varela, 1980). Phenomenologists believe that reality is how the individual makes sense of and constructs his or her own world.

So there are different types of reality to understand about Sam. Each of these areas – objective, socially constructed and individually constructed – can be researched in terms of a systematic investigation leading to an increase in knowledge. The type of reality that the practitioner researcher is interested in leads to different types of research.

1.3 DIFFERENT RESEARCH PARADIGMS

Researching the Objective World

Practitioners who are interested in researching the objective world use what is traditionally known as scientific research. Scientific research is characterised by experiments where data are gathered that critically test hypotheses. Scientific research attempts to systematise knowledge through generalisable principles. The data that are collected are usually in the form of numbers. This type of research is often referred to as quantitative research because the focus is upon quantities in relation to the subject of study.

Quantitative research traditionally takes a positivist approach. Positivism has its roots in research in the natural sciences – physics, chemistry and biology– and is seen to be objective. It takes the position that scientific knowledge is a direct reflection of a real and objective world. In recent years, post-positivism has replaced positivism as the most appropriate thinking about quantitative research (see Clark, 1998). Post-positivism continues to take the view that there is a reality that research should investigate. However, it proposes that this truth can only be slowly and imperfectly arrived at given the limitations of the research process. It also accepts that the researcher cannot take a neutral or value-free position in the research. The researcher's background helps shape the research and its results. The aim is still to be objective but there is a recognition that this is impossible.

The way the real, objective world can be understood is through experimental (or hypothetical-deductive) research. The purest form of scientific research is the experiment. An experiment has four key features:

- The random assignment of participants to either an experimental group or a 'no treatment' control group
- Intervention by changing one or more variables (called 'independent variables') by the researcher
- The measurement of the effects of this change on one or more other variables (called 'dependent variables') through using pre-and post-test measures
- The control of all other variables

(adapted from Robson, 2002: 110)

True experiments involve the random assignment of participants to different conditions. Sometimes it is not possible to meet all these conditions so a variety of quasi-experimental designs can be used.

- If it is not possible to assign participants randomly to two groups the groups can be established on some other basis – for example, by matching.
- If it is not possible to have two groups then a series of measures over time can be taken on the one set of subjects who are subject to some kind of intervention – this is known as impact or policy analysis.
- If it is possible to have only a single participant this is a type of quasi-experiment called a single case design.

In all these examples the purpose is to find out something that is true for other people in similar circumstances or generalisable. As well as experiments there are other ways of researching the objective world through gathering quantitative data. A survey using a fixed response (tick box) format can be used to generate knowledge. This type of objective knowledge is seen to be applicable to the whole population. That is why the participants in this type of survey are so carefully sampled. They have to represent everybody in the target population.

These types of positivist research are designed to find out truth in a real objective world. The key features of this type of research are summarised in Box 1.1.

Box 1.1   Key features of researching the objective world

- The process of research is usually deductive
- Research is based on what can be measured
- The research process is fixed at the start of the research in terms of the number of participants and the measures being used
- A hypothesis is formulated based on previous research
- The hypothetical-deductive method involves testing hypotheses through an experiment

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- Predictable relationships (cause/effects) between objects and events are sought
- Reliable quantitative data are collected
- Data are collected from a representative sample of people
- Findings can be generalised
- The researcher aims to be objective and neutral
- Data are used to support or reject previous theory

(see Hart, 1998: 83)

Scientific research holds out the possibility of generating knowledge that is more valid and reliable than personal opinion, fantasy or superstition.

Researching the Socially Constructed World

Researching the socially constructed world has many of the elements of the scientific approach. Knowledge is usually obtained from observation and open interviews rather than experiments. The data are critically analysed, and organised in a systematic way. The data are usually words and so this type of research is often referred to as *qualitative research.*

Tesch (1990) identified 26 different types of qualitative research. A few of these are central to the work of practitioner researchers and illustrate the main principles of research on socially constructed knowledge (see also Creswell, 2003).

Discourse analysis   Discourse analysis looks at texts to explore the functions served by specific constructions at both the interpersonal and societal level. Texts are all forms of verbal and written accounts, such as books, articles, newspapers and websites. They can be conversations and interactions in a classroom, ward or between members of a family. They can also be reports, case notes or a teacher's lesson plan. The researcher is interested in the way an account is linguistically constructed in terms of the descriptive, referential and rhetorical language that is used, and the function that it serves. Discourse analysis can aid understanding of how people construct texts to justify their position. Sometimes the interest is in simply understanding how the text has been constructed. However, more often discourse analysis is used to deconstruct a process. Discourse analysis has also been used extensively to identify ideologies, for example how racism or sexism is produced by the language people use.

Grounded Theory The purpose of grounded theory is to develop new theoretical perspectives based on (or grounded in) people's actual experiences. It was first developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a positivist research paradigm. However, it is now largely seen as a way of researching the socially constructed world. It is based on the idea that instead of obtaining information either to prove or disprove a previous theory, the researcher can develop new theoretical perspectives from studying what people actually say and do in relation to particular experiences. The research develops incrementally in so far that after the first interview is completed data is gathered. On the basis of this analysis more data is gathered either to support or refute the original analysis. The researcher tries to listen with an open mind – rather than starting with preconceptions about the area under investigation. Theory is generated as data are collected and frameworks are then developed and modified. The 'flip-flop' between ideas and research experience is central to the research and is fully recorded.

Ethnography Ethnography has a long tradition in anthropology and sociology. It is designed to analyse organisations, cultures or communities in their natural settings. These communities are usually observed comprehensively and in depth over time. The researcher tries to make sense of how these systems organise and operate. For example, ethnographic research might examine what goes on in a hospital ward that leads to feelings of empowerment? Or what support does a visually impaired child get in school?

These are just three of the principal strategies of qualitative research designed to understand the social construction of the world. They are in themselves quite different to each other. However, they do share some common features (see Box 1.2).

Box 1.2   Key features of researching the socially constructed world

- The process of research is usually inductive
- Research is based on what can be made meaningful
- The research process is flexible in terms of the number of participants or the lengths of the interviews
- It starts with a social phenomenon that the practitioner researcher wants to understand more about
- It is designed to find out how a group of people make sense of the world
- Rich qualitative data are collected
- Data are collected from a meaningful sample of people

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- Research illuminates particular situations – generalisation is not normally possible
- The practitioner researcher recognises his/her own position in the research
- Data are interpreted by the researcher

Researching the Individually Constructed World

The final area that practitioner researchers are interested in is how an individual constructs his or her own world (see Schandt, 1994). The focus this time is on the individual's experience – a phenomenological approach. This can be contrasted with socially constructed research, where the focus is on how language (or other events) is used to construct a discourse or shared meaning between people. One of the major issues in phenomenological research is whether self-knowledge acquired through self-reflection or introspection is a valid form of knowledge. This has led to scepticism from positivist researchers.

This process is compounded by the fact that it is not simply one person engaged in this process – there is a participant and a practitioner researcher. It is not the participant alone who constructs his or her own reality but also the practitioner researcher who is part of that co-construction. The practitioner researcher's own language becomes central to the process of research. Practitioner researchers need to be aware how they construct the world. This becomes a key aspect of the research, known as reflexivity (see Chapter 11).

The involvement of the practitioner researcher in the research leads to two radically different positions (see Smith, 2003 for further details).

- Faithful disclosure: the researcher tries to convey the 'real' life view or meaning for individuals, such as what it is like for a person to have a degenerative condition.
- Reframing: the researcher takes a 'suspicious' approach and tries to discover what is behind the individual's experience, such as aiming to discover what the person with a degenerative condition is trying to convey by telling us about their experiences.

There are a range of research methods for understanding how individuals construct their worlds. Two particularly popular ones are interpretative phenomenological analysis and narrative research.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)   The researcher is interested in the subjective experiences of the participant (Smith, 2003). The research is designed to investigate an individuals' perception and the meaning they

give to a phenomenon. Examples of IPA are 'What is it like to work on an acute psychiatric ward?', 'What is it like to be blind in a mainstream school?'. The research procedure usually involves getting to know a small number of people in depth.

Narrative research The researcher explores the lives of individuals and the story of their lives. Narratives are seen as the stories that individuals tell about themselves to give order to their lives. Data for narrative research are normally collected through interviews. The narrative interview is designed to allow the participant to give a detailed story about their life or part of it. Other forms of narrative research include the keeping of a journal or using photographs.

Phenomenological and socially constructed research share many of the same features (see Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Phenomenological research is always qualitative (see Box 1.3).

Box 1.3 Key features of researching the individually constructed world

- The process of research is largely inductive
- The focus is on how people make sense of their experiences
- There is recognition that other people may make similar sense of their experiences but that each account is unique
- The research starts with a personal phenomenon which the practitioner researcher wants to understand more about
- Rich qualitative data are collected
- Data are collected from a limited number of people
- The researcher recognises that he or she co-constructs the research
- Data are made sense of by the researcher through reflexivity
- Findings are constructions that are not more or less 'true' but more informed and sophisticated than previous constructions

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The interest for practitioner researchers in individually constructed knowledge is that it is close to professional practice. Understanding the phenomenological experiences of individuals connects the practitioner to the practitioner researcher.

These three research worlds have been described as three distinct areas. There are, however, some grey areas between them. No knowledge is completely individually constructed. Usually there is some shared meaning between people and therefore in this way it is socially constructed. Similarly, there are socially constructed areas that may be researched as objective knowledge.

For example, there are socially defined conventions for describing the reading age of children or the anxiety levels of mental health patients. Instruments have been devised to measure individuals, reading skills or levels of anxiety. In one way these areas are socially constructed. However, there comes a point where the social construction is so universally accepted that it is researched as objective truth.

1.4   THE QUALITY OF RESEARCH

Research in the objective world usually involves quantitative research, whereas research in the socially or individually constructed world usually involves qualitative research. The two traditions of quantitative and qualitative research have different beliefs about how the quality of research should be assessed.

Evaluating Quantitative Research

There are three main characteristics of good quantitative research: reliability, validity and generalisability. These three constructs underpin the main goal of quantitative research – replicability. Replicability is the idea that an independent researcher would obtain the same results by replicating the research.

A number of authors have written extensively on these three characteristics (see Robson, 2002 for a full discussion). They can be put into a series of questions that the practitioner researcher can ask about a piece of quantitative research to ascertain its value.

Select a quantitative piece of research in your own area of work and critically evaluate it using the questions below to decide how good it is.

Reliability
▫   **Participant error and bias:** Are the participants or the circumstances in which the data were collected skewed or distorted?
▫   **Researcher error and bias:** Is the researcher objective and free from bias?

Validity
▫   **Construct validity:** Does the research technique actually measure what it claims to measure?
▫   **Internal validity:** Does the research plausibly demonstrate the causal relationship between the intervention and the outcome?

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▢ **Generalisability** (also known as external validity)
▢ **Generalisability:** Are the results of the research generalisable to the populations in other settings?

Evaluating Qualitative Research

There is an on-going debate in qualitative research about how the evaluative concepts as applied in quantitative research (reliability, validity and gener-alisability) make any sense (see Morse et al., 2002). The concept of 'trust-worthiness' was introduced by Guba and Lincoln (1981) as a way of broadening the debate. The value of qualitative research can be thought about both in terms of trustworthiness and in terms of validity and general-isation. Our framework follows the work and the writing of Elliott et al., 1999; Maxwell, 1992; Morse et al., 2002 and Stiles, 1999.

Select a qualitative piece of research in your own area of work and critically evaluate it using the questions below to decide how good it is.

Validity
▢ **Descriptive validity:** Has the data been accurately collected for analysis?
▢ **Interpretative validity:** Is data distorted by the researcher's pre-set framework rather than emerging from the analysis?
▢ **Theory validity:** Are the data explained by appropriate theory?

Generalisability
▢ **Internal generalisability:** Are data distorted through selection of participants?
▢ **External validity:** Are the results generalisable?

In addition, qualitative research often looks for validity in terms of impact (see Stiles, 1999).

The frameworks described above are used to highlight the sorts of issues that are of concern to quantitative and qualitative researchers to show that their research is trustworthy or valid. Practitioner researchers need to address these issues for their research to be seen as valuable.

1.5 **HIERARCHY OF RESEARCH EVIDENCE**

Health services research is dominated by a biomedical model based on an objective world-view of research. There is a belief that there are universalities to the treatment of illness. Research that is essentially scientific and quantitative is seen as providing the best quality. Within the NHS the standard for research is often seen as a hierarchy (see Box 1.4).

Box 1.4   Hierarchy of evidence for research in the objective world

- A systematic review of randomised controlled trials
- At least one randomised controlled trial
- At least one controlled study without randomisation
- At least one other type of quasi-experimental study
- Non-experimental descriptive study, such as comparative study, correlational studies, case controlled studies
- Qualitative studies
- Evidence from expert committee reports or opinions and/or clinical experience of respected authorities
- Individual opinion

The top of the hierachy the 'gold standard' for NHS research is a systematic review of randomised controlled trials (RCTs). These are published by the Cochrane Library, part of an international non-profit and independent organisation, dedicated to making up-to-date, accurate information about the effects of health care readily available worldwide. Systematic reviews are reviews of the research in an area. They can be helpfully seen as scientific investigations in themselves. The subject of the research is previously published research in a particular area and these papers are researched using a planned strategy. This strategy includes identifying all the relevant articles using clearly articulated criteria, analysis of the quality of the research design and then a synthesis of the findings from the different pieces of research.

If the quantitative results of the research are statistically combined it is known as a meta-analysis. If the results are summarised but not statistically combined it is known as a qualitative systematic review. Summaries of research that lack explicit descriptions of systematic methods are often called narrative or literature reviews.

An experimental design with randomised control of the participants is seen as the next best research. It can be seen that qualitative research, professional experience and individual opinion are at the bottom of the research hierarchy.

There is much debate within the research world about whether this hierarchy applies to all research or just to that pertaining to the objective world (see for example, Barnes et al., 1999). The argument in favour of RCTs is that they provide evidence about whether an intervention works. Within the NHS, NICE (National Institute for Clinical Excellence) recommends changes in professional practice based on evidence from this research hierarchy.

Other government organisations take a very different perspective on research. Within education there continues to be ambiguity about what constitutes quality research. The Department of Education and Employment's (DfEE's) review *Excellence in Research on Schools* explicitly states: 'We found no single objective definition of what actually constitutes "good quality" research' (DfEE, 1998: 2).

In social services there is a recognition that while other types of research are particularly important there is also a belief that RCTs may protect children from many of the changes in policy and practice that professionals inflict upon them (Sackett and Wenneberg, 1997).

The main problem with the use of RCTs, in the fields of social work and education, is that they 'tend to yield equivocal results' (Robson, 2002). Robson's summary of programmes that have been evaluated using RCT concludes that they do not consistently come up with clear findings – either positive or negative. This includes research in the fields of education and social work as well as criminology. In other words, the use of RCTs in medicine to produce clear results about the benefits of an intervention (usually chemical) has not been reproduced in other fields. Robson (2002) gives three explanations for this.

- **Interventions are ineffective**: This explanation suggests that the introduction of a particular programme or procedure is too 'weak' to have an effect.
- **The design of the RCT is ineffective**: This explanation suggests that the problem is in how the research was carried out. For example, the sample may have been too small to see an effect or there may not have been genuine randomisation.
- **RCTs are inappropriate**: This explanation suggests that the characteristics of people have a substantial impact on how they react to a programme or procedure. For example, different children respond differently to different reading programme. Therefore by randomly allocating children to different

groups you are automatically washing out the major variable that affects the programme's effectiveness: that is people's, characteristics. This last explanation is also put forward by researchers using realist evaluation (see Chapter 4).

We have highlighted the difficulties of RCTs as it is important to recognise that they can become something of a holy grail. They may, however, be inappropriate and a hindrance for some practitioner researchers. The position this book takes is to recognise that research has different purposes that are best served by different research designs. The most common purposes of research are:

- Exploratory: understanding a little-known/researched phenomenon
- Descriptive: accurately portraying persons, events, situations
- Explanatory: explaining the relationship between or within phenomena
- Action: creating opportunities for change and empowerment
- Evaluative: establishing the worth of something

(see Robson, 2002 for further details)

1.6 MIXED METHODS FOR THE PRACTITIONER RESEARCHER

Combining the Quantitative and Qualitative Approach

Not only are there different purposes to research but also practitioners are faced with questions that require multifaceted answers. A mixed methods approach that uses qualitative and quantitative research can be helpful to many practitioner researchers (see Creswell, 2003). Different sorts of research can complement each other.

The central problem of combining qualitative and quantitative methods is that philosophically there are conflicts between the two paradigms. There are different assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how to obtain knowledge through research. However, these different paradigms can be combined as long as the practitioner research has a clear understanding of what the different paradigms will accomplish.

Take the example of Sam – our isolated teenager introduced earlier in this chapter. To help Sam, some objective knowledge is required. Equally, however, some knowledge about how she and her family and friends construct her difficulties and her own perception of them may be important.

Initially quantitative and qualitative methods were combined as a way to cross-validate or 'triangulate' results on the same research question by using multiple methods (see, for example, Campbell and Stanley, 1963). There was an acknowledgement that all research methods have limitations and that convergence of results across different methods helps to validate findings.

Increasingly, however, combining qualitative and quantitative research is seen as a complementary process (Morgan, 1998). The key goal is to use the strength of one method to enhance the impact of the other. So information gained from one part of the study (either quantitative or qualitative) is used to strengthen the other aspect of the research. This is important to practitioner researchers who are often working on complex, multifaceted issues.

Research Designs based on Complementary Designs

The core of the complementary design is to use a qualitative and quantitative method for different, but well coordinated purposes within the same overall research project (see Morgan, 1998 for further details).

Two decisions are required:

- The priority decision
- The sequence decision

The priority decision   The first research decision determines which will be the principal tool for gathering the research data, whether the qualitative or quantitative method, and which will be the complementary method. The principal data collection method must have the strengths that are most important to the research purpose. The contrasting complementary method is one that can add further data to meet the principal purpose.

The sequence decision   The second research decision is the sequence or order in which the qualitative and quantitative methods are used. The sequence decision is based on the most effective way to optimise the effectiveness of the principal method. So the question is whether a preliminary input by the complementary method adds to the principal method or whether the complementary method is used as a follow-up to maximise the value of the principal method.

Box 1.5	**Priority sequence model for combining qualitative and quantitative research**	
Priority decision		
	Principal method: Quantitative	Principal method: Qualitative
Complementary method: Preliminary	Smaller qualitative study helps guide the data collection in principally QUANTITATIVE study	Smaller quantitative study helps guide the data collection in a principallly QUALITATIVE study
	Example: Open-ended interviews with Sam and peers about the onset of depression is used to help devise an area-wide health survey for primary school children at risk of mental health problems	Example: A brief survey of self-esteem with adolescent girls in one school is used to identify girls to take part in a series of in-depth interviews
Complementary method: Follow-up	Smaller qualitative study helps evaluate and interpret results in a principally QUANTITATIVE study	Smaller quantitative helps evaluate and interpret results in a principally QUALITATIVE study
	Example: A health survey of adolescents with mental health problems reveals ethnic differences. These are followed up with focus groups for parents from different ethnic background	Example: In-depth interviews with Sam and other adolescent girls reveal a certain narrative pattern to their depression. This is followed up with a brief survey of boys to see if the same pattern may be present.
		Adapted from Morgan, 1998

Note: The left margin of the table body reads vertically: "Sequence decision"

Practitioner researchers should not feel compelled to use either qualitative or quantitative research methods. Using both in the same research project may be completely logical if the practitioner researcher recognises and identifies the different types of knowledge that they are interested in. By combining the qualitative and quantitative methods practitioner researchers can address

the very real multidimensional dilemmas that they face in their everyday practice.

Summary

- There are three different research worlds with which practitioner research is concerned. There is an objective world, a socially constructed world and an individual world
- A wide range of research methods are used to help understand these different worlds. Practitioner researchers need to select the most appropriate method to answer their research questions
- Traditionally, research has been divided into quantitative and qualitative research with little attention to integration in one project
- There are different ways of evaluating quantitative and qualitative research
- Practitioner researchers can combine qualitative and quantitative approaches to research complex multifaceted practitioner issues

FURTHER READING

Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research,* 2nd edition. Oxford: Blackwell

The second edition of this book provides a comprehensive overview of the issues that face people researching the real world. Despite its size the book is structured and written in a way that makes it immediately accessible. This should be the bible of any practitioner researcher.

Creswell, J. (2003) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. London: Sage

Creswell provides a comprehensive introduction to different types of research for different purposes. However, the main strength of the book is its promotion of using 'mixed methods' when undertaking research in the real world. It is written with clarity and a real understanding of research issues. It is thoroughly recommended for practitioner researchers.