

Methodology: How Can We Produce Reliable And Valid Knowledge?

Positivism	Interpretivism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The basic model of research is the <i>Hypothetico-deductive</i> model. This model argues that reliable and valid knowledge can be produced by developing hypotheses that can be later tested against empirical observations. • It is possible to measure and quantify human behaviour objectively and statistically. This involves breaking down the world into a series of smaller "events"; variables can be isolated and manipulated. • Personal objectivity is necessary in the research process. Value-freedom is an important consideration that is desirable (if not always possible). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If social reality is created by people going about their lives, the best we can do is to say that at a certain time and under certain conditions, this or that reality is evident. The researcher tries to understand the subjective experiences and interpretations of people. • It is not possible to make meaningful empirical statements about the social world, since observable phenomena are simply the product of human meaning and interpretation. • Personal objectivity is necessary, but it is only possible to understand subjective interpretations by becoming personally involved in the behaviour being studied. Value freedom is considered impossible

Methods: How Can We Collect Reliable And Valid Data?

Positivism	Interpretivism
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collection of empirical data is the primary objective. Any method that can be shown to be reliable (not influenced by the values and interpretations of the researcher) can be used. • <i>Main methods</i> used include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Questionnaires. - Structured Interviews. - Experiments. - Non-participant Observation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The collection of non-empirical data is stressed. Any method used must attempt to understand a social phenomenon from the point of view of the social actors involved. The attempt to capture the quality of people's experiences, meanings and interpretations is stressed. • <i>Main methods</i> used include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unstructured interviews. - Participant Observation (both overt and covert).

Adapted from Livesey, C. available www.sociology.org.uk