


# 2

## RESEARCH PHILOSOPHIES AND SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT

<b>Research Reality Scenario</b> 	<b>Knowledge and Reality</b>
<p>Bill Soames, the General Manager of the hotel, opens a meeting with the words, 'Welcome to this week's management meeting. One of the main problems we need to discuss this week is the fact that our room occupancy levels have declined quite significantly over the past two weeks. We need to try and do something about this. Who has some ideas?'</p> <p>'Well, common sense suggests that we could look to discount our rates more to try and attract extra bookings and guests,' ventured Janet Faulkner, the Restaurant Manager.</p> <p>'Perhaps we should set up a guest satisfaction feedback system to find out what our guests particularly like or dislike and then we could use this to improve things and get more repeat bookings,' offered John Thames, the Human Resources Manager.</p> <p>'How about setting up a reward scheme – like air miles – so that the more guests stay with us, the more reward points they get to redeem for another stay?' added the Marketing Manager, Justin Bones.</p> <p>'I think that we should invest in better vacuum cleaners and other equipment so that we can improve the cleanliness and hygiene in the guest bedrooms and make them more attractive,' Carmen Hoyes, the Housekeeping Manager, chipped in.</p> <p>'Hang on, hang on,' Paul Gestalt, the Rooms Division Manager, cried. 'Are we in danger of seeing a problem here when there isn't one?'</p> <p>'What do you mean, Paul?', said Bill Soames. 'We obviously have a problem when occupancy levels are going down.'</p> <p>'Yes, perhaps, but we need to look at this in a wider context,' replied Paul, who went on to explain what he meant by this. 'This is our low period during the year and, if we were to look at the occupancy levels for this period over the last five years, we would see that this always happens at this time. It is a natural consequence of the</p>	

seasonal highs and lows. All our experience indicates that we will have periods of higher and lower occupancy during the year and we just have to accept it.'

'Well, I'm not sure I agree with you, Paul,' said Caroline Oast, the newly appointed Conventions and Meetings Manager. 'Yes, we all know that high and low periods can and do occur, but, just because they have in the past does not mean that they have to in the future or that we should accept this as inevitable. I think such a proposition can be challenged. For example, not all hotels have this problem at this time of year, so it is not universal, and we could try to boost our meetings and special events business at this time, when other sources of demand for accommodation are lower.'

'Good idea,' Bill replied, 'We'll explore that after the meeting. Now for the next item ...'


Paul remained unconvinced and muttered, 'There's a lot to be said for experience and common sense in these matters, everyone knows that for a fact.'



To explore these issues further view the video entitled 'Is Anything Real?' available via the Video Links Section of the Companion Website ([study.sagepub.com/brotherton](http://study.sagepub.com/brotherton)).



To strengthen your understanding of the 'ologies' it would be helpful to access and use some of the resources on the Companion Website ([study.sagepub.com/brotherton](http://study.sagepub.com/brotherton)). The video links 'Complex Research Terminology Simplified: Paradigms, Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology' and 'Introduction to Epistemology' provide two useful videos dealing with these issues in a very systematic and clear manner.

Research Reality Scenario	Different Strokes
	
<p>Justin, opening the meeting between the two marketing supremos of the Galactica Fun Park, said, 'Hi, Randolph, we have a bit of an urgent issue to deal with. As you know, the company's Managing Director is getting a bit hot under the collar about some of the complaints we've been receiving from visitors to the park and she is insisting that we investigate the reasons for this so that we can improve their experience.'</p> <p>'Yes, I've been giving some thought to how we might do that,' replied Randolph.</p> <p>'So have I,' Justin said, 'so let me tell you where I'm coming from on this one and then you can do the same, Randolph. My view is that we have to investigate this in a manner that will give us a set of results that are accurate, valid and credible enough to stand up to the scrutiny of the MD. To achieve this we need to go about it in a scientific manner. What I propose is that we address the issue of</p>	

what the most critical aspects of the visitor experience are for determining their level of satisfaction.'

'Sure, I've no problem with that,' Randolph offered.

'OK, then we're agreed on the issue that needs investigating,' said Justin gleefully. Justin went on to say, 'The next question is how are we going to do this? I propose that we design and set up a survey, using a predetermined questionnaire with closed questions to obtain the data we need, and select an appropriate sample of visitors to complete this. Then we can statistically analyse the data and generalise from our findings. What do you say?'


Randolph has different views on how to approach this and outlined how he would go about doing it: 'I'm not so sure that would give us what we're looking for. Let me explain. I see where you're coming from, in terms of taking a rationalistic, reductionist and quantitative view of how to go about this, but I feel that we would get a more valid view of the most important aspects of the visitors' experiences if we approached it in a more holistic way. I think it is difficult to separate out individual elements of the experience and quantify their importance in isolation from the other elements because visitors are likely to judge their satisfaction with the experience as a whole, not by rating each separate part. Also, if we predetermine the questions to be asked and constrain how the visitor can respond to them, we are in danger of being selective in what we ask and so will get only standardised responses, which, by definition, may not be the real responses the people want to give. So, my approach would be less predetermined and involve a range of techniques, such as observing the visitors' behaviour, interviewing them – perhaps both in individual and group contexts – so that they give us their deeper feelings about the experience.'

'Ah,' said Justin, 'I can see we're going to have quite a discussion over how we should proceed on this one!'

**TABLE 2.1** Key features of positivist and phenomenological paradigms

	Positivistic paradigm	Phenomenological paradigm
Basic beliefs	The world is external and objective The observer is independent Science is value-free	The world is socially constructed and subjective The observer is part of what is observed Science is driven by human interests
What researchers should do	Focus on facts Look for causality and fundamental laws Reduce phenomena to their simplest elements Formulate hypotheses and then test them	Focus on meanings Try to understand what is happening Look at the totality of each situation Develop ideas through induction from data
Preferred methods	Operationalising concepts so that they can be measured Taking large samples	Using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena Small samples investigated in depth or over time

Source: Easterby-Smith et al. (2012: 27). Reproduced with permission of Sage

<b>Research Action Checklist</b> 	<b>Who Am I?</b>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ What are my basic beliefs about the world? Am I a realist, a critical realist or a constructivist?</li> <li>✓ Which philosophical stance do I favour? Positivism, phenomenology, post-modernism or pragmatism?</li> <li>✓ Which type of epistemology would I advocate? Is knowledge best obtained from an objective, external observer stance that sees the world as existing independently of you or from a more subjective, involved observer stance that sees we are part of the knowledge that is being obtained?</li> <li>✓ What type of strategic approach to developing knowledge (methodology) do I favour? The 'scientific approach' or one more closely associated with 'social constructionism'?</li> <li>✓ What type of data do I need to collect – quantitative, qualitative or both?</li> <li>✓ Which empirical methods and procedures would be the best to answer my research question/s – survey, case study, experiment, comparative, observational, mixed?</li> </ul>



You may also wish to consult some of the additional resources available via the Companion Website ([study.sagepub.com/brotherton](http://study.sagepub.com/brotherton)). The Web Links section of this contains a series of links to material on positivism, phenomenology, critical realism and pragmatism and the Video Links Section has a link to a video that explains the basis of a pragmatic epistemology.